

# Realities

## REALITIES *Seventh Issue 2015*

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



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## Realities

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

Seventh Issue, Academic Year 2014 – 2015

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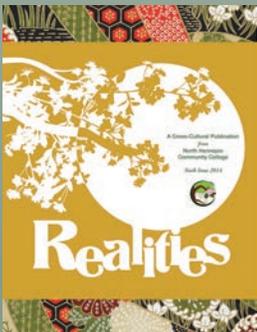
Mark L. Larson and Don Wendel  
Founders

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*Note from the editors –*

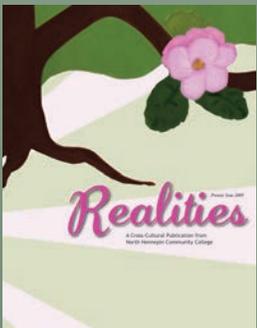
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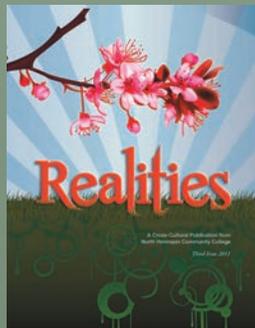
**Realities** is dedicated to all people who have had the courage to cross over their boundaries, thereby enriching their lives by seeing how other lives are lived.



*Premier Issue 2009*



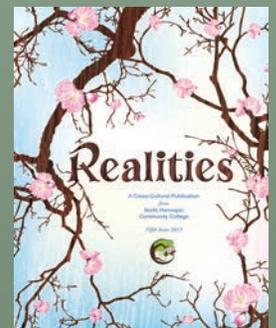
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# Introduction



We live in moments, those that are quick and passing, those that draw out and hold flesh to bone, and those that touch everything in between. Moments, our memories, create who we are—no matter how often we attempt to push them aside and become anew; they form our intangible organs, pulsing, beating, flowing throughout our bodies, encompassing our lives.

Poet and essayist Claudia Rankine writes, “Memory is a tough place.”<sup>1</sup> In the essays included here, written by students at North Hennepin Community College, we are granted insight in the tough places of memory, those specific to the authors, but also those we hold as our own, those that connect one of us to the other. We are granted an honest look into the human condition.

Here, we are led through mental illness. We are held close to the struggle with body image and bullying. We are offered a first-hand account of desegregation in the 1960s. We are allowed on the inside as families fall apart and are rebuilt. We are given the movement of place, refugees and returnees, and the pleasure and pain that accompanies it.

We are permitted to become a part of these writers’ lives, and it has been an honor to be part of their journeys, if only from a distance, with only their words to draw us closer.

Sincerely,

*Brian Baumgart and Karen Carr*

<sup>1</sup> Page 64 in *Citizen: An American Lyric*, which was a finalist for the National Book Award.

# Don't

By Aleesa Kuznetsov

“Don't make eye contact with him.”

The subway train began slowly moving as my family and I stood in the middle, holding on to the silver bars above us. A monotone voice of a computer came on saying, “Next stop, Sokol.” At one of the far ends of the car, an old man with a cane and dirty, rustled hair came walking towards us. As the man approached closer, it was apparent that he was homeless and asking for money. As he passed, I remembered what my mom had said. I looked down, scanning the soiled floor of the train, strewn with empty bottles and plastic bags. I noticed the mix of dirty tattered shoes with shiny patent ones, remembering not to make eye contact with the man. The train began slowing down as the same voice came over the loud speaker saying, “Sokol.” This was our stop and my cue to grab my mother's hand before we hopped of the train. What I had just witnessed on that train was an event that would happen every day on my trip to Moscow, Russia.

“Don't speak any English, stay quiet.”

As the four of us hopped into a taxi, being the youngest, I sat all scrunched up in the middle with my mother and sister on either side of me. My father began speaking to the taxi driver, in Russian, letting him know where we were headed. Casual conversation had started between him and my father, and understanding every word, I continued to stay quiet, remembering what my father had said. As the taxi came to a halt, my father paid the driver and we all filed out of the car onto the busy and rustic streets of Moscow. As we began walking, my father told me why I wasn't to speak any English; for if the taxi driver knew we were American, the price of that taxi ride would've been much higher. Whenever we walked anywhere in the city, we tried our best to blend in with the crowd and look as though we had lived here our whole lives. This was easy for my parents, but hard for my sister and me. If people found out we were American, strangers would pass us by with looks of disgrace. The habit of being silent became a norm. Unless we were with someone we knew or trusted, wherever we went, I would become silent and would just listen intently to what others had to say.

Despite the need to be careful and aware of our surroundings, I was still able to appreciate the rich beauty and history that the ancient city of Moscow had to offer. Being able to walk the same streets my parents had walked before was truly spectacular. Not only was I able to see where my parents had been raised, but I was really able to understand the culture they grew up in and what they were constantly surrounded by each day. From the experiences I had in the subways, taxis, streets and museums in Russia, I was able to realize how much of a culture shock it must have been for my family to move from the austere streets of Moscow to Minnesota “Nice.” For this two week trip, I was surrounded by people of my own culture, and it was still a culture shock. I can only imagine the culture shock my parents experienced every day when they moved,

The habit of being silent  
became a norm.

for they were constantly surrounded by people, places and things that they had never seen or heard of. My parents’ values were tested and pushed to the limit when they moved here. The cultural values I, as well as other Americans, had been raised with were so much different than those of my parents or other Russians. To be able to understand the cultural differences was something I learned with every encounter I had on my trip, whether it was with people I knew or complete strangers. In just two weeks, I realized that I have much fewer “Don’ts” in my life because of my parents. That the “Don’ts” that I do have in my life are much less astringent. I began to understand the reason behind every “Don’t.”

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*Aleesa Kuznetsov Kuznetsov is a first generation American and has grown up in the Twin Cities. Her parents emigrated from Moscow, Russia in 1992 due to religious persecution and poor living conditions. She speaks Russian with her family and also is conversational in French and can read Hebrew. She is a PSEO student at North Hennepin and attends Robbinsdale Cooper High School. In the fall, she will be attending the University of Wisconsin-Madison and pursuing a degree in Communication Arts. She enjoys music and the arts, specifically singing, theatre and piano, and also plays tennis in her free time.*



# Juice in the Sky

By Anh Duong

I thought our attempt  
to communicate  
would not end.

It was a fall day when I left Vietnam to go to America. I was excited to start a journey for a new life in a new country. The first time I stepped into the United Airlines plane, I was pleased with their welcome. Although the beginning welcome was pleasant, it turned out to be a long funny trip that I will remember forever. Everybody was sleeping while the plane was crossing the Pacific Ocean, but I could not fall asleep. I was thirsty, but I was afraid of asking for drinks because my English was not good enough to describe what I needed. Because of that, I thought I would wait until lunch or dinner time because juice would be served before the food, and I was patient to wait. However, the wait felt very long, so I closed my eyes to think about my family. After a long period of waiting, the flight attendants finally started to serve everybody drinks. The flight attendant who served my section thought I was sleeping, and she didn't put a cup of juice on the tray for me. When I opened my eyes, she had already passed me. I thought I needed something to drink before eating, and this time I decided to ask. However, I did not know what words to use. From past experience, I had learned that observing was a good way to learn when I didn't know what to say or do. Therefore, I looked around, but I did not see any clue to help me; however, I saw a lady who was sitting next to me was drinking some kind of juice. It smelled good. I liked the smell and decided to have a similar one. I raised my hand to let the flight attendant know I needed help.

When she came, I asked a simple question, "May I have some juice?" In my mind, I thought I would get the juice like the lady next to me, but it was not as simple as I thought. The flight attendant asked me what kind of juice I would like. I was hesitant to answer her because I only knew the name "orange juice" in English. However, I wanted to try the juice of the lady next to me, but I didn't know its name, so I did not know how to tell her. While I was thinking, she said, "Orange juice?" I said, "No" right away and started to try to describe what I wanted. "The red one" I said. She asked me again, but I did not understand the words she said. She kept asking me and I still did not know the words. I felt she asked me so many times because I didn't know English. She was trying to understand what I wanted, but it was not working. I thought our attempt to communicate would not end and if I said no again, maybe I would not have anything to drink. For this reason, I said, "Yes, please." even though I did not know what I agreed to. She left and came back with the red juice. For that, I was happy, smiled, and thanked her. I thought I had

made a good choice that I said “Yes” when I saw the drink and that she had understood me. What a good decision! I was proud of myself. I raised the cup to my mouth and took a sip and immediately wished I could spit it out. It was tomato juice. I can eat tomatoes, but I have always hated drinking tomato juice. Politely, I kept it and tried to swallow as fast as I could and found a small bottle of water around me to drink right away. For the rest of the flight, I just said, “Orange juice, please” anytime the flight attendant served drinks. I drank only orange juice during that trip. Obviously, communication is very important, even on an airplane, and language was the most difficult part of my experience on the plane to come to the U.S.

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*Anh Duong is a North Hennepin Community College student. She is working to achieve a degree in Computer Science. She likes to have challenges on new projects with new technology or programming languages and is willing to help, share knowledge, and experiences with others.*

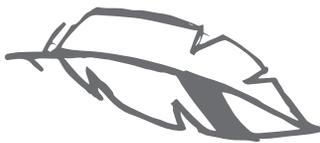


# *A Life Memory of a Bittersweet Journey to My Village*

By Basil Tifu Ajuo

**I**n October, 2005, I embarked on a journey that impacted my life in a very special way that I could never have imagined. This journey was made to my village. I was invited by one of the villagers to take part in an annual dance festival of my village. I met the messenger of the event in Yaounde-the capital city of Cameroon where I resided permanently. The name of this local village is Mbesanaku, meaning “people of the forest”. The significance of this visit to Mbesa is that Mbesa is my birth place and my family comes from there. Having the opportunity to go back to Mbesa during their annual cultural dance was very important to me because I had the luck to reunite with my family, especially my great grandmother, after 19 years.

The road was so long.  
I felt so tired.  
I wanted to give up.



On that adventurous day, I left my house very early in the morning at 5:00 a.m. The roads were so bad. They were hilly, stony and mountainous with no other means of transportation apart from trekking. I trekked a very long distance of about 25 miles, climbing and descending hills. I was sweating and my heart was pounding. The road was so long. I felt so tired. I wanted to give up, but something kept on reminding me in my mind to keep on going with one step after the other. I continued trekking. I passed through the mountain forest. I heard birds singing. I admired their sounds and felt accompanied by their songs. I saw trees blowing in the wind and the sun rising from the east. Though walking on my own with no one to talk to, I felt like I was not lonely on this journey because I was accompanied by the songs of the birds. I passed by a lake. I admired the beauty of the lake, but I was also fearful because of the wildlife. I walked through hills and viewed the natural beauty of other local villages from the top of a hill. I finally arrived at the grazing land and green hills separated by fast running streams that provide not only a good source of drinking water, but tadpoles to the people of Mbesa. I saw cattle rearing. This included goats, cows, and sheep. The grazing land was fenced so that animals would not be let loose. I rested a little and had a conversation with one of the shepherds. I regained my energy during this time of watching the animals and talking to the herders. This journey had a meaningful impact on me because this was the toughest challenge in my history and my first time to embark on such a long walk. From that day, I learned that a journey of 1,000 miles begins with a step.

I arrived at the cultural dance festival. I was received by different cultural dance groups at the entrance of the village. They sang traditional songs and played drums.

I felt so confused as I didn't know which dance to do to their beats. The dance group led me to the main area. This was where the main cultural activity was taking place. People, both men and women, were able to perform right on the stage dancing traditional dances. They danced barefooted. I was excited, and I danced until my feet were hurting. Some people walked without clothes. Children were running around naked while nursing mothers were breastfeeding their children in public. Local crafts were displayed. I saw the paintings of the first ever ancestors.

After the dance was over, I was invited for lunch. I ate local traditional food with roasted chicken. I also drank local corn beer and local palm wine. This was the only drink that was available. It was an interesting experience indeed. This gave me an inward emotion of joy and served as an energy stabilizer for me. The significance of this interaction and connecting with people from my own village after such a very long time will forever remain at the center of my heart.

This journey gave me the opportunity to reunite with my family. I was so fortunate that I was able to see my great grandmother again after 19 years. The first time I saw her was when I was 9 years old. She was looking so haunted and tired as if she was just going to pass

From that day, I learned that a  
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begins with a step.

away the next hour. I looked at her with tears and joy. She was sitting next to the king and the other princes of the community. I couldn't wait to kiss her on her forehead and to tell her how I was so lucky and fortunate to see her again after 19 years and for being her great grandson. She carried me on her legs. She danced around the compound with passion. It was a pleasurable moment for both of us. My great grandmother was able to bless me. I was also able to see my family and other family members. They were so excited to see me. They came closer to identify themselves to me.

Finally, this visit touched my life. I was deeply affected by the experiencing of embarking on a long walk, witnessing the annual cultural festival of my own village, and reuniting with my family. I was able to be blessed by my great grandmother. Since then I have been moving forward with her spirit in me. Whenever some things get me down, I think of the last time I saw my great grandmother

and her spirit lifts me up. This made me become a man. From that day, I started making decisions that shaped my history and one of those decisions was enrolling at North Hennepin Community College. I learned that if inhabitants in a poor community struggle to live despite their hardship, why should I not struggle to go to school so that I could change the next generation of people through my knowledge? I will never forget this experience when I was able to see my great grandmother to bless me before she finally passed away in 2010. This visit shaped my life to always think back where I came from and to try to move forward with my village and family at the center of my heart.

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*Basil Ajuo is an African student taking Paralegal courses at North Hennepin Community College since January 2014. He was born and raised in the country of Cameroon where he grew up speaking the languages of French and English. When he was 21 years, he began doing international humanitarian work in which he travelled to every African nation to spread the message of democracy and humanitarian ideas. Although he grew up in poverty, he found a way to become the voice for the voiceless. He has dedicated his life to the success of every human being. At NHCC, Basil has had the pleasure of meeting people he knows he will never forget. Students, faculty and staff are the people who have come from culturally different parts in the world. Getting to know the problems that students face daily and how the administration resolves the problems to make sure students are learning and graduating has been an awesome experience along with the fun involved. Getting to work as a student in the Diversity office of NHCC has been a privilege. The skills gained while working with the fabulous diversity team are immeasurable. North Hennepin is the most incredibly diverse community college in the State of Minnesota. Basil will be so proud to join its alumni in May 2016. Basil will be transferring to Augsburg University to study Political Science and Law and hopes of one day running for a public office.*

# *A Rose Amongst the Weeds*

By Leah Odegard

The bookmark itself is very tattered, with its purple ribbon frayed from absent minded fingers.

Between the pages of my leather bound bible, I keep one of my great grandmother's handmade bookmarks tucked inside. Although I do not open the book as much nowadays, it is comforting to know the bookmark is resting there safely. Rose, or Rosie, as I and the other great-grandchildren called her, was a very religious person, so it is the most fitting place to keep a piece of her. The bookmark itself is very tattered, with its purple ribbon frayed from absent minded fingers pulling on its threads, but the purple violet and strands of green grass beneath the sealed plastic still retain their colors. It is also fitting that a woman who loved flowers and collected them for her crafts was named after a flower, but Rosie never liked roses very much. She preferred the flowers and plants that grew in the forests in Northern Minnesota, especially the ones her children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren brought her over the years.

In my Nature and Literature class, we were encouraged to connect the readings and discussions we had with our own experience with the natural world and what it meant to us as individuals. That comes easily enough to me because of many of my family members. My mother is from Duluth, Minnesota, where she lived close to Rosie and her aunts and uncles. Rosie was a Girl Scout leader, so when she was not taking girls up to camp along the North Shore, she took her own children and grandchildren to their cabin, where they would walk in the woods, swim, and pick berries. My grandmother told me she remembers Rosie as being very outdoorsy, but that she also wanted others to enjoy their time in nature with her. My mother told me that Rosie would play games with all the grandchildren, have them bring her wildflowers, twigs, or grass that she would make things out of, like flower wreaths or woven grass dolls.

I was between six and eight years old when I vividly remember spending time with Rosie. She was in her late eighties at that point in her life, but when we went to spend the weekend at her home in Duluth, she would walk with us down to a nearby park to play or to the little convenience store to get us snacks. I also remember sitting with her in her dark, dampened basement where she made her flower crafts and arrangements. She would collect all sorts of materials she could work into her crafts, including the small, grubby flowers I gave her that grew between the cracks in the city sidewalk. My grandmother told me that she used to make many things that she



would give away or sell at craft shows in the Duluth area, like corn husk flowers, birch bark flowers with a pine cone bud in the middle, and dolls with faces made of dried apples. Rosie called her crafts “Nature All,” and the tagline she put on her business card was something like “God provides the materials, I just put them together.”

Of course, there was more to Rosie than just her crafts and her love of the outdoors. She was very personable and made a point to be active in her community. She gained a lot of respect from others in the areas of work and volunteering she did, but I think it made even more of a difference that she had a kind heart. She always seemed to

It made even more of a difference  
that she had a kind heart.

care about what I was doing and thinking, even if I was just a six year old girl babbling on and on about the silliest of things. When she passed away in 2002, it was a pretty devastating blow to my mother’s side of the family. She left an impact on everyone that knew her and were close enough, but no longer having her around to guide and counsel others still has left a big hole in the family. Now, it is up to us to retain the memories we have of her.

I like to make up my own stories, but everything I write is tinged with memories and people from my own life, including Rosie. If it were not for her, the natural world would not mean as much to me, nor would staying close with my family members. She saw the beauty in many things and was a loving force that was the heart and soul of my family. When I am outside, I can see her walking around her garden, picking out the weeds and the flowers for her crafts. As strange as it was to some, Rosie loved to work weeds into her crafts. My mother told me a story of when she, Rosie, and a few other

family members were driving down the highway when I was a little kid. Rosie looked out the window and urgently asked them to pull over the car. When they did, she jumped out and starting pulling weeds out of the grass alongside the road. My mother asked her what she was doing, and she said she could not go by so many beautiful, beautiful plants.

\*\*\*\*\*

*Leah Odegard, while having many opportunities to visit new places, loves Minnesota, the state she was born in. Raised in St. Paul by a father from Green Bay, Wisconsin and a mother from Duluth, Minnesota, she spent many vacations up in Duluth and in the Northwoods. She is currently enrolled in the Creative Writing AFA program at North Hennepin and loves to write, take catnaps, and play tabletop games with her friends.*

## He Used To

He understands how it feels to work 24 hours a day, but still worry about being hungry.

Son is an average working-class American. His family came over from Asia about thirty-five years ago, and in all that time he has only lived in a slowly-developed, yet friendly, suburban area of Minnesota. He's the head of his own family. Everyone in his neighborhood refers to him as the most hard-working and friendly person that they've ever met. On Sunday and Saturday afternoon, after finishing his two jobs, he's always busy in the front yard of his house, takes good care of the lawn, waters the trees, and fixes the bricks. He constantly kneels down on his right knee, behind those bushes near the edge between his lawn and the street, and trims the ugly branches. From far away, we can only see his hat above the height of the thick, green bushes, but sometimes when people walk their dogs by, he reveals his head and greets them.

Son, like most people, is also a part of a bigger family. His parents have ten children, eight boys and two girls. He's the oldest. His mother used to be a small-scale farmer, and his father was a soldier who participated in a civil war. When he was young, his family was really poor; in fact, all of their neighbors were poor. Day by day, they relied solely on the limited source of potato that they grew for lunch and dinner. There was no breakfast. Even worse, his father often abused him, his brothers, and his mom. Every time his father came home drunk, he always made sure that he kept everyone safe and got the knock-out strikes from his father. All of his back is the forest of old scars left behind after so many beat-ups. Despite living in such hard conditions, he always wanted to hang on to his education. Unlike other teenagers who would get themselves to bed as soon as they got home from work, he worked hard by day and went to school by night in a small classroom operated in the flickering light emitting from a handful of candles that were placed around the room. He liked to learn. The young man was really bright, even his teachers had to admit. When he was little, he recognized the importance of a good education to him, his family, and also the entire community. He always dreamed of becoming a scholar someday.

But then disaster struck. The civil war that had been going on for a while ended in a way dreaded by his family. His father's side lost, and the father himself had to go to prison. As the oldest child, he now took on the responsibility of a big brother and also helped his mother feed the entire family. Harsh piled on hard! There was no time, money, and strength to continue his education.



Decades later, his mother recalled while her eyes were already full in tears, telling her grandchildren: “I always remembered that moment. You guys must not know how hard our lives used to be... (silence)... The day he quit [school], I remember looking at your father [the oldest son] lying there in his sleeping place. His hands, all rough from working, hugged the books hard. He buried the side of his head in the pillow and faced the wall. I picked up a notebook on top of a neat stack on the floor, and took a look at it. (Breathing in, her mouth was shaking, speaking slowly in tears). His handwriting was as nice as it was when he was in first grade. In the dark, I only heard a soft sobbing sound, but I knew he cried a lot. Just by looking at him, my heart broke into pieces. You guys just don’t understand seeing your father sacrificing what he always wanted to do because of me unable to support him. I felt useless in his life. His grief is all my fault.” She took the sleeve of her shirt and wiped off what seemed like her last drops of tears.

Now, the teenager has grown up, married, and become the father of three children. For unknown reasons, he rarely tells his children about his past experiences, and neither does his wife. His dream of getting a good education now seeds in his children’s mind. Whenever he gets a chance to sit with his family, he never forgets to remind his three sons of the importance of getting an education despite that they’re all excellent students in school. When his oldest son, named Michael, was in his senior year in high school and about to enter college, the father urged him to visit different schools and to take the standardized tests. He also went online to look for advice from other experienced parents and drove to the bookstore, looking for something that might be helpful for his son’s big decision. He thought education would bring his children a brighter future and guide them to become better citizens of the world. Unlike his abusive father, he rarely drinks, really loves his kids, and never considers physical violence as a means to teach them to become better people. Sometimes, he would take a week off from work to lead his family

on a camping trip or just spend time together in his mother’s house. Coming from a poor family, he understands how it feels to work twenty-four hours a day but still worry about being hungry the next day, to always be afraid of not having money to see doctors when

He teaches his kids to help people who suffer.

sickness abuses you, to walk in the darkness, trying to find his twelve-year-old brother who labored to look after the kettle probably lost somewhere. So he teaches his kids to help people who suffer, to support old people, to donate food, money, and labor for the homeless shelter when they have time, to babysit for the single moms, and to do what they can do to make others’ lives less miserable. Most importantly, he tells his sons to always be responsible in the family and love each other. Brothers must help each other out, not be mad, not once in a while fight, but love each other. That’s all he expects from them.

Son has done so much for his family and particularly his children, but he always feels that it’s not enough. He wants to do more. His effort serves not only for the wellness and future of his family but also to fulfil his dream home.

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*Writer has chosen to publish anonymously.*

# *I Am*

By Mayra Menor

**I** 1996 – Los Angeles, California

I am from Los Angeles, California.

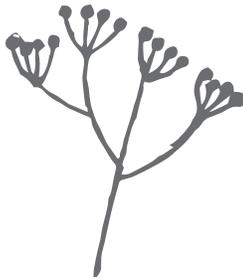
I am from a one bedroom apartment, home to three adults and a baby. I am from a queen-sized bed in the living room from which I often awoke to find my parents in a compromising position. A bed from which I often cried until they stopped what they were doing. A bed which I still remember to this day.

**1969 & 1971 – Axochiapan, Morelos**

I am, through my parents, from Mexico.

I am the child of my ancestors who followed the rules and never stuck out. I am the result of both, strict parenting and no parenting. I am from a family of alcoholics who can drink beer like water, while I am the one who chokes on a sip. I am from a generation of rebellious children who came home at seven when their mother said, “los quiero antes de las seis,” be home before six.

I am from a pair that separated three years after my birth. I come from a journey across the country, oblivious, at the time, to the fact that I could never return to my



I am the beads of sweat  
on my mom’s brow.

previous life, knowing only that I would spend my first winter surrounded by snow. I come from the flight over states, wondering when we’ll land and silently praying that nothing went wrong. I am the beads of sweat on my mom’s brows as she walked through the airport with her head down, only looking up when she heard her name.

**1999 – Minneapolis, Minnesota**

I am from a hidden room in Minneapolis, often forgotten in my corner. I am within the white walls which saw me quietly play as my cousins ran through the hallways

yelling in a language I couldn't understand, and giggling as I whispered "water" in the foreign language. I am from a childhood spent staying up all night waiting for my mom to come home safely, hoping that she wouldn't run into the people who wanted her out of the country. I am from a childhood where waking up in the early hours of the day to a man and woman having sex was normal.

#### 2001 – Bloomington, Minnesota

I am from a blurred house in Bloomington where I spent my young years hiding and in confusion. I often wondered why I couldn't talk to my father when my stepdad was home, or why I couldn't bring myself to say, "gracias," to the man who had taken my mom and me into his care when no one else would. I am in the car with a man who could not read and who spent hours letting me try to teach him even though all the books I had were in English. I am the happy moments where he introduced his sister as my aunt and I called her such, just as I am the shattering moments where mother said they were nothing of mine. I am in the corner of the room, crying for the family I'll never have and for the family I don't want. I'm the shadow slipping from one room to another in search of company. I am lost within the basement walls covered with saints, watching me give away my innocence in hopes of feeling something new.

#### 2003 – Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

I am from the yellow house located by an abandoned church. I am from the border of Brooklyn Center and Minneapolis. The years mash together in a haze of hate and hurt, of betrayal and abandonment. I come from the blue room at the back of the house, bare except for a Strawberry Shortcake poster and a cross. I am from the tiny closet where I went to escape my fears, where a thin curtain was the only thing separating me from the outside world.

I am the too-clean room which radiated control. I am in the fish tank in the living room which entertained me for only minutes. I am the humid days I spent upstairs, finally watching movies in English and letting my imagination run wild. I come from the bathrooms where I promised my friends I'd never let them go, even when I got too old to believe.

I am from the front steps where I often spent my Sunday nights talking to my dad over the phone. I am from the old tree in the front yard with a swing that could never be trusted. I am from an empty house where I spent my free time looking for reasons to hate my stepdad.

He always dressed like a cowboy when we went to parties.  
He always made me pull out his gray hairs.

He always bought me everything I wanted.

#### 2008 – Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

I am from dirt, humidity, and darkness—a basement on the other side of Brooklyn Center. In such conditions, it's easy to carry the negativity to the new place. It is my own hell hole, one which I must go down into every day and be reminded of everything I lost.

I am from the smallest room, painted blue, where I locked myself in to avoid everyone. I am from that room in which I was told I was loved and hated, where I learned who I could trust and count on. Within those four walls I realized that the man I claimed to hate was actually someone I loved, and that he'd been more of a dad to me than my biological father. I am the moments I spent beating myself up for not realizing this sooner and for letting one of the best things in my life go without a goodbye. I'll be in the empty roads I take to Illinois and then Mexico, in search of the family I lost, the one I didn't want but realize I need.

I lost the one I didn't want  
but realize I need.

#### 2010 – Brooklyn Center, Minnesota

I am from the same place with a new twist. I am from the now pink room where I spent my teenage years crying and slashing my arms. I am from the other side of the wall listening to my parents argue, saying that bringing my dad to live with us was a mistake. I am from the stairs I climbed into a new home where I was accepted with open arms. I am from behind the closed door where I told my mom I wanted to die. I am from the dining table at the edge of the living room where I tried to overdose. I am within the twisting roads leading to the hospital where I stayed at many times, praying that my stay would be more than a few days, and where my family pressured me into behaving properly because mental disorders son una locura. I am the sleepless nights I spent afterwards, replaying the death wishes I received from those related to me by blood.

I am from a pair who reunited eleven years after separating, only to gift me a sibling I no longer wanted. I am the nine months of waiting for a baby I knew would wreck my life. I am in the hospital room where life was brought to the world, where I realized just how ugly it was to be human – to be a woman. I am made of similar DNA to a mini Mayra, except she is the devil reincarnated while I

was the perfect first child. I am made of long nights, vomit, and new experiences. I am filled with laughter, tears, and screams. I come from hair-pulling, scratching, and biting. I am the first mutterings of “agua” and the giggling escape of “octopus.” I am from days of being replaced and ignored, from being pushed to the back of the list. I am the forgotten daughter who, by losing her role of queen, finally gained control of herself.

#### Time – Earth, Universe

I am from a place where suffering happens. I am made of experiences I’ve had and even those that I lack, where the English and Spanish language dance within me in a tale of their past. I come from a place where one must be independent, where loneliness and death are the only certain things in life. I am the creation of something bigger than me, and I hesitate to put all my trust into someone I cannot see.

I am who I am now, but I will not be who I am now in the future. I will be someone else with more stories to tell, with more pain and joy etched into her being. I will be someone I’m terrified to meet.

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*Mayra Menor is the eldest daughter of two Mexican-born people who immigrated to the United States in the early 1990s. She was born in California and moved to Minnesota when she was around three years old. She has spoken Spanish all her life but in recent years English has taken over and she is now forced to take Spanish courses to properly learn her mother tongue again.*



# Going to School During Desegregation

By Diane Hall

Being in the South as a child, going to school was quite an experience in my young life.

I was a part of history during the year 1965. I was eight years old. During that time, civil rights was trying to desegregate schools. That was when black children were not allowed to go school with white children.

I was one of those children that broke the barrier of integrating the public schools in the South. I was young and scared at the time; I didn't understand fully what was going on. I knew that there were lots of people involved in this situation that I was in. The media was surrounding the area that I had to walk to get to the front door of the white school where I felt I was not wanted. There were white people on the one side calling me nigger, and telling me to go home, that I didn't belong there. There were no white children that day in classes. The teacher was hostile and uninviting in class. I sat there and followed instruction. Even as uncomfortable as I was, I knew it was the right thing to do at that time.

Even then as a young girl, I believed in equal rights. I was a little girl marching along with civil rights leaders in Grenada, Mississippi. There were scenes like out of a movie: people being sprayed with tear gas and beaten with sticks and called nigger over and over again by the Grenada Police Department. I was frightened and scared while going through stuff I didn't really understand. People ran; some were screaming.

This intense, horrific situation with integrating the school went on for weeks. Walking into school with my skinny little legs, I was scared but proud to go through the aisle. The media on one side and an angry mob on the other side; the mob was whites mostly, men with some women, and some students with their parents. The group on the other side was supportive, and they wanted to see change. The police and civil rights leaders were also there.

I felt dirty and out of place. Every day that I attended that school, people were calling me names and spitting. I got whipped with a wooden paddle on my behind; it hurt so badly. I didn't know why this was happening, for I had done nothing wrong. I felt like I must have done something wrong, but what was it?

Ashamed, I didn't tell my mother what had happen to me because I didn't want any trouble for me or my mother. It had gotten so that I just couldn't go to that school anymore. I told my mom what happened to me, being whipped with that wooden paddle by the principal. After talking it over with my mom, I told her that I couldn't go back.

I realized why I had gotten whipped was because I had used the bathroom that day. I was called to the office where I had to lie across the principal's chair, and was whipped just because I had used the rest room that day. Telling my mom I wanted out of the school, my mom took me out of the school and enrolled me in another. This was the worst experience in my young life.

Experiencing such a negative situation in my life set me up for not liking school and not trusting people that were in authority. Having experienced that negative input in my young life has shaped my life in the worst way.

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*Diane Hall was born in Grenada, Mississippi. Her parents are the late Peter and Irene Hall. She has four siblings.*

# *The Outsiders*

By Audua Pugh

I didn't have a voice.  
I couldn't speak  
my mind.

When I was a child growing up in Chicago, Illinois, I was sad the majority of the time. There were no other kids around my house or my Auntie Jo's house, just me, and I spent most weekends there and when my mother had important places to go. I was raised, "children are to be seen and not heard." I was shy and reserved. I didn't have a voice. I couldn't speak my mind. I was a child amongst a sea of adults. I don't really remember why I was sad, but I do know that those feelings were real. By the time I became a preteen I began to gain weight because of the depression that I suffered. I was what is called, "big for my age." I can remember when I would catch the city bus I had to take my birth certificate with me to prove that I was eleven. Feeling like an outsider is difficult, being seen as different is painful. I was too young to talk to the adults that I was around, and I was looked at differently than the kids at school because I was overweight. When I gained the weight it was hard for me to look in the mirror at myself because all I saw was fat and ugly. In the same manner, Lucy Grealy an award winning poet and author of an essay entitled "Mirrors," didn't look in the mirror at herself for almost a year<sup>(33)</sup>, because she thought that she was ugly. She avoided mirrors, even objects that had reflections like a doorknob, or a coffee machine<sup>(33)</sup>.

Kids are mean; they tease you and call you names. Ms. Grealy was teased all the time. She states that "people would stare at her in stores, and children would point and make fun of her to the point where she came to expect it, everywhere she went"<sup>(36)</sup>. In the same manner, I was teased so much that I would answer to the names they called me, like Moose and Big Foot. I would smile at school; I pretended that everything was all right, but at night when I got home I would cry. Even my mother didn't know that I felt like an outsider because I was overweight, because I didn't have a voice. I felt empty inside, like a balloon – just a cover full of air.

I had a friend, her name was Veronica, and she was short and overweight too, but the difference between us is she was talented. She had a personality the size of a skyscraper, and she could sing like nobody's business. She could dance; it was amazing for me to watch her go. She had the skills of Fred Astaire in my mind. For me, she was everything I wasn't. I looked to her for strength. I respected her opinions and I valued her friendship. She knew how much the name calling bothered me so she made up a song to help me feel better and to show my classmates that I was okay with who and what I was.

*“B.A.B.Y. H.U.E.Y. Baby Huey, Hey, hey, Baby Huey, Wool!”*

I still went home at night and cried, but at school I had put on a mask and convinced myself that it was not me, it was them. What could I do? How could I get these people to like me? When will I matter to the adults that I was around? When?

In Lucy Grealy’s “Mirrors,” Lucy went through quite a few periods at school when she didn’t feel like she belonged. Because of the cancer in her jaw and the many operations she had to reconstruct her face, after which her face was still disfigured, she too felt like an outsider. She states, “School became a battle ground, and I came home at the end of the day exhausted with the effort of keeping my body so tense and hard that I was sure anything would bounce off it”<sup>(36)</sup> When a person is going through taunting and teasing from others it is exhausting. You feel like you’ve been hit by a Mack Truck. I can truly relate because that is how I felt many days – beaten and broken.

In school, no boys wanted to be my friend, but they were ugly and immature so it didn’t really matter. Boys were just someone that I

## That is how I felt many days – beaten and broken.

shared space with – that is how they began to look to me. “Who wants to be friends with those stinky boys anyway? It’s just a hassle.” Those were my thoughts. In Grealy’s essay, she says “she felt like a dog and a monster – the ugliest girl they had ever seen.” Her biggest disappointment came when the boys that dated her sister began to taunt and tease her about being Jerry’s girlfriend and she knew that wasn’t a compliment to him, but it was an insult about her<sup>(38)</sup>.

There was a period when I felt so down on myself that I contemplated suicide. I actually did take a handful of pills. The ambulance came and I was taken to the hospital. Rumors at my school flew, like birds on their way south for the winter. People said I had to get my stomach pumped. I was so embarrassed, I didn’t return to school for two weeks. At that point I had to do something, but what? So I focused on losing weight. I didn’t expect anything from people anymore, so I had to get satisfaction from inside myself. I felt like Lucy Grealy when she said, “I became forthright and honest and secure in the way only the true self-confident are, those who do not expect to be rejected, and those like me...expect no rejection”<sup>(38)</sup>.

As time went on I did lose the weight, and I began to have the confidence I so desperately needed; however, another issue arose:

I was also tall and towered over most of my friends and also the boys that I was interested in. I wasn’t an ugly girl but because I was tall; boys called me Lurch from *The Addams Family*. They all rejected me, and the shunning began all over again. I began to look for love in all the wrong places. I began to think, “maybe if I sleep with them, they will like me – maybe even love me.” I met a young man who was the sexiest, smooth brown-skinned, tall, dark and most handsomest thing I had ever saw in my life and I wanted him! I wanted him to be my boo and he said he would be, but little did I know after he got what he wanted from me, he dropped me like a hot potato. He danced afterward like he had scored a touchdown. I was humiliated! He wouldn’t even walk me home. As I walked the twelve blocks home alone, I cried all the way there. “Was I stupid? What was I thinking? All I heard in my head was the Angela Bofill song titled, *I Try*. The words kept playing over and over in my head:

*“I try to do, the best I can for you but it seems it’s not enough, and you know I care even when you’re not there but it’s not what you want. You close your door when I want to give you more and I feel, I feel so out of place and you know it’s true, don’t you think I’m good enough for you. Can’t you see that you’re hurting me and I want this pain to stop?”*

When I arrived home, I played that song over and over, and I cried all night long. In a similar instance Lucy Grealy had the same issue; she would sleep with men in the hopes that they would have a relationship. She says, “I viewed sex as my salvation.” Unfortunately for her, just like me, it turned out the same way. All we wanted was to be happy the way normal girls do. She states, “I was sure if only I could get someone to sleep with me it would mean I wasn’t ugly, that I was an attractive person, a lovable person; it would be hard to guess...I in turn left each short-term affair hating myself”<sup>(41)</sup>.

Lucy Grealy whose tired body was beaten and broken could never let go of the “ugly” little girl that lived deep inside her soul. She couldn’t let go of all the gloomy memories that were etched into the perfect picture she dreamed about in her mind and all the voices she believed that screamed in her ears. She committed suicide at the age of thirty-nine.

Lucy Grealy didn’t allow herself to love herself. She didn’t allow her gift and talents to outshine the face she saw in the mirror, but I did. I reached out to people and allowed people to give me guidance through my unfortunate circumstances. I allowed what I saw as the face of God to speak to my soul and I willingly gave myself to Him. Today I have a level of confidence that I didn’t have before. Today, I have a husband and family that love me, and most importantly, I have a God that I serve and He gives me inner peace, with who I am, and whose I am. I also have the power of prayer, and I have

theme music that guides me, and I keep it in my heart in my sad times. It's Whitney Houston's, *The Greatest Love of All*:

*"I decided long ago, never to walk in anyone's shadows. If I fail, if I succeed, At least I'll live as I believe, No matter what they take from me, they can't take away my dignity, because the greatest love of all, is happening to me, I found the greatest love of all, Inside of me."*

What I have learned during my trials and suffering is acceptance in any situation is the first step to recovery. That grace is a gift, and that I have to continue to listen to the inner voice that lives in me. I have to continue to utilize those that I have been blessed with to have around me and continue to seek a face that I have never seen but know in my heart exists.

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*Audua Pugh was born in Chicago, Illinois, the daughter of a single parent. Her family originated from Mississippi, then migrated to Cairo, Illinois, and later moved to the Morgan Park area of Chicago, Illinois, where she grew up until adulthood. She moved to Minneapolis, Minnesota in 1985. Audua is a recovered drug addict, having turned her life around over ten years ago. She is an active servant in her church and community. Currently she serves as president of the Women of Destiny Women's Auxiliary, member of the Usher Board and Deaconess Board, Church School Teacher, VBS Teen Teacher. In 2014 she was appointed to serve as Vice President at Large of the Women's Auxiliary for the Minnesota State Baptist Convention. On January 9, 2012, Sister Pugh decided to pursue an Associate's Degree in Liberal Arts from North Hennepin Community College, where she maintains a GPA of 3.8 and is a member of the Honor's Program, Phi Theta Kappa, Founder of Weak yet Strong Recovery Group and the Women on Wednesday, Women of Color Group. She is also the treasurer of Student Senate and manages the NHCC Food Cupboard. She is married to Rev. Michael Pugh, and they have two adult children, a fifteen year old, three grandchildren, a dog, and a cat. She enjoys spending time with her family, watching movies and participating in church and community events – and reminding people that "U R Appreciated".*

# *My Soul, Slapped to Awakening*

## *A Coming of Age Story*

By Kate Durushia

I came into the kitchen to find several days' worth of dirty dishes piled neatly on the floor. My patience wearing thin, I started running a sink of soapy water and picked the dishes up, one by one. Then she came in. My mother's voice could send my stomach plummeting into my gut, a feeling I could only diagnose as anxiety.

"What do you think you're doing?" she snapped, her tone filled with tension; the hair on the back of my neck stood straight up. "I'm going to wash the dishes." There was no fake pleasantries in my voice. I spoke how I felt, and I felt annoyed – and maybe a little scared. My mother is taller than me, stronger than me, and a second degree black belt in jujitsu. She is intimidating and overbearing, manipulative and bipolar. The only person in the world who could ever hurt me with just the words from her mouth.

Only she could pierce  
the armor I had so  
dutifully built up.

I've always had a bit of a thick skin. Call it growing up the only girl with three brothers and four male cousins. Few had any qualms about making comments on my weight, my face, my hair. I was excluded constantly, and consistently I fought for a place in the family. Full-out screaming, cursing matches with my older brother could leave me in tears, but it also toughened me. I eventually learned that if I could survive my closest family calling me the nastiest names, I could ignore strangers or friends who chose to say the same or worse. I evolved; I felt like a duck. No matter how much water was poured on me, it easily rolled right off my back.

But my mother was always different. Only she could ever pierce the armor I had so dutifully built up. That day in the kitchen is the fulcrum of who I am today. The single event that forever changed how I would love, treat, speak to, think of, and deal with the woman who birthed and raised me.

"I just put those there!" she screamed at me, and I turned to give her my best death-glare (which is really pathetic, 'cause I have a soft baby face. It never stops me from trying.) "Well I figured I would wash them instead of leaving them there to walk all over!"

The next twenty seconds is just a blur. It may have been less than twenty seconds; it seemed to go on forever. Her hand raised high in the air. My back pressed against

the sink. Her grunts of anger. My arms up, protecting my face from her repetitive strikes. The most I remember thinking is: I can either throw her on the kitchen floor, further hurting her bad back or injuring her in some other way, or I can let her have her way.

I could never hurt my mother.

Dropping my guard, my hands falling to my sides, her open palm landed hard and forceful upon my cheek. She only had to attempt to slap me three times before I let her get this blow in. Thankfully, this was the one and only time she has ever hit me or my brothers.

The fury was over and gone in just a moment. She stormed out of the kitchen, collected her work bags, and slammed the front door on the way out. I kept myself composed long enough to get to my bedroom where I collapsed, my cool hand pressed to the hot, stinging mark on my cheek, and cried – no, sobbed – harder than I ever had before. Harsh, long, forceful and breath-stealing sobs moved through my body in waves. The pain was irrelevant; it didn't matter that I was physically hurt. The sobs came from a deep emotional well within me that had been popped like a balloon, exploding into a wave of, "this is different now". Thinking back, I almost laugh. "This just got real."

In seventeen years my mother had never raised a hand against me. In seventeen years it had only ever been words – biting, gnawing, chomping words. Words that cut into my flesh like a serrated knife or peeled the substance from out my soul. Words had always been her only weapon against me, but there was something much scarier about her using physical violence. Words I can handle; brush off, get stronger from, cry silently to myself for a minute and then just get over it. But a slap... A slap could become a punch. Or a kick. It could become eight years worth of martial arts skills used against me. It represented a change in her abuse, an evolution into something more. A feeling of, "where will it end?" If she could raise her hand to her daughter, what would stop her from attacking her sons, too? At thirteen and fifteen, will they also have to deal with the physical abuse on top of years of emotional abuse? It was this that effected me the most in those moments after the incident; this thought that left me out of breath and crumpled in a ball on the floor.

My father consoled me, comforted me. To this day he regrets never filing a report with the police. I don't know that I would have let him.

Suffering from Borderline Personality Disorder and severe clinical depression, my mom was never easy to deal with. I had to learn how to disconnect from her. I was forced to distance myself from the

words, else they turn again into hands. Feet. She would accuse me of not loving her, then turn around and tell me I'm the only one who still talks to her. Her constant need for attention drained my father to the point of divorce, and continues today to drain me.

Borderlines have a personality disorder that stems from a childhood where they didn't receive enough or the right kind of attention. If a child is given love and attention one moment, and then completely ignored the next, it can make them mistrust the person caring for them. I am positive this is what happened to my mother. A child raised this way will reach out for attention, begging, pleading for it only to turn and push you away. A need for attention, but a fear of rejection. Her father never gave her the attention she needed; her mother is manipulative and overbearing and loud. Her family constantly called her ugly as she was growing up. It's no wonder she has issues. No wonder that she will push me away and then accuse me of not loving her.

I can sit next to her as she sobs inconsolably, my face carved from stone, and I am picturing my heart being protected inside a cold, frozen prison. Ice encases that vital muscle, thick and strong. The tall, wrought-iron fence rises high, high above that most tender part

I was forced to distance  
myself from the words.

of me, the gates closing, the chains holding them tight and the padlock clasped, keeping it all together. The key sits embedded in the ice next to my frozen heart; impenetrable, it cannot melt. I am safe from her, she cannot hurt me. She cannot cut me with her tears. Her words cannot break the ice that holds me together. Without that ice my heart would fall into a million pieces, so I must keep it in tact.

Ice is perfect to compare to when dealing with my mother. Years of my life were spent tip-toeing around her, walking on eggshells, testing the thin ice I must cross just to get through a day with her. She worked over-nights for several years, and I would go into fight-or-flight mode every time I would hear her bedroom door open in the afternoon. Relief would wash over me when the door shut behind her, and she was gone for the night. Peace in the kingdom.

I lived like this for many years, engaged in my own little self and concerned with silly, childish things like my hair, my make-up, my clothes. Today these seem trivial. My hair does as it wishes and I

remain a slave to its will. Which is fine, as long as it fits in a pony-tail it can do whatever it likes. Rarely will I leave the house with make-up. I have completely expelled that vain part of myself that needed to have a face full of powders and liners and creams. I don't care much anymore. It's my face. With or without make-up, if someone doesn't

I shall never stop growing;  
I can only get stronger.

like it they can look away. And my clothes... I could wear my normal things on Halloween and just tell everyone I'm a fashion disaster. I don't even clash in a stylish way. I just... clash. Which is perfect. I love it. These childish pieces of myself are dead, gone, released from the force of her hand, my soul awakened to the reality of putting others before myself. Far before myself. An instinct to protect my brothers rose up inside of me and remains today, and likely forever. She created in me a mother bear, and a spirit that has much better things to do than worry about my appearance. For this I am grateful.

But the war has not been won. Not yet. Maybe not ever. Maybe someday she will not cause in me anxiety and fear. Maybe someday a suicide attempt is followed through with and I spend the rest of my days blaming myself. Maybe she lives to a ripe old age and we continue as we do, me with my ice castle heart, and she with her burning, scorching dragon-breath.

Once in a while I forget to lock the gates. The storm hits me like a desert sun and the ice melts away, leaving me vulnerable. Sometimes I don't know I'm exposed until it's too late. Until she calls me up and says to me, "can you come over? I want you to hold my hand when I die." And then I break. My heart falls to pieces and I can't breathe, can't seem to hold myself together. Frantically my mind searches for that person in my life who I can call, who can help me pick myself back up. Usually I find no such person, those who I trust are busy, those who I might trust don't know my story. It is just me, alone, trying to hold myself together and slowly rebuilding the ice castle around my heart. I always refuse to drink when she does this to me. I feel like I just need a good stiff drink, but instead I "just keep swimming." Nothing else to do.

Often I think my older brother was smart. He finally stopped talking to her. He decided that if she was going to push him away, he was going to go away. She still cries like he's dead. Writes him letters that say, "I loved you when you were a baby, even though you were

colic-y." He doesn't read them. I do. "Kaitie said she would hate me forever if I killed myself—" I threw the card across the room. I never said that to her. "It would hurt me more than anything else in the world if I lost you." That's what I say to her. Over and over. I could tape those words and just play them back for her on a loop. Maybe eventually she would get it.

It will never end for me and her. She has me strapped into a roller coaster of emotions and my only option is to ride it, praying the safety straps hold so I don't go flying off into the abyss. All I can do is hold on tight and keep my heart as cold as ice. But I will never be naive about my mother's disorder. I can never go back to the girl I was before the incident. She was self-absorbed and ignorant. I am not her any more, and I hope never to be her again. My mother may have hurt me, and will, no doubt, continue to hurt me. But I believe there is still much I can learn from her about dealing with difficult people and difficult situations. I shall never stop growing; I can only get stronger; and I hope someone might benefit from me saying, from too much experience, "there is light in the darkness, a silver lining, a reprieve from the pain, and a lesson to learn."

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*No biography submitted.*

# *A Recession Story*

By Marcia Sanders

According to the U.S. National Bureau of Economic Research, the Great Recession of the 21st century lasted from December 2007 to June 2009. Like a furious tornado, the unemployment associated with this recession indiscriminately hit people from every class, culture, and region of the country.

Forty percent of unemployed workers during the recession were over the age of 45 <sup>(Willis)</sup>. A college degree and several years of career experience did nothing to shield millions of Baby Boomers from job loss. Once out of work, it took older workers longer than any other age group to regain employment <sup>(Johnson & Butrica)</sup>.

This time, my hard work  
didn't pay off.

That is what happened to me. After losing my job in 2010, I was unemployed for four years. Although I work now, I still haven't obtained a position equal in pay to the one I lost. That is why I decided to return to school to obtain a second degree. I plan to study nursing because the health field is apparently recession proof.

One of my friends, Ike Uloma, a former Systems Administrator with 15 years in the IT industry also spent four years searching for a job after his layoff in 2009. He finally went back to work at the end of 2014. I talked to him to see what advice he could offer.

The 54-year-old Uloma says long term unemployment was one of the most unforgettable experiences of his life. "I worked hard to get an education and continue training to stay up to date in my field. The success I enjoyed was the result of hard work. I applied that same work ethic to my job search but this time, my hard work didn't pay off. I kept searching, doing my due diligence, and in four years I never got a decent job offer."

Uloma says his long term unemployment was emotionally devastating. It was extremely difficult adjusting to life on unemployment benefits. “We had my wife’s income but without my income we weren’t able to make ends meet. I felt it was my responsibility to be the primary provider and when I was unable to do that I was demoralized,” he emphasized. Being unable to provide for his family led Uloma to

He was able to persevere by showing resilience and flexibility.

experience a loss of self-esteem. To cope, he says he had to learn that his worth is not solely dependent on what he provides financially. He learned to acknowledge his immeasurable qualities, like being a caring father, a supportive husband, and a good cook who has a sense of humor. He says, “I felt better about myself when I started to focus on the positive.”

He also says he had to learn to stop struggling to get back to his pre-recession income. Instead, of being frustrated by his fruitless efforts, Uloma eventually realized that to get back to work he had to adjust his priorities and be willing to accept a lesser paying job. Numerous older job seekers, myself included, had to accept work in significantly lower-paying jobs. Some people just gave up looking and opted for early retirement <sup>(Sherk)</sup>.

Uloma believes that he would still be unemployed if he had not been willing to reduce his salary expectations and seek work in a field outside of IT. Today, he works as a correctional officer, earning \$60,000 less than he made in his last job. He says he sometimes thinks he must be crazy for taking such a physically demanding job. Even though he complains that the rigors of working in corrections are too strenuous for someone of his age, Uloma successfully graduated from training camp when many recruits younger than him did not make it.

Now that he is back to work, Uloma shares lessons learned from his four years of unemployment. “I’d say the most important lesson I learned from this experience is that the capitalist system does not offer job security for its employees. Motivated by profit, they can easily throw out the older, experienced worker and bring in new people that they can pay less money.” Uloma claims that long term unemployment made him realize that he is expendable and as such must always keep his job seeking tools sharp.

In addition, he is doing what he can to secure his future by selling insurance on the side. He says, “If you have a passion, work on that and become self-employed. That’s the way to free yourself from the stronghold of Capitalism. So long as you are somebody’s employee you are enslaved to the system. They will use you as long as it is profitable to do so and when they don’t need you they throw you out. You’ll find yourself 75 years old working at Walmart because you don’t have enough money to survive. “

Uloma’s story is one of millions of similar tales of recessionary unemployment. Though his experience was economically and emotionally challenging he was able to persevere by showing resilience and flexibility. Making time to develop these traits may be helpful to me or anyone else trying to gain employment during these slow economic times.

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*Marcia Sanders moved to Minneapolis three years ago from Baltimore, MD to be closer to her family who moved here from New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina. She began studying at NHCC in the fall of 2014. Although her major is currently undetermined, she enjoys studying English and Art courses.*

# Dare to Dream

By Jeffrey Clark



Another long Tuesday goes by at work, the fluorescent light radiating all around, your eyes lose focus on the computer screen. Already drained by the endless emails and conference calls, you just can't wait to get out of the office. You rub your eyes to regain focus and glance at the clock that slowly ticks as if it was a constant reminder of the slow and steady theft of your life. Your heart sinks as you notice its only one in the afternoon. Another four hours to go. Tick, tock, tick, tock, the moment hits you like a ton of bricks and you think to yourself, how in the hell did I end up here? I never wanted to be in business, but I'm good at it, so this is what I need to do, right? Why am I so depressed working here? I did everything by the book: got the degree, got the job, made it a career, made a good amount of money but here I sit, sad and feeling as if something is missing.

Tick, tock, tick, tock. The moment hits you like a ton of bricks.

Today, many of us are in this familiar situation. We do what we believe is the right thing for our families, for ourselves. We provide and accumulate wealth, all the while losing the most precious asset in our world: Time. In a world where many believe money and power are the benchmarks for our success, it has caused countless numbers of people to ignore their dreams and ambitions of doing something they truly love, for the sake of attaining status that is expected not only by society, but by family, friends, and peers as well.

Late at night I look up at the stars and I am in awe; in awe of what's out there, and what could be. The possibilities are truly endless. Perhaps, just perhaps, somewhere in space and time, there is another version of myself. I wonder what that version is like. Does he go to school? Is he rich? Poor? Famous? Most importantly I wonder if he is truly happy. Does he do what inspires him? I like to believe in a world out there amongst the stars; there is a world where a different order exists. An order that rewards a person for doing what they love as opposed to what is expected of them.

A world that would frown upon cookie cutter degrees and the artificial UV lights of the office world.

While there is without question a place in the world for the go getters of business, the ramifications of the 24/7 lifestyle of business are becoming more predominant on our world today. As our stress level increases, so does our blood pressure, our cholesterol, and bouts of depression. Let us look at a culture that has historically been rich in history of well-being. Japan has long been one of the healthiest nations in the world, long out-living us here in the United States. But since the rise of the economy, and as demand for Japanese products has risen, so has the demand on many of its workers. Because of this demand, a new phenomenon has developed. The phenomena is called Karoshi. Karoshi can be translated as “death from overwork.”

According to a Washington Post article called *Japan's Killer Workforce*, among 2,207 work-related suicides in 2007, the most common reason (672 suicides) was overwork, according to government figures released in June. There were stories of sudden deaths from people who had no history of illness – 20-, 30-, 40-year olds alike – all having worked over 100 hours of unpaid overtime a month for six months, a year, or even more at a time. It makes me wonder why these people continued to literally kill themselves for the sake of a job; a job that ignored their well-being and cheated them out of hard-earned money? The reason they do this, the reason anyone does this is because we are taught to believe that we have to. We have to get the great paying job, the safe degree, whatever it takes to set ourselves up for success in life. We continue to fail ourselves in understanding what that success in life really means. To do work that fills our soul.

Others have decided to take action and change the status quo, to reinvent themselves by understanding that happiness can only come from within. James Barnett was one of these people. Raised by his parents in a Methodist home in Florida, he always had a belief in doing things the way that Christ would want to have done. During his time in high school as well as at Florida State University, James often did volunteer work with the homeless, but all the while, he felt disconnected with the struggle. After finishing college, James started working at J.P. Morgan and making a large six-figure salary. Although his financial house was in good standing, James was not happy. He called his friend who was getting ready to go on a mission trip to Nicaragua, and James decided to go with him. What James saw there changed his life forever.

Shock and disbelief were words that came to his mind when he saw a city dump, surrounded by garbage and fecal waste two stories high, and people. People who lived in that city dump. Not long after arriving, he met a local prophetess named Ms. Ruby. She had chosen to live amongst the poor, praying for everyone she came in contact with. During that time, the thought came to his mind that, if she can do this, perhaps I should do this as well? Fed up with the guilt in his heart, he sold all of his possessions and decided to live amongst the homeless<sup>(Steele)</sup>.

While this story may seem extreme and not very common, the resonance of this man's journey can be felt in the heart strings of us all. Many of us, throughout our life's journey, feel a sense of something missing. In James's case, it was a lack of understanding about how so many live. What he chose was not safe, popular, or what was expected of him by society. But he chose it anyway. For him, the chance of inner peace and happiness made the risk worth it in the end. But why did it happen to James at this time in his life? When he was in school, why did he not choose to live a more humble life then? Working for J.P. Morgan is a far cry from the streets of America. Perhaps the school system itself is inhibiting people from making these choices.

Looking at colleges and universities around the world today, there are a swarm of students attempting to major in business. It is currently the most sought after degree, with one in five students choosing it as a major<sup>(O'Shaughnessy)</sup>. So the question must be asked, are we oversaturating the market? In an article from CBS Money

Others have decided  
to take action and  
change the status quo.

Watch, Lynn O'Shaughnessy discusses 8 reasons not to get a business degree. One was simply that the job market is crawling with business degrees. When trying to stand out in a crowded marketplace, a person with a business degree can be lost in the shuffle amongst the others with identical degrees and education. Other factors mentioned were poor quality of life, misconceptions about actual earnings, and the lack of real world knowledge that comes along with the degree itself. In a survey of employers by the American Association of American Colleges and Universities, they found that

89% wanted college students to pursue a liberal arts degree. Let us start to think outside the box and acknowledge the fact that businesses want original thinkers – people who understand the evolution of society's wants and needs – to view problems from a creative mindset and be able to solve problems from a different perspective.

With stories such as James Barnett, and statistics showing that business degrees may not be the guaranteed ticket to the golden egg that many believe it will be, does that change your mind? Does it make you think twice about who you are or who you want to become? The prospect of prosperity may be too great for people to change their minds, and not everyone should. I am not advocating the destruction of the business blueprint, but I think people need to know there is another path. There is more than one way to be deemed a success in life.

Henry David Thoreau said, "Go confidently in the direction of your dreams. Live the life you have imagined." Quotes such as these inspire our inner desires and drives them to the surface. It is unrealistic to have no fear in doing this, but fear is what has always driven us. Driven us to be great, to seek out the unknown, to dream bigger than our mothers and fathers before us. What makes us tremble in fear? Seek it, it has consumed us for too long. Know that what lies beyond the fear is greater than anything else the world can offer ourselves. The joy and wonders are plentiful. Seek truth, learn trades, become a sponge of all knowledge. Follow your dreams. The alternative seems bleak. Write, paint, sing, act, invent, play, live the life, don't let work be your life. Dream big, not because it will lead to success, but because if you dream, you have succeeded.

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*Jeffrey Clark absolutely hates to fly but loves to travel. He is 35 years old, married with children. He is a recovering alcoholic which is why he is now just starting to figure this whole "life" thing out. His favorite word is "resolve." He is a Phi Theta Kappa member and takes great pride in this because of how horrible of a student he was in high school. He has lived in 6 states and 2 countries. He was in Germany when the Berlin Wall fell, and he was in Florida when the Challenger blew up. He has a strange connection with British culture and feels he should be living there. Maybe it's all the rain.*

There is more than one way to be deemed a success in life.



# *The Market Place*

By Richmond Seju

There was this market place right at the entrance of Bubuduram Refugee camp in Ghana. The camp is located in the middle of Kasoa, which is a bad place for a refugee camp considering the fact that the Kasoa native don't like outsiders, especially Liberian (about 90 percent of refugees on the camp were Liberian, including myself). My older brother and I spent most our days around the market place playing marbles, watching movies at the video club (movie theater), watching people play video games, mostly FIFA and Mortal Kombat, or just enjoying the strange but familiar beat of the market. The market place is not just the market; it's everywhere near the market. I heard that the market place that made a huge part of my childhood memories was torn down in the interest of development, but the memories we had there will live on with us forever.

That road made me  
who I am today: a  
brave man.

I remember our adventure everyday started on that long spine-chilling but still beautiful dusty road that led from the market place to Area U, where we lived. Traveling on the road in the daytime was the easy part; leaving the market place and going back home at night was when the bushes around the road branched out ears and eyes. That was when the saying we usually referred to "Everybody is for themselves, God is for us" becomes a reality. It was during that time our inner Usain Bolt would kick in. It did not rain much on the camp, but when it did was when you could appreciate the beauty of the road. Sometimes my brother and I would leap on the road like two frogs after waiting for hours for the rain to stop, enjoying the sweet, fresh, musky yet pleasant smell of rain on the road. The rain always made the little rocks on the road so radiant. Sometimes we would take off our slippers and let the cold wet sand find its way around our feet and between our toes. It was a great feeling.

Even the little old frowning house and that trail of unbearable smell that came from that house on top of the hill, which added up to the eyes of the bushes at night, looked and smelled remarkably beautiful when it rained. That road made me who I am today: a brave man who didn't fear the unknown and the dark, and also made me really fast. Sometimes doing a track meet or in a dangerous situation, I would whisper to myself, "Everybody is for themselves, God is for us."

I can recall the familiar, energetic rhythm of the market, the way everybody moved around, dancing from one foot to another, as if the beat were moving too fast. They

yelled, shouldered, and pushed each other with the tempo of the market. Busy market women and men shouted out of their lungs what they were selling to attract buyers; the market was alive and so were the thieves that enjoyed picking pockets. I could never figure out why the market grounds were always wet. Maybe it was to get rid of some of the blood that always leaked from under the doors of the slaughterhouse. I hated those noises that came from that slaughterhouse; I hated the way it made me feel, and I hated the little hole that it had on the door that made it look like the animals were staring at me. Maybe the market people made the ground wet every morning to eliminate some of the odors from their rotten fish. The market had a weird smell: a mixture of fresh and rotten fish, muddy smell from wet ground, and blood from the slaughterhouse.

Sitting on a high, rotten stool that rocked back and forth at the right corner of the market was my favorite market woman. Her dark, brown wrinkles were visible through her beautiful face and hands. Her eyes were dull and the whitening on her teeth had long gone, but she had the friendliest smile in the market. Her back was leaned as if she carried the world on her back when she walked. She did not yell much, as compared to the other market women. She was clearly older and wiser than most of them. No one ever knew where she got her fish from; their eyes were always bright and crystal clear, their skins were at no time dulled or discolored, and they constantly smelled of fresh water as if they'd been caught a minute before you bought them. She used to keep my fish separate because her fish never lasted long on the market. I was her favorite customer.

Thinking back now, I had a lot fun at the market place. I still remember the way my brother and I would run to the market, leaping one step at a time. I still remember how we would take off our slippers at night and run home like there was no tomorrow. I can still recall the smell of the market and how it made me feel. I plan on going back sometime in the future to visit the area where the market place was located; I hope to see some familiar faces.

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*No biography submitted.*





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