

# Realities

Eighth Issue 2016



*A Cross-Cultural Publication from*  
North Hennepin Community College



# Realities

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

**Eighth Issue, Academic Year 2015 – 2016**

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*Note from the editors –*

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

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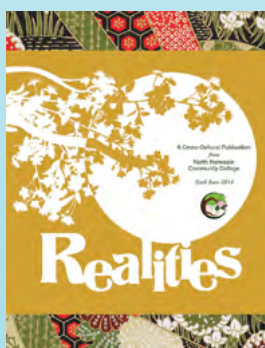
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**Realities** is dedicated to all people who have had the  
courage to cross over their boundaries, thereby enriching  
their lives by seeing how other lives are lived.

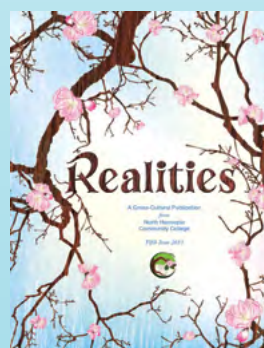
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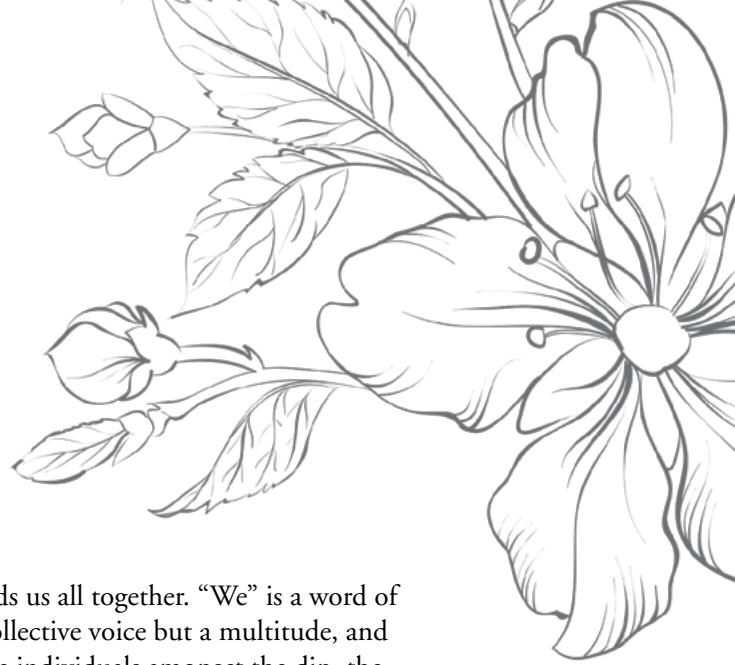


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## Introduction

“We” is an important word, one that ties and binds us all together. “We” is a word of inclusion. But within each “we” comes not one collective voice but a multitude, and if we don’t listen close enough, if we don’t hear the individuals amongst the din, the cacophony can be deafening, and, even worse, it can be silencing.

In 2009, Nigerian author Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie gave a remarkable TED Talk, “The Danger of a Single Story,” and in this talk, she discusses how we are often prone to hearing only a single story, a single concept, of what a certain place or a certain people are, and how this leads us to believing in stereotypes derived from that single story. This, of course, is dangerous.

*Realities* sets out to combat the idea of the single story, while at the same time giving voice and visibility to the individuals who help make up the whole story, and in their own words. In Erick Alvarado’s essay, he writes of his father: “[It] always bothers me since he always finishes his lecture saying that he doesn’t want me to become a ‘nobody’ like himself.” Angela Tran begins her essay, “To me, language is equal to experiences and memories.” Que’ Nikki Ternoir writes, “Being the color that I am, I have to think about where I go and wonder if I’ll be safe or not.”

*Realities* seeks to be a place of safety for all, a place where language and memory co-exist, a place where each and every one of us is a “somebody,” and where each writer is given voice to share their many stories and where the rest of us can listen closely.

Sincerely,  
*Brian Baumgart and Karen Carr*


## Untitled ("Screaming without a Voice...")

**By:** Michelle Andrews

*Screaming without  
A Voice  
Imprisoned without  
Any Bars  
Except in the Head  
Except in the Heart  
Standing Bare Naked  
Stripped of "ME"  
Of Identity  
Of Spirituality  
Emotionally Lost  
Physically Broken  
Mentally Silent  
Head Hung Low  
Tears  
Forgotten  
Dying before your Eyes  
Asking  
"SEE ME"  
I am Ojibwe*

---

*Michelle Andrews is 45 years old, born and raised in Minnesota. She moved to beautiful California for a year as to discover who she was other than a mom, as her children had left home and she was embarking on the empty nest syndrome. Her parents are also born and raised in Minnesota; however, they have recently retired in Florida. She speaks English and can speak some Spanish but not a lot. She has seen all but five of our beautiful States. She has also traveled to Bonaire, an island off the Northern area of South America. She is new to NHCC and is pursuing Nursing. She likes walks in nature, dogs {currently has 3}, being alone with her thoughts, and taking every day to learn something new. She enjoys writing poems and drawing. She would love to learn to paint someday. She is one of seven administrators who run an HIV/AIDS Support and Education site of an international group that is 10,025 strong.*

A piece of birch bark with a central white patch containing text, mounted on a wooden stand. The bark is layered and textured, with the white patch being a smooth, irregular shape. The text is written in a cursive font. The stand is made of two wooden pieces that support the bark from below.

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*—Michelle Andrews*

## *silencieux\*/ugalu\*/silent*

**By:** Que' Nikki Ternoir

*When I was little I didn't really like my skin color.* All of the celebrities like Avril Lavigne and Haley Williams were so much lighter than I was and it seemed as though their lives were perfect so I wanted to be just like them. I mean it wasn't that my life wasn't perfect. I seriously got whatever I wanted. As a child I thought being rich meant happiness so my parents made sure my silver spoon fed me well. But that had nothing to do with the fact that I didn't think I was pretty. I had everything in the world from the newest mp3 player to the latest fashionable clothes, but I still wasn't happy because I wasn't pretty. In school I was too white for the black kids and too black for the white kids. I couldn't fit in anywhere. I used to look up YouTube videos on how to lighten your skin. I tried everything from bleaching cream that's super harmful for your skin to organic home remedies and nothing really worked. Yeah, it was that ridiculous.

### ...I was beautiful too

It wasn't really until a bit before the Black Lives Matter movement started going on that I realized I actually liked my melanin. Tumblr surprisingly helped me figure out that I was beautiful too. All of the pictures about how beautiful my skin is and the greatness my race has done: it was really encouraging. But I had to find it within myself because if I couldn't find it, then who would? My dad was always talking about me knowing my French heritage like, "Baby, how ya doin in French class? You need to go work at a French restaurant so you can become more fluent so you can teach ya kids, unlike my pops." Then mom says, "That's that native in ya, baby," talking about how much I like to drink, which is kind of stereotypical. I haven't even gotten to know my main race yet; how can I learn my other cultures when my main one that people see is still up in the air? When people look at me, all they see is black. So you can sort of see where I kind of got side tracked about who I was for a sec. I have 7 younger brothers and they're all looking up to me to set an example, so I had to start somewhere.

At 18, I started dating this 6 foot, pale mixed boy. He had green eyes and the cutest smile; I couldn't tell he was mixed until I saw his hair honestly. He grew up in Coon Rapids with white girlfriends, white friends, white



family, and just a super white life. I never ever thought I'd have a chance with him; y'know some guys don't like black girls. But that's besides the point. He only lived with his black dad for a short while and ever since then he's been with his mother. I'm not saying there is anything wrong with his mother's "raising a black kid skills" but there are a couple things she missed. I found this out the day of Halloween.

"Happy day after your birthday day, bae. You wanna come see my sister in this Halloween parade?" my boyfriend calls me and says. I'm just like yeah totally, family bonding time, let me tell my parents to come too so they can finally meet your family. Every other year I'm a vampire so I decided to be a witch this year, spice it up a bit. I throw on a black dress, black eyeliner, and "Black as satan's heart" lipstick, with diamonds on my eyelids. I even have a witch hat and broom to match. I am the cutest evil witch ever. I walk outside though and completely forget I live in Minnesota. It feels like it is damn near -2. Maybe because it is Halloween and the spirits are out roaming the streets in plain disguise but it is colder than any other day in October. So I throw my jacket on and proceed on my way to Anoka. I was going to say forget it, but there is a bakery near there and they have THE best red velvet cupcakes.

I'm in the car with my parents and my two baby brothers and my boyfriend, like this is about to be super fun. We end up having to walk 5 blocks to actually get to the parade. I'm strutting my stuff because I know I'm cute today. I had just turned 20 and life is so much better than it was a year ago today. So yes, I am feelin' myself, but once we get there, there is nothing but white people. Now don't get me wrong, I love all people. I was even excited that I had me a white boy til he told me he was mixed. (Still excited but you get the point.) I just get really nervous when I don't see any black people because then I feel like I don't belong. So we're walking to a spot where it's close enough to actually see the faces on the people in the parade but far enough to where they have to run up a hill to give our little ones candy. So we've only been there for about 10 minutes and I'm freezing. I want to go home and I don't even care if my parents finally meet my boyfriend's mother or not. I just want Satan to warm my sheets up for me as I lie in my bed. But my mom shoots that idea down and says, "We just got here, Que', hold on." I'm just like dead at this point, so I continue looking for Coon Rapids High school down the line of people and my parents start talking amongst themselves. I don't care what's going on; I keep looking for my boyfriend's sister. Then I hear my mom curse. I'm not going to repeat what she says but it was along the lines of, "What the duck are you looking at?" So that's when I widen my attention span.

I start asking my parents, "What's going on? Is everything okay?" And I look to where my mom is looking, and staring right at me with her camera phone is a white lady, laughing her butt off. She is a little on the thicker side, blonde hair, and a mouth so wide a plane could park itself in there, and she'd still be able to talk. She isn't that pretty either. I'm assuming those were her brothers surrounding her, because I can't imagine anyone wanting to date her. The guys keep looking back half-way smirking. She doesn't turn around, not once, to look at the parade. I'm super confused, like why is she laughing? I turn around to see if there is anyone behind me and there is no one. So I'm like, "Dad, is she... is she laughing at me?" He can't even answer me with words. He just looks at me... My mom replies for him and says, "They're laughing at you, Que'Nikki."

## Is this racist or just bullying?

The gates holding back Minnehaha Falls in my eyes unfenced, but the lady still doesn't let up. She is still laughing at me and pointing her phone in my direction. I am trying to think of things that she could be doing, like she can't be being racist right now, this isn't real. At this point my boyfriend finally hears what my parents are saying and kind of brushes it off. Like oh maybe she's laughing at your costume. I'm pissed that he said that because there isn't anything funny. I am cute! There isn't anything funny! I can't help but want to be comforted by him even though what he said is stupid. My mom begins to get angry with me because I'm letting the lady hurt my feelings. So she goes on a rant and says, "Don't let her get to you. There's idiots all over the world and that's one of them. Don't worry about her." That had never happened to me before. I'm lost for words. Is this racist or just bullying? I've been bullied before but it didn't feel like this. It felt as though someone ripped out my heart and ran over it with a bulldozer while it was still beating. I'm so hurt.

The lady finally puts her phone down after a while and walks away with the group of guys still laughing in my direction. To this day, I'm still not sure if I had done anything wrong or if my makeup was just funny. I'm still trying to find an excuse for her because stuff like that isn't supposed to happen to me. It's not supposed to happen to anyone. My boyfriend still justifies it also, but it's harder to hear him justify it because his exterior is predominantly white. So it kind of seems like he's making excuses and I understand that he's

Being the color that I am, I  
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safe or not.

never had to go through this a day in his life but he wasn't even sympathetic. He brushed it off like he was used to it and this so happened to be my first time ever being mistreated by a stranger. I was hurt that he didn't know what it felt like. I was hurt that he didn't react the way I wanted him to. I wanted him to use his privilege, his voice, and tell the lady to screw off. I wanted him to be my voice, but all he did was act oblivious.

Being the color that I am, I have to think about where I go and wonder if I'll be safe or not. It doesn't have to be just around white people though. When there's a bunch of people that aren't like you, or you think they aren't like you, you categorize them. Different skin color, accent, religion whatever. I already had it in my mind that I had to be skeptical about where I was at. I pick and choose my fights. That fight wasn't chosen by me but I can't be angry at my boyfriend for putting me in that type of situation. He didn't know any better and neither did I. I could have showed my ass but I was out numbered. So being quiet was my best bet. It was a lesson learned.

*\* Silent in French, Silent in Cherokee*

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*Que' Nikki Ternoir is a little African American girl born in Columbia Heights, raised in Minneapolis. Her father is from Illinois and mother from Delaware. She is pretty darn fluent in English but even after 5 years of French, still can't speak it; thank God it isn't required for nursing. She hasn't been anywhere really. She is only 20, so there's still time.*



# Where I'm From: The Inner City

**By:** John Kormah

## I.

I'm from God's DNA, filled with bright colors like P.B.J. to M.L.K. then Malcolm X. I'm from the motherland, the continent which gave birth to all nations, Africa; Yes Africa. With its thick cultural background like a mountain lion, you can quote me on this and I am not lying.

I'm from slavery, I'm  
from chains, I can  
feel the blood of my  
ancestors flowing  
through my veins.

## II.

I'm from the likes of the inner city kids, growing up in the most diverse and overly migrated city in Minnesota, Brooklyn Park. From the neighborhood of drug dealers, weed smokers, crack sniffers, boot liquor, and a whole lot of things I choose not to live off. I'm from a church where I found Jesus, and I'm now delivered. I'm from the bloodline so sharp, no porcupine could ever over shine because it's so divine. From Adam to Eve, ole' how blessed is he who curses Eve. I'm from a home where my Mother is in charge of the household, where there is no Father so she play the role, and from a house of athletes, she became my coach. And now her wisdom my own. I'm from the orange dirt in the Liberian soil. (Hard, foul, tasted like sweat and years of hardship). I'm from the pitchblack womb, of a mother calf fatten at the belly. I'm a wolf, I'm a dog, I'm a mix breed, I'm from a tribe, I'm from a place, but I don't know my name. From four different languages breathing inside of me, Kpelle, Bassa, Gio, Kissi, yet I still try to learn english in a different country.

## III.

I'm from Hip-Hop, 90s to be exact, From P.A.C. to B.I.G., I still listen to every category. I'm from a small group of freethinkers, and philosopher asking Obama, Bush, Clinton, "How can we make peace, if you fight wars?" I'm from slavery, I'm from chains, I can feel the blood of my ancestors flowing through my veins. Every lashes, every beaten, will forever be in my brain. I'm from the Black Panthers organization, We are a representation, sparking a revolution to open a revelation.

I'm from a heart of Sabali, which is Patience in Mali.  
I'm from the rich, succulent, orma of fried rice; Yes, Rice.  
I'm from you, and you are from me, if black lives matter, than your life matter to me. From the heart of poetry, I respect this type of artistry.  
I'm from a different place, I'm not of this world, nor do I call it "Home."  
My desires are not for earthly things that will fade, corrode, or burn. I set my heart and mind on things above. My faith and hope alone are in God alone, and I eagerly await his return for me. I am a citizen of Heaven.

---

*John Kormah was born March 14, 1996 in Monrovia, Liberia. A single-child in a household of two. He is currently doing his undergraduate work at North Hennepin College in Brooklyn Park, Minnesota. After his two years at North Hennepin College he plans on transferring to Northwestern University - St. Paul. His favorite sport is soccer and is currently a One2One mentor at North View Junior High. He loves literature but wants to study medicine to become a pharmacist. His dream is to one day run his own store.*

# Meaning of Marriage

**By:** Choua Yang

Marriage isn't just about a man and a woman. Marriage is about two loving people who care for each other.

*The idea of marriage is to be happy with yourself and to be happy with your spouse making lifelong journeys with each other.* When two people are together, they should not feel a single worry. However, if they do feel like they're having worries, their significant other can help them through the worries; they are like a personal guidance counselor.

When I hear about marriage, it makes me think about what the future has in store for me. Why does it make me think that way, you ask? It is because being Hmong male in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT) community can be quite difficult. I grew up with very traditional customs, for instance, marriage between a man and a woman. When I first found out that I was bisexual, I did not know how I would come out to my family. It was something that I had to go up against, just like any other person having to come out to their family. I thought about how I was going to get the thought of a man and a woman marriage out of my head and how difficult it was going to be. I have thought about the process of coming out to my parents repeatedly and wondered about what my parents were going to say. Thinking to myself on a cool night, I soon came to a resolution that "it doesn't matter who I am. My parents brought me into the world for a reason and they'll support me no matter what I am, or who I am." Once I thought about that, I finally came out to them, saying that I was bisexual. Their reactions were stunning to me. My mom was quite supportive of me; on the other hand, my dad wasn't so supportive of my decision because the traditions that have set in his mind.

As Amy Grant, song-writer and singer, once said, "Every good relationship, especially marriage, is based on respect. If it's not based on respect, nothing that appears to be good will last very long." We as Hmong people need to respect one another for his/her choices and not put them and their choices down. It's not anyone's job to put someone down because of their choices just because your culture says something totally different about it. In other words, claiming someone's sexual orientation that it is against your religion is like being angry at someone eating candy. Marriage isn't just about a man and a woman. Marriage is about two loving people who care for each other. For example, if one of the people in the marriage is at their lowest point, the job of the spouse is to help them get back up.

## We can rewrite history, amend cultural norms, break barriers, and create new traditions!

The thing about marriage within the Hmong community is that change can be hard and difficult with strong cultural roots and belief systems. The idea of change is to do something different. Change and the Hmong community doesn't go well together. The reasons why is because we are afraid to break the rules. We are afraid of cultural norms, beliefs, and customs, like a man and a woman marriage. What do I say to the Hmong community and their fears? I say overcome those fears, embrace change, accept and respect each other on who they are. We can rewrite history, amend cultural norms, break barriers, and create new traditions! The Hmong people were once immigrants, and we're able to adapt to the environment, laws, rules, and regulations and toward our new home in the United States of America. If we are able to adapt to those changes we should be able to adapt to and accept same sex marriage laws. Instead of shunning, fighting, and creating more issues between families, and being upset about gay marriages or changes, we as a Hmong community, should start thinking about the impact made upon our children and our grandchildren and their decisions. Like the writer Jonathan Rauch says in his essay, "What is Marriage for?," he clearly states, "There is no reason why a male-male or female-female couple could not make and sustain the promise of a lifelong caregiving, opponents of same-sex marriage are reluctant to put the caregiving commitment at the heart, rather than the periphery, of marriage" (Rauch 104).

My hopes for the Hmong community is that as we are legalized citizen of the United States, the Hmong community needs to learn how to accept each other for who we are. Being an immigrant group is already hard enough to fit in with the rest of society. And as a Hmong community we need to be the first to adapt, and be accepting to one another. Don't be mistaken, I know keeping our heritage is very important because it's what makes who we are. It's what makes me who I am today: a Hmong male in the LGBT community. By adapting and accepting LGBT relationships, we as a com-

munity can show society that we accept changes and adapt to what's in our environment. Hmong people can make a change, and add on to Hmong history, instead of the history being forgotten.

Some may think that a marriage is about a man and a woman and that's the norm. The norm doesn't revolve around one idea; it revolves around many great ideas. Every single individual, all approximately seven billion people, think differently from the person next to them. Yes, they might think similarly, but there's always going to be a difference.

All in all, everyone has their rights. Everyone all has a voice to speak. A marriage isn't just about religion or a single idea; it's about the difference that makes a marriage unique. A marriage is not about being able to live with someone; but about not being able to live without someone. Meaning this marriage is about two people who understand one another and have been in a position of his/her spouse. Marriage is about coming together as two parts joining like two pieces of a puzzle to make a bigger picture. It's about making life-long journeys.

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*Choua Yang, being a Hmong male who grew up in the United States and is a person in the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender (LGBT) community, knows there can be quite a few obstacles to face, especially with parents who grew up in a different country, and also was raised in traditional families. These challenges that he faces are the same as other Hmong LGBT. He hopes to overcome these obstacles that many are facing, and also hopes to make a change in the Hmong community. He is currently doing general education courses, and hopes to transfer to St. Paul College to become a respiratory therapist and further pursue higher education.*

## Traveling and Adapting: The Guide on Living as a Foreigner

**By:** Emma Peredecea

A ridiculously long-awaited journey that by a stroke of a miracle was happening after many tearful and silent prayers.

*The feeling in my toes had vanished long before my family and I reached the airport gates.* Perhaps it was the frigid wind and low temperatures of that January night that kept my feet from feeling any warmth, or the two pairs of thick cotton socks my mother insisted on, enveloped by white and tight fitting knee boots. But the drive towards the airport wasn't as uncomfortable as the journey ahead I'd have to endure with my strangled toes. Apart from the other few emigrants that were to board the same plane as my family's, the ticket holders and baggage claiming operators were the only ones who were awake at two in the morning on this night. My family and I spent hours waiting for our departure time in the company of our cousins, my aunt and uncle, and a family friend. This journey wasn't your regular three to four-hour family vacation; it was the relocation of a family to the opposite end of the world, a ridiculously long-awaited journey that by a stroke of a miracle was happening after many tearful and silent prayers.

The eleven-hour flight started in the Airport of Chisinau, Moldova, later connecting in Frankfurt, Germany with a layover of two boring and uneventful hours. After boarding the Delta airplane, we were soon crossing the Atlantic arriving in Chicago, where we spent the night in a small hotel that was prepaid for the emigrants that were coming from Moldova. Taking off my boots as I entered the small but accommodating room was like being liberated from stiff and suffocating chains. I was finally free, and my toes seemed to regain consciousness as the blood started to circulate again after nine hours of imprisonment. Following the sleepless night, due to the overwhelming excitement and exhausted but wide awake brains, we boarded one final plane that took us to Minneapolis, Minnesota, our final destination. Although this happened seven years ago, it's an event in my life that is etched to my identity as a foreigner. My family and I adapted easily and quickly to the life in America because we were accustomed to traveling and flying ever since I was a preschooler. But after a brief evaluation of my six years, as a United States citizen, I realize that for most of my life I've always been a foreigner. Foreign land has been my home ever since I left the country in which I was born, and living in a trilingual house is now the norm. I haven't had much chance to call myself a Moldovian citizen since I left my natal country when I was five, but from what I do remember, Moldova was a country that held its charm in the rural valleys and countryside life that many Moldavians were known to have.

The country is situated tightly in between Ukraine and Romania, nations that suffered Soviet Union control and Communism until the early twentieth century. The abundant grasslands and hills of Moldovian terrain are still very vivid in my head, and although relatively poor, the vast fields of cattle, corn, and fresh water creeks more than make up for the lack of economic prosperity. The viridescent, hilly plateaus that I remember have large rows of yellow corn and much larger-than-your-face sunflowers. They each surround and square off smaller gardens within, where you can find all your daily vegetables: spring onions, cucumbers, tomatoes, and radishes. One particular memory I have of those grassy plains is of my younger brother, my grandparents and I sitting on homemade stools along the edge of the crops and gorging on freshly sprouted spring onions, supple tomatoes and rich feta cheese made from scratch. Opposite of the crops, I recall tall and thick mulberry trees that my brother and I used to climb at the mere age of four and five. Roaming and exploring the woods nearby was our favorite thing to do while our grandparents worked their fields in the seasons of planting and harvesting.

Because the country lacked economic stability, married or single men and women left to find work in western countries, my parents included. Fast-forward to two years after our mother left us in our grandparents' care and here we were, flying, for the first time, to what I'd later call my second home.

Adjusting to Italy proved to be an effortless task. My brother and I picked up the language in a hasty yet efficient manner— watching television, reading the children's books and what the school was teaching. But Italy seemed to have many more wonders, starting with the fact that the little town of Chieri had beautiful playground parks. In comparison to the old, rusted, and less-safe playgrounds in Moldova, these parks were fully furnished with bright primary colored swings and slides that were safe to go down on. Another amazing place in the town was a hilly mount, where two buildings had been eradicated to be the tallest in the town, and you could see the entire town as far as your eye could stretch. The town was coated by red terracotta rooftops and each building seemed to have the same opaque shade of dusty beige. It was like the town was from a scene in the movies, constructed purposefully this way to rekindle antique and modern Italian architecture. On top of these adjacent buildings, an old brown church stayed rooted and locked as an old museum artifact, that the town council seemed to have forgotten about. Looking down at the cobblestone streets, you could always spot large groups of people walking, jogging and running.

Unlike in Moldova, where you might see one child in the streets around midday, the little town of Chieri boomed with citizens that went roaming about the city at each time of the day. To my brother and me, Italy seemed like another planet, filled with wonderful places to explore and new towns to visit. After about two years of living there, we couldn't imagine another home. School was definitely one of the highlights of living in Italy. We changed teachers with every new year, but what I personally loved about being in elementary school was the fact that we could always call our teachers by their first name. Being the teacher's pet that I was, my teachers would always treat me as a daughter. Once in the first grade, I'd been gifted two Barbie dolls by my favorite Italian teacher, Signora Rosella. I can still name my favorite math teacher, Maria-carla, and my least favorite, Venere. Unfortunately, our stay in Italy lasted only seven years, and after our grandparents decided to leave behind Moldova to go live with my great grandparents in the United States, we were soon following in their footsteps. My new home was going to be Minnesota, but even though both my brother and I were leaving friends, cousins, uncles and aunts, and our beloved Italian language, we were more than ready to embark on another journey. However attached we were to our Italian home, we relished in the fact that the United States was going to be our new home. I remember imagining yellow school buses and American TV stars, and debating whether everything I'd seen on screen about American culture was going to be true.

The childhood that I had could be considered very different than what other children might have had. Having to adjust to drastically different cultures and environments could also be considered unstable for young children. But I'm glad that with each new relocation, I'd always kept an open mind and a welcoming embrace to the new place I'd call home. Living as a foreigner taught me much more of what it means to have a home. It's not necessarily the place you're born. Home can be at the exact opposite end of the world. My traveling definitely expanded my small view of the world and the communities that I've lived in. Without it, I would not have been the young adult that I've grown to be, and definitely would not have gotten over my fear of flying.

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*Her name is Emanuela Peredecea, but most know her by Emma. She is a full-time PSEO student who works part-time at a little boutique called "Crystal House." This essay is a brief recollection of her past 18 years so far, and she knows that she is not the only foreigner who has lived, for most of their life, as a cultural nomad.*

# Traveling to the United States

**By:** Bilal Turay

*I came to the United States in May.* I was excited to start a journey from my country Liberia to America. It was the first time I had flown in an airplane, so I was excited. When I arrived in the United States Airport, I was pleased with their welcome. The airport was beautiful, very big and nice looking. I saw lot of people moving around, I had never seen before when everybody was busy moving from place to place. Unlike in my country we have very small airport and we do not have a lots of people moving around in our airport I was so confused, and I was surprised when I saw lot of people around.

It had been more than 5 years  
since I had seen my brother.

My brother met me in the airport. We were very happy to see each other. It had been more than 5 years since I had seen my brother. Then we took my baggage into his red car. When we were on our way home, I saw some of the beautiful bridges crossing one another. Some were very broad, and some of them were up while others were down. It was amazing to see those kinds of bridges for the first time. The road was very wide, and they were lot of cars running on the road, unlike in my country where we do not have bridges crossing one another. Our bridges are very narrow, and our roads are small from one side to the other side. I saw some beautiful tall building, something I had never seen before, but one thing that impressed me most is the environment. All the places were very cleaned and nice looking, and it was so fascinating, unlike my country, which is very different where you see lot of garbage on the street, and the places are very dusty. My brother took me to one of the best Asian restaurants and we ate Chinese fried rice with chicken and the food was delicious. I had never had eaten Chinese fried rice before. After two weeks I began to look for jobs, and I got one good job. It was at a food production factory. My first day at work was very difficult for me because my English was not too good for me to communicate to other people, and it was very difficult for me to understand them too. Even though I wanted to say something, it took me a long time to say it because when I spoke they said they could not understand what I said to them. For instance, when I asked



The United States is  
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language

them about icebox they began to ask me what is icebox, and it was very difficult for to figure out from this problem. I began to listen to them carefully, and after a few months I started to understand them what they called icebox—freezer. Obviously communication is very important even in the working places. After some months, everything was fine. The United States is very beautiful and had nice people because they accept everyone even if you struggle with language and find it very difficult to speak English.

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*Bilal M. Turay is a North Hennepin Community College student. He is working to achieve a degree in accounting. He likes to help, share knowledge, and share experiences with others.*



# An Immigrant Family

**By:** Mariela Landi

I am proud  
to come from  
an immigrant  
family because  
I know the  
true meaning  
of FAMILY.

*There are millions of immigrant families in the United States and around the world.* Many people came to the United States in search of a better life. People come from countries such as Mexico, El Salvador, Honduras, Ethiopia, Ecuador, and others. These countries are impaired, where there is no work, where violence grows daily, where people suffer from hunger and malnutrition, and where people flee from war. Also, these countries are full of corruption and drug dealers. If you ask an immigrant “why are they here?,” they will answer to give my family a “better life.”

I came from an immigrant family from Ecuador. I am proud to come from an immigrant family because I know the true meaning of FAMILY. I strongly believe that immigrant families really know the value of family. My parents got married very young. My mom was fifteen and my dad was seventeen years old. They fell in love and decided to start their own family. I have a total of seven siblings, six sisters and one brother. At that time, my dad used to work as a labor man in construction. He used to work full-time and do physically demanding work. He worked so hard to earn money to keep up the home. We were poor and sometimes we did not have anything to eat, but we were happy because we were all together. My dad did everything he could to keep us happy. My mom used to sell quail eggs on the streets to earn a little bit of money to help out my dad to pay debts.

Eight months before I was born, my dad lost his job. Then, without his job, our lives got more difficult. My parents had to borrow money from close relatives. At this point, my brother and sisters could no longer attend school. There was no money to buy food, or to pay school tuition, or for school supplies and uniforms. My mom used to cry every night for not having enough money to buy food to feed her kids or to send them to school. My dad was frustrated, because he could not find a job. My father decided to immigrate to the United States to give us a better life. That’s when my family broke apart.

My dad had to pawn our house to get some money to pay the “coyotes” (the men who help out to cross the border). Crossing the border was extremely difficult. My dad put his life at risk three times in order to pass the border. Finally, at his third try he passed the border, but unfortunately, he ended up dehydrated and had a severe cold. It took him about two months to recover.

When he finally recovered, he began to work in three jobs: as a dishwasher, cook and labor man. He had no time to rest, but what kept him going was his family. Whenever he could, he used to call us to see how we were doing.

Therefore, the day I was born, my dad was in New York working really hard to support us. I can image how hard it was for my father not being able to be at my birth. But, I do understand why he wasn't there. When I was about one-year-old, my mom also immigrated to the United States. My mom left us under the care of my beloved grandmother. She loved us and was happy to take care of us. My grandmother supported my mom in her decision because they thought that it was the best for all of us. We grew up without my mom or my dad. I personally felt lonely at times. I did not know them in person. I was so little that I barely remembered them. I had no childhood memories with my parents. That made me feel lonely and isolated at times. My grandmother was always there for me, and my brother and sisters were always taking care of me. But, in the inside, I missed having my parents by my side.

My siblings and I had to face a lot of struggles during our childhood. Once my parents settled in America, we no longer suffered hunger. We had everything we needed for school. There were bad people who used to call us "orphans" and that made us sad. People were mean to us. Our relatives used to hit us with no reason. My older sisters and brother used to protect me from them. But, in consequence, they were hit twice or more times. When my parents called us, we felt extremely happy because we knew that even though they were not there, our parents loved us so much.

My grandmother is one of the most important people in my life. She was about seventy years old when she began taking care of us. She was the sweetest and most generous person I have ever known. Her hands were as soft as cotton, and with a simple touch she made me feel calm. My grandmother loved us with all her heart. She was always there when we needed a hug. She was diagnosed with diabetes one year after my parents left. Even though she was sick, she did her best to take care of us. When my mother found out that my grandma was sick, she immediately paid someone money to help her out with the care of her children and her mom too. Our childhood was filled with tears and happiness too.

During our childhood we had to move constantly. The reasons why we moved often was because our aunts used to treat us badly. Our cousins used to hit us every day. My aunt stole the money my mom sent for my grandmother to buy her

medicines. Time passed by, my grandmother, my sisters and brother moved to our parents' house by ourselves. My sisters were old enough to take care of the house.

We no longer wanted to live with people who made us suffer that much. Everyone helped out around the house and now we felt safe and we could call it our home. After five more years my parents decided to bring us to the United States. We came in pairs of two and thanks to God we all arrived safely. The day I met my parents was the greatest day of my life. I hugged them so hard and never wanted to let them go. I was so thankful to them because they never abandoned us. They were always there taking care of us. They had to face many struggles, too, in order to find a job.

## My story relates to many stories of immigrant families, people who abandoned their families to save them from hunger and poverty.

Coming from an immigrant family is extremely hard. Our saying is that family comes first at all times. Our values are strong. My family is the most amazing family in the whole world. I appreciate all the hard work and all the sacrifices that my parents had to go through to give us a better life. My story relates to many stories of immigrant families, people who abandoned their families to save them from hunger and poverty. The greatest thing when they reunite is that all that hard work is paid off, with an immense love and strong bonds between their families. Family always comes first. Today, I have my own immigrant family: my husband and my two beautiful kids. And I will do my best to give them a "better life," simply because I love them with all my heart.

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*Mariela Landi was born in Ecuador and came to the United States when she was twelve years old. Her parents had to sacrifice a lot to give their kids a better life.*

## My Father's Lecture

**By:** Erick Alvarado

*"Donde mierda estas?"* yelled my father from the other line of the phone. He was wondering where I was and I politely told him I was leaving my girlfriend's house. "I need your help. I'm picking you up," he told me, and rudely hung up the phone before I could argue with him.

It was another day of Minnesota bipolar weather, for it was mid-September and in the upper nineties. When he picked me up I noticed as usual my dad was wearing his dirty work clothes; his khaki shorts, a pink shirt, and his Twins hat. My dad was driving his old 2004 Chevrolet express, also known as the creeper van that he uses for his construction projects. The van always seemed to smell like grass and some other funky smell. We were driving on



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Lowry Street, which over the years became a very familiar road. I obnoxiously kept asking him where we were going, but as usual he looked at me and rolled his eyes. While driving on Lowry Street my dad mention how excited he was my little sister was finally starting school. He also brought up another topic; he wanted my mother to go to school as well, so that she could learn to speak English. But then I asked him a dumb question. Why should she go to school? She can just work, make money, and help you pay the bills. He gazed at me with a disappointed look and I knew at that moment I was going to receive one of my father's famous lectures.

Whenever my father gets serious, he becomes really tense and as he took off his old Twins hat, I noticed that the van began to go slower. Every time my father begins his lecture, he always starts of with a quote that has become

## Graduating from college, becoming a “somebody,” and gaining my father’s approval, that has become my new goal.

famous in my family, “I don’t want your mother to be a ‘nobody’ but a ‘somebody.’” What he means by this is that he doesn’t want my mother to have a horrible, minimum wage job since she can’t speak English very well. If she was to go to school and learn English she would have a brighter future and would become a “somebody.” Whenever he says this, it always bothers me since he always finishes his lecture saying that he doesn’t want me to become a “nobody” like himself. This really bothers me because I look up to him a lot. He was the one who brought my family to this amazing state and gave us the opportunity to follow our dreams. This time I had enough. I responded, very angry and disgusted at his comment. I told him, “How can you be a ‘nobody’ when you started with absolutely nothing in this country and now have achieved so much? At the age of fifteen, you had left everything behind like your family and friends just so you could find yourself a better future. Then you even managed to build a family and give us everything we desired.” After I told him that he began to smile. Then he suddenly realized everything he had gone through to achieve his goals. All the suffering he had been through and he didn’t want that for me.

It was silent for about three minutes, enough time for my father to bring all his thoughts together before he responded to my comment. He began, “I know I have achieved a lot. I know it might look like it was easy, but it’s not. I went through a lot of stressful and miserable days to get to where I am today. Every day it was a thirteen-hour shift from five-thirty in the morning to six in the afternoon of working my butt off and dealing with hateful people. People with so much hatred that when they got a glimpse of me they would have a disgusted look on their face. They didn’t like me because of my ethnicity. They would tell me stereotypes, like how did you get this job when you can’t even speak our language. I would look at them and apologize because I didn’t know how else to respond and I needed the job.” When we finally arrive at our destination, which of course was Humane

to Society hardware store, he stopped the car and told me he didn’t want me to follow the same path he did, he didn’t want me to suffer the way he did. He wanted me to go to college and follow my dreams to become an engineer. This was a realization for me since many immigrant students have to face barriers and more challenges to excel in their education. But graduating from college, becoming a “somebody,” and gaining my father’s approval, that has become my new goal. I will prove to others who doubt immigrant students that they are wrong! People of different backgrounds can also achieve many great and amazing things.

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*Erick Alvarado was born August 5, 1997 in a city called Cuenca, which is located in Ecuador. It has been ten years since he has moved here from his homeland. In Ecuador, the native language is Spanish and their culture is very extraordinary. What most Ecuadorian people are known for is their kindness, being short, and for eating exquisite foods like cuy (breed of the Guinea pig), or ceviche. Erick is also fluent in both English and Spanish, and he is continuing to master proper grammar in his writing for both the languages. He is the first sibling in his family to graduate from high school. Also, this is his first year in North Hennepin Community College and he enjoys the school’s diversity. He also hopes to become a successful Latino someday and to help out his community in the process. Since Erick always wanted to help out his Latino community what better way to do it then to write a personal story, with hopes of it getting published so fellow students can read it and have an insight to lives of immigrants in the United States.*

# Moving On

**By:** Tatyana Andriyesh

*The day my sister got engaged was the worst day of my life.* Okay, maybe not the worst but it's pretty close. In 8 months they would seal the deal, she would leave and my life as I know it would be over. "Why the rush," I asked. "Why not be engaged for at least a year?" "Why wait," she would respond. Why wait. Why. Wait. The words would ring in my head. For me I thought. Wait for me.



I was 16 when they got engaged and she 19. I helped plan the engagement. I wanted her to be happy and he made her happy so I set it up, told him where he needed to be and when to be there. "You should look nice today at work," I told her. "Why?" she asked. "It's Valentine's day, why not," I responded. Why not? So she left for work that day and returned home glowing, 24 dozen, red, long stem roses in hand but that's not what caught my eye. It was sparkly, not too big but not too small. I looked at her, if only she knew how much I loved her.

The wedding dress shopping began. She, my mom, and I went to one boutique after another until we found the dress. Wedding dress shopping was hard for someone like her. She managed to look good in every dress. Was it because every time she smiled her dimpled smile she glowed like a million stars? Her teeth were so straight and pearly white she could have been paid to advertise toothpaste brands. Or the fact that her lips were always light pink and plump without the use of any lip product? Or could it have been that her face was so somehow perfectly symmetrical? I watched her walk out with A-line, mermaid, and ball gowns, and bile rose to my throat, my eyes grew watery. It hit me like a train that she would move and I would be here. 2,000 miles in between us. Who would sacrifice their time willingly and go wedding dress shopping with me without uttering a single complaint?

There were four bridesmaids. I told myself it was okay that I wasn't the maid of honor because her childhood best friend seemed to be closer to her. Yet, I realized, who was there when she needed someone to wipe her tears? Who was there to defend her when people talked behind her back? Who was the one to plan the bachelorette party just so she had something to remember us by? Who was the one to decorate her bridal shower? The one who wrote emails back and forth to her fiancé telling him the questions he would need to answer for the video being made for her. Me. The second

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bridesmaid. Maid of honor was just a title. But I still wanted it. It meant something to me. I held my breath hoping she would change her mind and give it to me. She didn't.

As the days grew closer, I grew more bitter. I would have to go from seeing her everyday to seeing her maybe three times a year. It hurt to think that she would not be there to witness the milestones I would face in my life like my graduation, my baptism, my wedding dress shopping, my birthdays. What about the kids she would have? Would I be the auntie that sees them once a year? I didn't want that. I wanted to see her smiling face every day. I wanted to be there for her milestone moments like when she gives birth, for her birthdays, to witness and see the mom and wife she would become, but just not from 2,000 miles away.

So I stood at the wedding as the sun beamed down at me. I watched them get married and the whole time I struggled to keep the tears from falling. "Isn't it going to suck that your sister is moving?" people would say to me. They asked just to spark conversation, nobody actually asked because they cared. So I just smiled and nodded my head. I didn't want to hear how you would feel. I didn't want to hear how you moved away from your family. I didn't want to hear how much it sucks because I can feel how much it sucks. I can feel how she was slowly forgetting about us. About me. It didn't hit me at first that she was gone. It hit me two weeks later when I came home from school and there was no one to talk to, to tell them about my day. Nobody to hang out with me on the weekends. So I stayed home, for a month straight, weekends and weekdays. I don't know if it was missing her that made me snap or the boredom. I punched a wall, I punched my pillow, anything that couldn't break because I didn't want people to see how bad this was hurting me. I think the question that I had trouble answering was who am I without my sister? Who am I without my siblings? I thought that if you get attached to

someone they'll just end up leaving because in the end who are you to make them stay?

The anger settled in my like it was its home. The one regret I have is being angry at my parents who were missing her just as much as me. That I didn't confide in them like I should have. That I let myself be bitter and angry when it wasn't something I can control, that this was just another part of life. Yet I tried to find something that made me feel put together, that made me hurt less. In the end I found one thing or one person. God. I searched through darkness, but I ended up in front of him. I think this was a part of his plan for him to show me who I am, and who I'm not, and mostly to show me who he is. To prepare me for the losses I would feel in the future. To show me how to be strong, and that even though people will always leave me, he never will. He loved me when I couldn't love myself or thought that I wasn't loveable, and that is something I will forever be thankful for.

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*Tatyana was born in Moldova, a very small country in Eastern Europe that is between Romania and Ukraine. She speaks Moldavian and just a little bit of Russian. This is her first year at North Hennepin and so far it's not too bad. She is not sure what career she wants to pursue yet but who really knows what they want from life when they are 19 years old. All she knows is she hopes to travel in the future. She likes to read. One of her favorite books she has read so far is The History of Love by Nicole Krauss. She likes chocolate ice cream because she loves chocolate. She enjoys swimming and snorkeling. She is not athletic but she does enjoy playing sports for fun even though she's not that good. She hates that everything in life is a competition and tries to avoid that. She tries to soak up as much as she can of life.*

# Expression of Languages

**By:** Angela Tran

*To me, language is equal to experiences and memories.* You go through so many different kinds of experiences when you know more than one language. The memories you get from learning another language are also unforgettable. Speaking another language has strongly impacted my family and I. Language improved the communication within my family and developed the bonds that we have created. It also played a role for me at school and work. It enhanced my skills and abilities above other people that are the same age as me.

The languages I grew up hearing and speaking were Chinese, Vietnamese, and English. My mom is Chinese and my dad is half Chinese and half Vietnamese. There are two types of Chinese: Cantonese and Mandarin. My mom spoke Cantonese and my dad spoke Mandarin. Growing up, my mom spoke a lot of Vietnamese and Chinese to me, and my dad mostly spoke Vietnamese to me. I think my dad knew some Mandarin, but he was very fluent in speaking Vietnamese. My mom spoke both Cantonese and Vietnamese very fluently. If I remember correctly, my mom spoke more Vietnamese to me than Cantonese, because my dad couldn't understand Cantonese. My brother spoke a lot of English to me. At school, everyone spoke English, so when we got home from school, English was easier to speak rather than trying to remember Vietnamese or Chinese.

Even though my first language was English, I was still put in ESL in elementary school. If I remember correctly ESL is an abbreviation for English Second Language. I was in ESL for many years, but I eventually tested out of the class. ESL was actually really fun and we got to do many fun activities. I remember I was really close to my teachers and we bonded really well. I still have some old pictures of everyone, so it's nice to look back at the old memories. Even to this day, I still talk to my classmates from ESL. It's nice that we all somewhat keep in touch, even if we didn't graduate from the same high school.

In my extended family, my brother and I were the only two out of all my cousins that could speak fluent Vietnamese. We were also the only ones who could understand Vietnamese. My cousins didn't know how to speak Vietnamese and they could barely understand it. I remember it was difficult for my grandparents to communicate with my cousins because my grand-



parents didn't know much English. My grandparents have learned more English during the years because they had no choice to. My cousins don't know how to speak Vietnamese well, but they know all their favorite Vietnamese dishes and how to say them correctly.

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The adults in my family were always the most proud of my brother and me because we could speak Vietnamese. All my cousins always looked up to us the most. At one point, my cousins, my brother and I went to a Vietnamese temple. The temple taught us how to read and write Vietnamese. Each Saturday morning we would go learn Vietnamese, then had lunch, and after lunch we would learn a Vietnamese song. It was like a school for us on Saturdays and wearing uniforms was optional. Some of the kids knew how to speak and read Vietnamese and some kids did not. Learning how to write in Vietnamese was really challenging because there are 5 “symbols” that go above each word. If you put the wrong symbol, it could possibly change the tone of the word or change the whole word in general.

After learning more Vietnamese, my mom took my brother and me to Vietnam. I was already fluent in speaking Vietnamese, so I wasn't worried about speaking to the elderly. It was really cool seeing different types of foods. There are so many types of delicious foods and it ranges anything from rice to noodle soups. Eating in Vietnam was very cheap and affordable. A lot of the eating areas were outside in the hot weather, but it was still nice and different. There were also a lot of food carts that went around villages selling instant food. Learning about the culture was an amazing experience. I felt really honored to be able to speak to everyone without my mom translating for me. The adults were proud that my brother and I grew up in America and that I had learned another language. I always heard the adults saying, “It's harder for children in America to learn Vietnamese because English is their first language.” In Vietnam, I was able to learn more vocabulary from my neighbor who went to school. The cool thing about spending a long time in Vietnam was that I didn't have to attend school, not even one single day! I spent a whole month in Vietnam and by the time I had to leave, I was really sad because I got use to another environment and everyone made it feel like home for my family and I.

In America, my mom was able to speak, read, and write English, but she didn't know really big vocabulary terms. She was able to do more of the simple things for me like taking me to conferences for school and making doctor's appointments. For the more complex things, she would ask my aunt for help. In many ways, I could relate to Amy Tan and how she grew up. “Like others, I have described it to people as ‘broken’ or ‘fractured’ English (Tan 53). Sometimes I would have to explain to people that my mom's English wasn't perfect or I would have to translate for my mom. If my mom still couldn't understand me, she would just ask my aunt and my aunt would translate it for her.

## I am actually more thankful than ever that I got the opportunities that some people don't get in their lifetimes.

Now that many years have gone by, I speak Vietnamese and Chinese at school and work. In high school, I learned how to speak, read, and write Mandarin Chinese. It was a challenge just because I already knew Vietnamese and Cantonese Chinese. Even though I already knew Chinese, it was like learning a whole new language. Everything was pronounced and spelled differently. Each word had its own tone and the way you use the tone could change the whole word and meaning. When I spoke Chinese, I sometimes mixed up Cantonese and Mandarin just because they were similar in a way but still very different. I spoke more Vietnamese than Chinese at work.

After graduating high school, I moved out of my parents' house and lived with my cousin and niece. My niece's name is Keilani Tran and she is now two years old. She is very talented and she is a very fast learner, so when I lived with her, I taught her how to speak Vietnamese. For the longest time, everything I said to her in Vietnamese, I translated the words in English for her. She knew a lot more English but when I spoke Vietnamese to her, she always smiled and laughed or nodded her head like she understood me. Her mom is French and wanted her to learn French as well, so maybe she was trying to learn too many things at once. Maybe Keilani was confusing herself with French and Vietnamese words. Until this day, Keilani knows the simple things in both languages so I feel like she is learning. I can't wait to teach her more as she grows up because the new generation needs to pass down our generations, so we can keep our family traditions going, even when we aren't around anymore.

I remember when I was younger; I use to be embarrassed that I knew another language. This is because when my brother and I caused trouble at the grocery store, my mom would yell at us really loud and everyone would look at us. Now that so many years have gone by, I laugh at the memories and think

about the good times. Now I can say that I am not embarrassed that I know another language and I am actually more thankful than ever that I got the opportunities that some people don't get in their lifetimes. I learned a difficult skill that I can always use and hopefully teach the younger generations. I hope my parents are proud of my brother and me for what we have accomplished with knowing multiple languages and I would like to thank them for all their hard work and dedication that they have done for us over the years.

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*Angela would like to dedicate her story to her mom Anh Chung. She wrote this story in honor of what she has been through in life. Angela had a rough childhood growing up, but she remembers this part of her childhood as something positive. Angela believes she wouldn't be the person she is today without her mom and the experiences she went through when she was younger. She said it was a struggle growing up, but she is thankful for whatever happened to her in life because it has made her a stronger and independent person. Angela believes that everything happens for a reason, even if you may never know the reason why. Everyone goes through ups and downs in life and that's normal, it's just another experience that everyone goes through. No matter what happens in life, never forget that life always moves on and never give up because best things in life are worth waiting for.*

I hope my parents are proud of my brother and me for what we have accomplished with knowing multiple languages and I would like to thank them for all their hard work and dedication that they have done for us over the years.



# Frozen Twilight

**By:** Jose Sanchez

I didn't know what to tell them so I just said, "My father got into an accident."

*It was a cold winters evening*, snowflakes were slowly spiraling down to hit the frozen tundra that we call downtown Minneapolis. The bus was making its typical thunderous noises from being such an aged bus. The noise was muted by the laughter of my friends as we waited for our designated stops. It was my sophomore year of high school and I was enjoying life like any high school student would, of course that was until I received a phone call from my mother. I thought to myself, "That's strange, why is she calling me right now?" considering that she usually calls me after I arrive home to reunite myself with my younger brothers while she's at work.

The laughter and conversations on the bus began to muffle through my ears and all I can hear is the tears hitting the floor as I sit there without motion, staring into the fake leathered exterior of the bus seats. I slowly begin to creep back into reality as my friends begin to break the cold, lifeless trance that I was immersed in. They begin to ask me; "Are you okay? What's wrong?" It was probably the most common question I heard so we'll just generalize the bundle of questions they asked to that. I didn't know what to tell them so I just said, "My father got into an accident." They began to stare at me as if I was going to explain the details to the report I had just received. I begin to move up multiple seats and sit there, alone, next to the freezing, corroding bus window, staring along the road and streets. Arriving upon my stop, with the usual trees and lumps of frozen snow, the path that I usually took felt different and much emptier. All I could really focus on was the path home and the anxiety that was filling up my entire being at that moment. I didn't want to rush home and catch the announcement on what happened so I walked, staring into the sky and being lost in this twilight. Before I knew it, I was at my front porch. The shabby placemat greeted me with the sharp bristles to clean off my old boots from junior high. I walked inside, looking around for my mother, but she was nowhere to be found in the house which I used to call home, but at that moment felt like an eerie basement, alone shrouded by the dark corners of the house.

It was about four o'clock in the afternoon and my brothers arrived. Everybody was home except for my mother and father. We waited around for her to show up and pick us up to go to the hospital that night. Five hours passed but it felt as if it had only been thirty minutes. We were later taken to the hospital to finally figure out what exactly happened. My mother was

still in shock and still couldn't explain without tearing up. As soon as we arrived to see my father, we opened up his room and the lurid light began to blind us as the smell of anesthesia and morphine began to fill our nostrils with the scent, slowly burning the smell into our brains. Laying my eyes on my father, my eyes began to swell and fill with tears. My father began to slowly raise his arm and gently waved me over, and said to me, "Don't cry." Which only impacted me to snivel my tears but didn't help. Roberto, my father, had suffered 3rd degree chemical burns on his hands, face and chest. I began to whimper as I slowly walk closer and closer to him, laying on the bed, trying my hardest to not hug him and hurt him in the process. When the doctor came in he explained that my father had survived a car explosion while being a backseat passenger with other employees on their way to a client. My father was practically disabled; he could barely move or talk.

When we were later heading home, I didn't know what was going to happen to our family because of this tragedy. After a couple of months, my father was able to leave the hospital and we welcomed him back home, but there were major changes in how we usually went about our lives. I had to care for my father and do most of the work around the house. I had to become the man of the house. I ordered my brothers to help around, assisted them with their homework, cooked and maintained the house as clean as possible. This was the least I could do since my mother had to work two jobs in order to sustain income for food, bills, and education. Being a high school sophomore, I had given up my old childish attitude and I had to mature my personality. I had a much more ominous atmosphere following me to school and people noticed. I was the student who would always walk to class with a smile on his face while greeting everyone who I walked by. The change was almost instantly noticeable, and people didn't want to ask as to what happened; they just walked away not knowing as to how to handle the situation. That's where I began to actually take account of my close friends. They stayed with me throughout this journey and helped me when I needed it. Everything seemed like my family and I were going to be all right if we kept going at this pace. That was until one afternoon, my mother wanted to talk to me. I knew this was going to be bad news by the worried face she had. After closing the door behind her, she told me that she would not be able to support me financially for my high school education. I stood there, silent, staring outside as birds flew by the window, and she knew that I wasn't too happy with the news. What could a high school sophomore do to support himself in this desperate time of need for financial help?

I ended up finding a job, about an hour away from where I lived. It was in Osseo, Minnesota. I had no other way to get there but by the city bus. I also couldn't decline since it was practically the only place to accept a fifteen year old with an accompaniment of an adult. A janitor at the age of fifteen cleaning an elementary school is a bit rough but it wasn't too bad. I remember seeing kids with paint stained clothes from an after school art class as they looked at me and my beat red headphones, swaying as I danced and cleaned the paper ridden floors of the hall. At that school, I was nicknamed "Headphones." Clever. I can hear you saying but it always brought a smile when they waved and greeted me using that nickname. I can still remember the exact time and bus I would take, the 723 bus at the corner of Penn and 33rd Ave at around six o'clock. The sun just slightly hovering over the horizon, hitting my glasses and making me lift my hand as I tried not to go blind. With the addition of a job, my grades weren't holding up very well, but I was able to pay of the tuition in the end. Before I knew it, it was 2013, and I had graduated. Caps were thrown, camera flashes were all throughout the Basilica, and the sun was shining down on us that day, while hearing the honks of nearby cars congratulating all of us that had made it through high school.

As we were all heading outside, I could see my mother and my father waiting for me. They were able to attend. I could see a teardrop falling on the outline of his blistered cheek. I was the first one in my family to ever graduate high school and attend college.

With the accident that happened to my father, I could only assume the worst and think that dark days were upon my family, but with the experiences that I had through the sacrifice of my father's pain, I could see that I had grown stronger both mentally and spiritually; I had become an individual capable of fending for himself. I do sometimes look back and think what would be different if that accident hadn't occurred. I would probably still be attending parties, acting as immature as I could and not giving a care about the future. However, I am here today entering my second year of college and still going strong. I plan on being the first in my family to not only attend college but to graduate and hopefully acquire a Bachelor's degree in social work or elementary education in order to become a social worker or a teacher and guide today's youth into the bright future.



## Hello, Kari Jean

**By:** Kari Hovorka

*My annual summer pilgrimage eventually takes me just south of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan.* This location is nestled among the canola and wheat fields beside Provincial Highway 36. My sense of obligation, and not much more, is what brings me to this place each year. My mother raised me right in that I now feel obliged to do things I don't really want to do in the name of propriety. "Thank you notes should be handwritten and prompt." "Ladies cross their legs at the ankle not the knee" and "We visit graves out of respect, to say good bye." These are the things proper people do, like eating cranberries with Thanksgiving turkey even if we hate cranberries. That's just what we do, dammit.

Even death  
doesn't change  
that we exist.  
It just changes  
how we exist.

I end up here, with my sense of propriety in tow, searching aisle upon aisle for recognizable names. I never remember exactly where they are, and I have begun to give up hope that I ever will. After several minutes of searching, it becomes a sad kind of game and every bit of me wants to give up and go, but I don't. The names finally look familiar; Hannah Triggs, Glenn Peterson, Edith Peterson and then, Marlene Struble. With that name my mind at once goes "aha" and "oh no." It is that moment I detest; my game of seek and find ends with a sense of both victory and defeat. The sight transports me back to a cold and rainy November afternoon when we buried her here. I was 21 when I lost my mom. I will always remember the phone call from my dad. He said, "I'm so sorry, Mom died last night," to which I replied, "My Mom?" like he certainly must be talking about somebody else. He wasn't.

## If I listen, I'll hear her in my aunt's laughter and in the way they call me Kari Jean

It is a curious thing how we use the word lost when someone or something we love has died; like a deceased loved one is a favorite novel we intend to read again but have misplaced somehow. Maybe this is because we instinctively feel that death is not a complete end. I have lost several people I love as I have gotten older. Thinking of them as a loss gives me hope, the hope that they can be found, not in the physical, literal sense but found in a more abstract, spiritual way. Even those of us who rely more on science than on theology recognize, through the explanations of metaphysics, that all matter is connected and continuous. Even death doesn't change that we exist. It just changes how we exist.

To me, she's not here in this graveyard filled with names. She exists in so many other places, if I look. I find her in my twin daughters' faces. I recognize her in the little blue vein running down the bridge of Maggie's nose, just like Mom's had. Also, in the way Maggie's eyes wrinkle when she smiles; like mine do and Mom's did, in the same exact way. Also, in Anne's determined chin and the delicate line of her lips when she frowns in concentration. If I listen, I'll hear her in my aunt's laughter and in the way they call me Kari Jean; nobody ever called me that except Mom and her three sisters. I feel her near me when I cook her recipes: wonderful cake, sage stuffing, and pie crust. I love to read her recipe cards. They represent her so well. The handwriting is neat and proper and salt is always written NaCl, a geeky nod to her love for chemistry.

Most recently I find her in my pile of textbooks and hours of study. My mother was the first person in her family to attend university. This took a good amount of courage and hard work on her part; farm girls just didn't go to college. She bucked the trend and it defined so much of who she was. It is one of my deepest regrets that my life's circumstances have me attending college at the ripe old age of 37, long after her death, and long after the chance for her to see me

plow through my courses. She left me with a good amount of wisdom, none much greater than how to correctly dress and roast a chicken. Following closely behind are these sage bits of wisdom: "Kari Jean, girls are just as smart as boys" and "You're just as smart as anybody, when you put your mind to it." And put my mind to it I did, finally. She's here somewhere, amidst the rough drafts and lab notebooks and finals week stress. She is here for every A and every less than an A, and she's proud.

Maybe this is  
where our loved  
ones are most  
often found, in  
the good and  
decent lessons  
they imparted.

Perhaps I do find her here, after all. Not in the carved stone or the incessant prairie winds. Maybe this is where our loved ones are most often found, in the good and decent lessons they imparted. My mother is in the lessons she taught me; in the properly roasted chicken, in the admonishments of lady-like posture and yes, even in the obligation to visit this place and say good bye at least once every year. It is, after all, the proper place for good byes. For the remainder of the time, however, I will continue to look and listen for the fleeting moments that remind me that Mom is still near, and she's just dropping in to say "hello."

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## Other Publication Opportunities at NHCC

### Northern Light

Northern Light is a student-run journal dedicated to the publication of original scholarship by NHCC students in order to disseminate knowledge and increase the visibility of undergraduate research at two-year colleges. It is published electronically on the web every spring.

for more: <http://northernlightnhcc.org/>

### Under Construction

Every year since 1968, students at North Hennepin Community College have collaborated to produce the award-winning literary and arts journal Under Construction. Its pages have typically portrayed a breadth of human experience, but in recent years, as the student population has become more diverse and international and enrollment of both older, returning students and PSEO students has grown, this range has increased dramatically.

for more: <http://nhcc.edu/about-nhcc/publications/under-construction>



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