

# REALITIES

ELEVENTH ISSUE



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

Eleventh Issue, Academic Year 2018 – 2019

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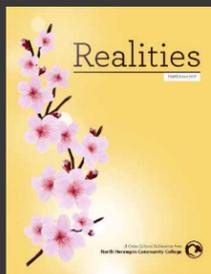
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Realities is dedicated to all people who have had the courage  
to cross over their boundaries, thereby enriching their lives by  
seeing how other lives are lived.



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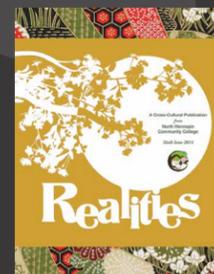
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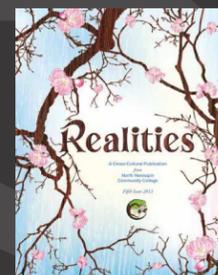
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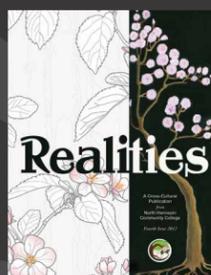
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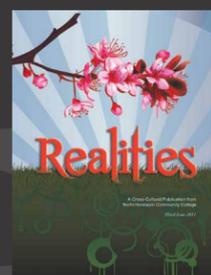
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## INTRODUCTION

As with all the humans who make this publication what it is, Realities itself is in a constant state of flux, transitioning from one version of itself to another, while still holding firm to its roots and honoring its history. It expands and contracts each year, sometimes a much larger publication and sometimes smaller. And this issue—which thoroughly gives tribute to the history of Realities—is a smaller one in pages, to be sure, but make no mistake in thinking that it is smaller in the human experience; do not enter here thinking that fewer pages means diminished power, because the writers featured here demonstrate what has always made Realities—and the students at North Hennepin Community College—extraordinary: these are true, lived experiences expressed with bravery and gentleness and intimacy and lyricism and, yes, even some fury.

As much as these authors, and Realities as a whole, honor the history of the magazine and the writers who have come before, we are duly honored to be able to share the voices and visions of the writers included in this edition, from the racist assault in Maliha Walji's "The White Blanket" to growth in the arts in Kao Seng's "Little Hmong Dancer."

Realities, then, is the result of thousands of lives: the writers, their fellow students, those who factor into these pieces, and the ancestors who've come before us who might even be speaking to us as we tell our stories.

**Sincerely,**  
**Brian Baumgart and Karen Carr**

## THE WHITE BLANKET

By Maliha Walji



**W**hite shining diamonds were falling from the sky. I stared in wonder as they fell into my hands, sparkling, and then vanishing suddenly. I was shivering, despite the fact that I insistently had convinced my mother that my sweater was just enough, and that I did not need my big, puffy jacket, which resembled a marshmallow. There was a slight wind with a bite to it, leaving my cheeks pink and feeling prickly. Little did I know that the day would bite in more than one way.

I was on my way to school, it was a Monday, and even though I was only in the third grade, I already dreaded walking through the doors. It wasn't my teacher that was the problem; Ms. Schumacher was as sweet as can be, blue eyes sparkling, always smiling lovingly at her group of students. No, the problem was me. I did not belong in this school. I did not belong in this brilliantly, blindingly, white building. Yes, there was color, the brick walls, the posters, the bright "feel good" quotes on the walls, the mismatched array of colors worn by students and teachers.

But all those colors, no matter how vibrant they appeared on the surface, seemed to fade into the background. The colors you could really see, really notice, were the ones that could not be worn or removed. These were of course the ones some of us had been born with: the colors of our skin, the various shades of brown, yellow, olive, and black.

But there were very few of these shades that you could see, despite the large number of students enrolled. In my 3rd grade class, there were thirty-three students, and only three of them weren't white. There was one Asian, Lily, who was more

like a banana—yellow on the outside, white on the inside. Another kid the color of a cappuccino, Hakim, who was mixed: half white, half black. And then there was me: African-born-Indian with the black scarf on my head, topped with a black fabric snapback pulled low over my eyes. To say the least, we stuck out like sore thumbs, and I was the most swollen one.

The colors you could really see, really notice, were the ones that could not be worn or removed.

It was time for lunch, and I was standing in line with my white friend, the most popular girl in the third grade, Peyton. I don't know how it happened, but I was her best friend. Maybe it had to do with the fact that I didn't gossip like the other girls, that I didn't talk about the expensive things that my daddy bought me, or just because my big brown eyes and ears soaked up everything she said. I always stood by her side, holding her Gatorade and my lunch box while she stood in line getting her hot lunch, which I could never afford. I gazed down at the floor, shuffling, as the line moved, watching a small insect scurry away only to get crushed underfoot. Clack! I snapped back into the present, startled by the sounds of trays being stacked by the lunch ladies. We made our way to the long, tan, squeaky, rectangular tables, each assigned for two classes per grade.

The cafeteria smelled of shrimp poppers, making my stomach grumble. I opened my lunch box and took out my metal tiffin. It was filled with rice and curry, still slightly warm. Immediately the area around me smelled strongly of tangy tomato, tamarind, and the spicy chili powder my grandmother had sent from Kenya. Everyone at the table turned to look at me, even the other

few colored kids, at my foreign food. I was hungry, and I knew my home-cooked food would taste amazing. It would be like fireworks going off in your mouth in comparison to the shrimp poppers everyone else was eating. Yet, I only ate a few bites, moved my food around, and eventually closed my tiffin and packed it away, because the food suddenly didn't taste as good anymore.

All of a sudden, I saw Hakim's white older half-brother Clarence, whom everyone, including Hakim himself, was afraid of. He made eye contact and snickered at me, and I quickly looked away. Clarence's favorite hobby had been tormenting me on the bus. He thought he was able to pick on anyone since he was in the 6th grade, the highest grade at our school. Clarence set down his tray at his table, and whispered something into the ears of his friends, causing them to all laugh. He swaggered his way over to our table, hands in the pocket of his red hoodie.

"Hey there, terrorist, got a bomb under that thing?" he said, leaning into my face.

Before I could comprehend what was happening, Clarence grabbed onto my slip-on scarf aggressively, yanking it over my head, then flinging it across the room. Bewildered, I just sat there for a second, glued to my seat, eyes wide.

"Wow! Towel-head isn't bald!" Clarence exclaimed.

Everyone was shocked at first; all the children in my half of the lunchroom swiveled in my direction, wondering what the commotion was about. But when Clarence called me a towel-head, many of them burst into laughter, most too young to understand what they were taking part in. My vision blurred as tears welled up in my eyes, and suddenly I felt dizzy. I dove under the table shaking, trying to pull my shirt over my head. I had never felt so exposed in my life. Sure, I hadn't

always worn my scarf, it had only been my second year wearing it then.

But in that moment, it wasn't just the absence of my scarf that made me feel naked; it was the intense, burning sense of loneliness and difference. It made me pray that the earth would open and swallow me whole. In that moment I did not appreciate the struggles my parents faced to bring me to the United States, or the rich culture I had inherited. I wanted to rub away the color of my skin, to change the way I dressed. The worst part was that Peyton hadn't tried to defend me. None of my peers had stood up for me. But why would they, when they never had faced such a situation?

When lunch was over, Clarence was given a warning by the behavior teacher, and the rest of the students avoided eye contact with me. I continued with the rest of my day, not hearing words from Ms. Schumacher's mouth, only the echoes of Clarence's words and a faint ringing in my ears. I hypnotically doodled mandalas on my paper, thinking about the snow falling outside. The white beautiful layer covered everything, effectively suppressing the surrounding colors, reflecting the rays of the deceptively radiant sun.

*Maliha Walji is a full-time PSEO student at NHCC and Park Center Senior High School. Maliha is passionate about bringing awareness to racial issues through storytelling. She has always enjoyed creative pursuits, especially in writing and drawing.*

## A PHONE CALL FROM CHINA

By Audrey Zhang



**E**quality is one of the fundamental values in the U.S. That women have equal rights to men is so crucial and meaningful. It means that women can have the same freedom and rights as men do to attend schools, apply for jobs, and vote for elections. It also represents the nation's civilization. Unfortunately, women are still not as equal in some ways in China, especially in small cities and the countryside. As a Chinese citizen, I grew up in a traditional Chinese family in a small city deep in the hinterland of China. I believe that I and my sister should also have the same rights to my brother to inherit my parents' property.

**I believe that I and my sister should also have the same rights to my brother to inherit my parents' property.**

On a windy and cold winter evening in 2016, for our dinner, I made a fried pork meat with red spicy pepper dish which complemented the fried tofu perfectly that well suited my daughter and my husband's appetites. My family was so pleased with my Chinese flavorful foods and gave me a high praise on my dishes as usual – "Mom is the best!" "Mom gets a magic hand." I felt so contented. We were laughing aloud and soaking in the enjoyable atmosphere. Meanwhile, my cell phone rang upstairs in our office room. I wasn't going to pick up my phone because I wanted to enjoy the dinner with my sweet family. However, my daughter got so excited she ran upstairs quickly and yelled, "Mom, Gramma is calling!" She asked as she was running down again, "Can I answer the phone? I want to speak with Gramma, please!"

I replied, "Yes, you have my permission, but for sure, only speak Chinese with your Gramma."

She showed me her funny face and then began to answer her gramma's call from China. "Gramma, I miss you! I want to have the Chinese New Year with you, and I want to play fireworks, lots, lots of colorful fireworks," she said in perfectly standard Chinese with her Gramma.

"Okay, my dear! I miss you too!" I could easily hear my mom through the speakerphone. "Is your mother beside you?" my mom asked her granddaughter with an unusual low voice as if she was anxious about something or she hadn't been sleeping for a couple days. I had to drop my chopsticks instantly and place the phone to my ear as close as I could when my daughter passed the phone to me.

"What's up? Mom, is everything okay?" I was worried and quickly walked upstairs toward my office room.

My mother hesitated for a while, then said, "It's not too good."

I heard her weak voice pause again as if something was stuck in her throat so that she couldn't talk smoothly or perhaps she got terribly sick so that it influenced her ability to speak properly. I was extremely nervous and constantly wondered what kind of the terrible thing could happen to my parents.

Finally, my dad started to speak. "Wei (my nickname), we are encountering difficulties in finishing the roof of the new house due to insufficient capital. All material costs have been

raising rapidly months after months."

Four years ago, my parents made a big decision to sell their apartment in the city in order to build a four-floor house in the countryside where they were born, which was a part of their retirement plans. I knew my parents wouldn't call me for help if they had an alternative approach. In the past, I have supported my parents as much as I could because I love them deeply. But this time, I wasn't pleased to hear that at all because I just couldn't believe that my parents put all their retirement money into the rigid concrete and brick house. Both of them are just about seventy years old. What about the rest of their life? What if they get sick and need to check in the hospital? How are they going to cover the necessary bills? I knew their hometown is famous for its gorgeous scenery which is surrounded by beautiful mountains and rivers. I acknowledged that they made a good choice, though to pour all their savings into a huge house was a bad decision. I just couldn't think of what kinds of motivations caused them to build four floors. For who? For my old brother? Suddenly, I felt my heart beat quickly. My hands were toasted, and my head was going nuts as if the sleeping volcano suddenly woke up and readied to erupt anytime.

Nevertheless, I took a deep, deep breath and tried to calm down so that I could be able to question my dad nicely. I asked, "Dad, Mom, can I ask which floor of the new building would possibly belong to me in the future?"

"We will save one room for you to use while you visit us," my mother replied quickly.

I assumed that my parents thought they were being very generous with me. I just couldn't believe what I heard, and my brain went blank immediately as if the downpours caused my awakened volcano to fall asleep again. I was speechless. I felt extremely calm and cold. I could feel my body was rigid and

my hand was frozen. I was staring outside of my window while I was standing in the center of the office room. There was a street light on the opposite side of the street. The spot light on the ground was constantly shaking because of the unexpected wind. The darkness surrounded the sole light which seemed to be isolated and weak. "Mom, Dad, I don't feel well, I need to rest for a while," I said. Then, I hung up that phone call without giving them any promises.



"Audrey, are you, all right?" My husband was worried. He probably realized something went wrong so he came upstairs to check whether I was OK or not. He was holding me to his chest while he was concerned. My heart suddenly was warmed up as if a wounded little sheep was curling up by her partner. Therefore, I couldn't help myself tearing up.

According to Chinese conventional culture, boys always have unique rights in their family to inherit parents' property, but nothing for girls, particularly if girls are married. In our original nuclear family, I have an older brother and a younger sister. In this case, obviously, my sister and I were not primary to our parents' consideration which made me so disappointed and depressed.



That night was so long to me. It was almost two o'clock in the morning. I still couldn't sleep because I couldn't stop wondering why my parents only cared about their son. Then, I got up and reached my aunt to talk about my uncomfortable feelings. She could understand me right away. "My dear, it's obvious that your parents haven't handled this well and they haven't considered your feelings carefully," my aunt emphasized. "There is no child who doesn't want her or his parents' equal love. I need to talk to them. Dear, you need go to bed and have a good rest," she comforted me.

I said, "Okay, Aunt, I love you!"

Presumably, my aunt had a formal conversation with my parents about this issue. A couple days later, I received my parents' phone call again. My mother said, "My dear, we call you because we want to ensure that you know we care about you and love you just as much as you care and love us. We didn't mean to hurt your feelings. We thought you wouldn't care so much since you live so far away from us..." Honestly, I hadn't caught the reason part, but I did hear the first part – my parents do care and love me too. I was tearing up again, but they were warmhearted and happy tears. The outcome of their conversation was a big surprise to me. My parents finally changed their traditional wisdom and gave us reliable words – all their children now have an equal right to inherit their property in the future.

It was my first time to experience an unfair Chinese conventional culture between man and woman; it was my first time to feel speechless and isolated by my deeply loved parents; it was my first time to hang up my parents' phone call. Fortunately, with my sweet aunt's help, a happy atmosphere remains in my original nuclear family. My sister, brother, and I share the same amount of love from our parents. That was a great mental and emotional release for me. So, I deeply believe that girls should have equal rights to inherit their parents' property, which would show equal love is being received from their parents.

**No biography submitted**



"I am honored that Realities' advisors chose the concept of the intertwined hands as the preferred cover design for this new Issue. I took this photo several years back as a project for a Digital Photography class here at North Hennepin. The "models" were two of my fellow classmates - he was born in America and she, in Lebanon. They were good friends and the three of us used to hang out together. Being an Israeli myself, having a Lebanese friend was intriguing. During our conversations, we found many similarities between our cultures."  
-Orit Kidron



**L**uckily the flag waves back blue and red,  
many solely salute the white.  
Put on a façade to celebrate instead  
just as fireworks mask the gunshots tonight.  
Women waiting- witnessing wrongdoing in Washington,  
pray still those in jail inhale oxygen.  
United we stand, so we believe.  
Is freedom truly all we'll achieve?



*Kevin Jacobson is a student at North Hennepin Community College and has no idea what he wants to do with his life. Kevin has a triple major in Economics, Mathematics, Liberal Arts, and is taking eighteen credit hours per term. At the same time, he teaches nervous kids how to debate, plays the violin on weekends, yet always finds time to put his heart and sole (the groundbreaking, footprint-making kind) into poetry. All he asks is that you find time to review his work as well- it may help him figure out what he wants to do.*



**W**hen I walk along the way  
The people just stare at me in dismay  
They think that I'm forced to wear that "thing"  
But I wear it for Allah (the God)  
Maybe they think that I'm not free  
Just because I wear a headscarf on me  
But that is not true I am free  
I wear it for Allah, The almighty  
The way I dress is not to show some skin  
But for people to judge us not by our body, but from within  
They might call me names or even start to stare  
But that's made me to be strong on my faith  
So when you pass me walking down the street  
Don't think that I am forced to cover myself up to my feet  
Not only Muslims should cover their beauty  
Here it says in new testament bible  
The practice of Christian women covers their beauty  
Is commanded in Holy Scripture  
For Muslims it's mentioned in Quran in many pages  
"O Prophet! Tell your wives and your daughters  
And the women of the believers  
to draw their cloaks (veils) all over their bodies.  
That will be better, that they should be known so as not to be annoyed."  
This all from Islam books, not by man to force  
It's a simple way to be a modest and humble  
So don't be next to me and start to grumble

I feel proud and happy when I wear my cloth  
So this scarf that I have on  
Is my choice so don't be alarmed  
I felt right and true when I put my hijab on from the start  
It's because it calmed me, purified me, soothed my heart  
But really the only difference between you and me  
Is that I just cover my hair and my body  
You look at me and call me oppressed.  
Simply because of the way I am dressed  
You know me not for what's inside  
You judge the clothing I wear with pride  
I'm individual, I'm not man's slave  
It's Allah's pleasure that I only crave  
I have a voice, so I will be heard  
For in my heart I carry his word,  
O you girl, wrap close your cloak  
So you won't bothered by ignorant folk  
Man doesn't tell me to dress this way  
It's a Law from God that I obey,  
For Allah himself gave us LIBERTY  
When he sent religion  
To you and me.  
So, if any of you ever see me and hear my voice  
Just know that what I wear is only my choice

**No biography submitted**

## THE AMERICAN DREAM

By Aina Oluwatoyin Emmanuel



On a regular Saturday morning, unlike every other weekend I was trying to hide from my mom so I could be excluded from house chores such as dry cleaning, washing dishes, cleaning the household or cooking so I ran to the viewing center where soccer matches in Europe are being aired, although you have to pay or buy a bottle of beer before you can be granted access into this viewing center.

Unfortunately, my favorite soccer team Manchester United was losing to a rival team so I was tensed and disgusted at the moment, an elderly man approached me anonymously with a questionnaire form; he said he had asked the manager of the viewing center who was the smartest in here and he had pointed at me. I felt reluctant at first answering the questions on the form because I was in a bad mood already based on the fact that my favorite soccer team was losing, but I answered it real quick so I could focus on the game.

In addition, I received a call a week later from a betting company in Lagos (Nigeria) saying I qualified for a betting competition based on the questionnaire I answered, and I'd be representing the State of Lagos. At first I was nervous because there are at least 36 million inhabitants in this state and I was the only one chosen but at the same time I like new challenges so I took it on and went for the competition. Other participants from other states had arrived looking ready and prepared. Afterwards we all walked into a room to meet the sponsors which was the director of the betting company and I was fortunate to shake hands with Minister of Sports for Lagos State; this was a dream come through for me because I was always seeing him

This was one of the biggest moments of my life. A big decision rested on my shoulders on what to do with such huge amount.

on the internet or sports programs on television. At this point I realized I had to take it seriously and hopefully I can meet with the President were the fancy dreams and aspirations I whispered to myself.

The day for the competition had arrived. Every participant brought their family members and well-wishers while I brought just my best friend because neither of my parents supported betting and my siblings believed I wouldn't win. The competition began midday and continued for so long. Surprisingly, the competition was being aired live and broadcasted on every radio station across Nigeria. My dad was the first to call my phone claiming he saw someone who looked like me on tv; on the other hand, my friends recognized me anywhere anytime so they figured out it was

on the tv and they were all blowing up my phone right away with phone calls, text messages, voicemails on social media and everywhere you could monitor an individual. I came 3rd position and won six hundred thousand naira which is equivalent to \$1,673.69 in US currency. By

the time I got home, the news had already spread everywhere. A huge crowd gathered at my parent's house waiting on me to come share money with everyone. This was one of the biggest moments of my life. A big decision rested on my shoulders on what to do with such huge amount.

I came to a conclusion to follow my childhood dreams which was to study and live in America someday. I realized an opportunity had presented itself due to the fact that I hail from a middleclass family with average income my parents combined, it had to be now or never, so I started doing research on how to study and live in America. I



came across the requirements which included sitting for two international exams called SAT and TOEFL which require a high mark scored before colleges could consider my applications. At this point I realized why my dad was always mean and sour towards me whenever I failed at school. The expenses for these two exams were taken care by me so I had to pass. I came out in flying colors, a few weeks later I had already received four admission letters from different colleges, so I decided to go for the cheapest one I could afford which was Dickinson State University in Dickinson, N.D. It was at this moment my dad realized I wasn't playing around, either way I was going to achieve my American dream, I had to leave the neighborhood because so many people were on my nerves asking for money they didn't work for nor support me when I was competing. It was very hard maintaining a low profile because the picture of me holding the huge check from the competition as my reward went viral all over the internet, social media, newspapers, articles etc. I felt I was being watched everywhere I went and the fear of being robbed hastened my dreams.

In conclusion, I left Nigeria, West Africa on the 12th of December 2016 to pursue my American dream. It has been an amazing

journey so far. I experienced a lot of culture shock such as the mode of dressing, music, foods, and accents. Most importantly I made some interesting memories I'd forever hold on to with some amazing international students from different parts of the world with different beliefs, languages, religions, cultures, etc. I feel accomplished because it's a dream come true for me. The first to travel overseas in my lineage; most importantly investing in my education has been my best decision ever.

*Aina Oluwatoyin Emmanuel is an international student from Nigeria who recently transferred from Dickinson State University, N.D. He is currently enrolled in Pre-Nursing programs.*

## LITTLE HMONG DANCER

By Kao Seng



**W**hen I think of events in my life that have helped me become the person I am today, I instantly think of the heartbreaking stories, the drama, family issues, and my mental instability, but I don't want to write about them. A part of me wishes I could just come out and tell the whole world every negative thing that has happened in my life, but another part wants to shine the light on the things that have been shaping me positively. And that's exactly where I am going with this paper.

As a little Hmong girl, I never got to experience the fun little things that other little girls got to experience. My family was an immigrant family and therefore we didn't have much. In our rented red house on the corner of Penn Ave, we lived as a huge family of over 15 people.

Minneapolis is a bright city; thousands of people are permanently located there and that means high traffic, so I was never allowed outside the house; however, I snuck out whenever I could and every time, I would pretend I was feeding chickens. I'd scatter grains of dry white rice onto the dirty ground of my yard that had brown wooden fencing around it, feeding my imaginary chicken family like they did in the old Hmong films that I watched with my Grandma in the old, sturdy red house because we had nothing else to do. I'd sometimes take my grandma's huge yellow woven basket that was already worn out and place heavy cucumbers inside to make it seem as if I was getting ready to go farming like they did in the old Hmong films. My grandma would yell at me, if she caught me, telling me to put away her basket because it was one of the only precious items she had brought over from Thailand. I spent a lot of time with my grandma because I was too young to attend school, and my mom was working for her high school diploma

and my dad was constantly working to provide for the family. Back then everything was hectic, so I don't remember spending much time with my parents. I grew up sleeping with my grandma in our small bedroom with a mattress on the floor; she took care of me, bathed me, tied my thin black hair up into a high ponytail, put clothes on me, and fed me whenever I began to get crabby. I was so close to her that when I was finally enrolled into pre-school, I would cry for her to come in the bus with me.

My mom decided to not further her education after she received her high school diploma; she had just given birth to my brother who is now 12 and was pregnant with my other brother who is now 11. She became a full-time mom then, and that was when I started going out with her. She'd sometimes take me shopping if we had a little extra cash, and she began taking me with her to the Hmong New Year celebrations that occurred every year; there I saw little Hmong girls and boys dancing on stage. I'd keep watching until my mom told me we had to go. The stage was brightly lit, and the colorful background only made the dancers stand out more. They wore beautiful Hmong clothes, that should have been impossible to dance in, and seemed happy as ever. The crowd was loud, and the sound of jingles from the metal bells on their outfits stood out more to me than their music did. I was amazed and told myself that one day I would be one of those dancers up on that stage. I'd be dancing for other little girls like me and I would be smiling with grace wearing colorful Hmong clothes with metal bells that would jingle for the whole crowd to hear.

The first time I brought up the topic of dancing to my mom she told me to wait, I was little, but I knew why she wanted to wait. We had just moved into

our new house, the one I currently live in, and the debts were probably piling up. I was disappointed. I thought maybe I should just give up dancing. I told myself I'd be ok, watching is ok, I don't have to dance. But my mind was already set on it. I had already told myself I was going to be on that stage. So I waited; the year went by slowly. I was going to be a fifth grader and I became not attracted to school. I finally gained the courage to ask again after nearly a year and half. It was a hesitant decision, but my mom took me to the Dao Lan Dance Studio tryouts, and I was there for three months. I guess you can say it was a free trial because when my mom found out the price, she took me out. She told me we can keep looking. A few months after I finally found my dance school, Iny Asian Dance Theater; located in Minneapolis at that time. I went in on an April afternoon, the sky was gloomy, and I was scared. Walking through the hallway was a nerve wrecking experience. The lights were dimmed dark and I felt as if I was walking into a cave with no exit; I was suffocated. My parents spoke to one of the instructors and I got signed up; however, I couldn't compete that year and had to wait till the new year started because they already had their teams picked out.

I officially began my dance journey in 2014. I was a tiny person, new to everything, dancing, flipping, and flexibility, but I somehow managed to get myself a solo that first year. I waited two years to finally be enrolled so I did my best at every practice. At the practices I tried hard to learn the dances and to learn them well. I wanted to be good at dancing. I knew I couldn't be perfect, but I at least had to be good. I'd get mad when my parents took me to practice late or when my hair didn't want to cooperate with me. I was obsessed with going to practice. I still vividly remember the first day of Hmong New Year dance competition. I didn't treat it as a competition though; it was my first year and all I could think about while walking

up that stage was that there were other little girls wishing they were up here the same way I had wished to be up here. Walking up the coarse stage stairs I had butterflies in my stomach, the crowd was cheering, and I was really going to do this. As soon as I got up on the stage, I saw the lights shining on me, I smiled, and this smile came from within. There were people clapping from every corner of the huge room, and I felt as if the whole world was appreciating me. I was so

I thought maybe I should just give up dancing. I told myself I'd be ok, watching is ok, I don't have to dance.

happy and proud of myself; the two years of waiting was worth it. My dream of being a dancer on stage came true, and I was ecstatic.

Today, five years later, I am still a dancer. Although along the way there have

been complications and disappointing moments in my dance life, the stage has always solved everything for me. Dance was the start of my creativity and the roots of my confidence; it gave me strength to continue in school and was an escape from the things I wanted to get away from. My dance family is a family I am learning to love more and more every day. I have met many amazing people from there whom I talk to in and outside of dance. Life friends were made, and life lessons were learned. I went from being a little girl sneaking out of the house to feed her imaginary chickens to a Hmong dancer who amazed people with her talent. I traveled for dance and those opportunities opened my eyes to the worlds I didn't live in. Without dance I wouldn't be who I am today, and I am forever grateful to have experienced the things I have experienced in this way.

**No biography submitted**



## THE WORD IS NOT MINE

By Vanessa Klaers



It wasn't more than a year ago that I first read Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn*. I loved it. I read it while I was in Mississippi, and I drove by the same antebellum homes that Huck floated past on his way down the river. When I arrived home from the short weekend trip, I passionately slammed on my keyboard answering discussion questions the night before class, and I was eager to talk about racism and class in the pre-civil war south. I entered the classroom, chairs set up in a neat, little circle, and pulled out my notes. When my teacher turned discussion over to us, I sat and waited. I feared I lacked the perspective to initiate the conversation, so I looked around for a student who I thought would have an appropriate point of view. I looked around for a black student.

I didn't find one.

Shit! I had little faith that one of the affluent kids in the room would agree with my thoughts on white privilege, and I no longer felt like sharing the progressive ideas I just spent hours pouring into my typed notes. In retrospect, I absolutely could have thrown something out there and seen how students responded. Maybe we were all feeling the same way.

Instead, for the first time in my life, I kept my mouth shut.

Eventually, one brave, moderately intelligent boy squeaked out a few of his thoughts on Huck and Jim's friendship. Then some more kids peeped about what the conmen represented and why they were included in the story.

I was bored out of my mind.

How had these students just read the word, the word that I had so many thoughts on, 219 times

and not have anything to say about it? I was looking forward to a courageous conversation about the word in music, the word in the mouth of a black person versus the mouth of a white person, and the word being replaced by "slave" in the novel and what effect that would have on its meaning.

What I got was a bunch of guppies sitting in a circle. Myself included.

However, I was younger, and still learning. Since then, I've grounded myself in my opinions of the word.

It's not mine.

The last time I heard it, I was at a friend's house. It was late at night, and I had just gotten out of her shower. When I heard male voices beyond the locked door, I crossed my arms tight against my chest and the thin t-shirt covering it before slipping into the room I was staying in. After putting on a hoodie, I cracked open my door, looked both ways, and sleepily shuffled into the living room.

I rubbed my eyes and asked Lucille, "Bro, who's here?"

"Charlie and Seth."

"Who?"

"Charlie, the kid who gave you that book on that rapper you like? The one who, like, faked his death or somthin'."

"Oh. Tupac, yeah. Who's Seth?"

"I'on know. His friend."

Lucy looked tired laying on her couch watching Rick and Morty with blood shot eyes. I had a feeling I knew where the boys were.

Makeup-less and frizzy, I slipped on Lucy's tiny sandals and opened the back door. Wondering why the neighbors hadn't done this already, I flipped on my phone flash light and used my best cop voice to say, "All right, boys, time to wrap it up out here." They jumped a little, given their altered state of mind, but then relaxed, putting their questionable activities back into their backpacks.

On the way up the back steps, Charlie said it.

I don't remember how. I think he was referring to Seth. All I know is that I wasn't expecting it, and it certainly rubbed me the wrong way.

I whipped around.

"Excuse me, are you any part black?"

"No, just Mexican."

"Then you can't say that word."

"Okay."

Later that night, he said it again, followed by an attempt to pardon it.

"Oh, shit. I'm sorry," he said as he lifted an apologetic hand in my direction.

Lucy was confused. "Sorry for what?"

"Oh, she doesn't like that word."

Lucy rolled her eyes. "Damn, you brought out social-justice-warrior-Ness. We're losing fun-Ness."

I held back the burst of anger that could have had me barking at my best friend, then calmly explained, "It's not that I just don't like it, or that

I feel some sort of invigorating righteousness when I tell people not to use that word if they're not black. It's just that if anyone were to see me on a snap-story next to a non-black using the word, suddenly I'm that white girl. Suddenly people I consider friends, no matter their race, can say, 'Nah. Ness hangs out with kids who say that word.' I just don't want that."

I don't know if what I said was effective, or if the boys just pretended to take my point because they wanted to end the conversation. I'd like to think, though, despite their weak arguments about being "black cultured" or having "black friends" that let them say it, they understood what I was driving at: the word is not theirs.

The word is not mine.

*Vanessa is a middle-class, white girl from the western suburbs of the Twin Cities. Though she can't recall what childhood influence lead her to be so progressive – her mother's Spanish-speaking coworkers, her father's African best friend, or just her own empathy – she finds herself thinking the deep thoughts and writing narratives like this one. She will graduate from Wayzata High School in 2019 and continue her education in the fall at a four-year college with interest in education and environmental science. Vanessa is attending NHCC from Fall 2018 to Spring 2019 to earn college credit early and enjoy a new academic environment.*

## THE GOLDEN FISH

By Maria Valentina (Ulen) Rodriguez

**W**hen someone decides to emigrate far from home, many of them will face some troubles such as getting lost pretty easily; they don't know the city or town where they are. However, they always can ask for some help. However, in a big number of cases they don't know neither how to speak nor how to understand the language. Because of not knowing the language, they can only communicate basic ideas. Consequently, new problems will show up, and those problems would trigger others such as the fact that they don't have a good economic status or don't know anybody. As a result of not knowing anybody, their social life will look just as dead as my goldfish. Triggering depression and even anxiety. Those problems will end up with them in the bathroom, just as my gold fish did. Alone, dead, and far from home. Living in another country isn't for everybody.



*Ulen was born in 2002 in Bogota, Colombia. Ulen graduated from a high school named Escuela Pedagogica Experimenta in 2018, and Ulen is currently studying graphic design at NHCC.*

## 50 SHADES OF YELLOW: COLORISM IN ASIAN CULTURE

By Athina Souphaphan

If you're white, you're all right—according to an old-school nursery rhyme. “If you're black, stay back; If you're brown, stick around; If you're yellow, you're mellow; If you're white, you're all right.” These words portray the disparity between skin color, and the meaning behind colorism.

It is heavily discussed that colorism generally happens between People of Color and white people, but we fail to notice the colorism that is prevalent in our own communities, and amongst our own people. Anti-blackness and white privilege is not just a huge issue in America, it is a global issue where pale skin is perceived as beautiful, and black or brown skin is ugly.

Growing up and being the only brown-skinned granddaughter in my family of light-skinned Laotian immigrants, I was constantly reminded to stay out of the sun. My grandmother would remind me to wear a hat when it was sunny outside or to bring an umbrella. This confused me as a child; aren't umbrellas supposed to be for the rain? “Bo thak dhat! Pew se phin dum. Jao se phin eee dum,” my grandmother would say, which translates to “Don't bask in the sun! Your skin will get black and you will look like a black girl.” Kids just want to play outside with friends. They aren't cautious of the effects that the weather would have on their skin color. These comments never stopped me from achieving even more golden skin, but these comments have extremely diminished my self-esteem from an early age.

These remarks began from my own family members and continued from strangers. I would walk into a party with my mother—a brown-skinned little girl with a fair-skinned mother, to be

constantly questioned by middle-aged women about the race of my father when he was the same ethnicity as my mother. This continued in grade school when my peers would think I was being dishonest about my race. Even as a child, I felt ostracized by my own family when I was just as Asian as they were.

My experience of colorism did not just exist in Minnesota, it had travelled all the way to

Thailand. Many of the Thai people I knew in America were just as dark as myself, so to my surprise, I noticed that most of the locals in Thailand had pale skin. On our twenty-one-hour plane ride, the beautiful Thai flight attendants were all light-skinned.

My mother and I checked in at our \$28 a night, smoking

allowed, stinky hotel, and I noticed that the receptionist's face was ghostly pale, but his arms were dark. I came to the realization that this man had painted his face with makeup that was about four shades lighter than his natural skin tone! In Asia, the makeup stores have aisles filled and shelves stacked with whitening creams and chemical-filled soaps to “bleach” dark skin. There are foundation colors with fifty shades of butter—no deep auburns or golds that most Thai people have. This industry of desired white beauty has spread from Korea in the East to the Philippines in the South. It is more than an industry; it is a dangerous cultural obsession.

Colorism has existed in Asian Culture for centuries. The desire to have white skin was an indicator of wealth. Back in the day, the upper class were likely to spend more time indoors and

away from the sun, unlike the less fortunate—beggars and peasants who worked long days under the sun. This essentially led to the association of white skin being a symbol of power and beauty, and dark skin being associated with poverty and unattractiveness. “This prejudice against individuals with dark skin tones is prevalent to this day, with origins going back far before Europeans began to colonize the Indian subcontinent,” (Mariam). European colonization only added to this ideology and it also brought the desire for Eurocentric features that Asians also strive for.

Colorism is not just about vanity. It is not just about how impressionable young, brown girls and boys don't love themselves, but about how the rest of the world doesn't love them. This is about white supremacy. The glorification of white skin goes beyond the multi-billion-dollar industry of whitening products and regimens; it is a form of white supremacy.

During our stays in Thailand, my mother and I would love getting 158 baht or \$5 deep Thai massages. My mother had a friend that owned a massage parlor across the street from our hotel, so we would usually go there, but we decided to take a tuk-tuk to Bangkok to explore the night market. We came across this cute little massage parlor—next to the stands of freshly cut exotic fruits and aromatic roasted duck—and were kindly greeted by a young Thai girl. Our pleasant welcoming turned into a traumatic memory.

As we walked up the stairs, the Thai masseuse lead me into a dingy, dark, room, and she instructed me to change into linen wrapped pants. She spoke in English to me and Thai to my mother, which wasn't surprising since my mother's features looked more Thai than mine did. “Luuk puut Thai mi di?” they asked my mother, which translated to, “Does your child speak Thai?” my mother told them that I didn't,

so they assumed that I didn't understand when they began to talk down on me. Although some children born in America cannot fluently speak our native languages, we can understand it very well thanks to our non-English speaking grandparents. The massages began and conversation started flowing between the two masseuses and my mother. They discussed how I was not as beautiful as my mother because of how dark my skin was. I laid there silently, pretending to be asleep, so that they couldn't see the silent tears my eyes were forming. My mother timidly defended me and argued that I was still pretty despite having dark skin, but I still heard the embarrassment in her voice, which broke my heart even more. How could I love my skin when my own mother was not proud enough to stand up for me confidently?

After that incident at the massage parlor, we decided to grab a bite and I confronted my mother about how I felt about the situation. We ended up arguing in the middle of a huge bowl of shark-fin soup about how she thought I had low self-esteem and was overreacting. After the stubborn silent treatment and many tears, I finally accepted that she just simply couldn't

understand where I was coming from. She will never experience prejudice because of her skin color. At the age of 19, I realized that my mother was never prepared to have a brown daughter. We never had these conversations while I was growing up, so she didn't understand the effect that colorism had on me from all these years. That incident was just one of many incidents that I experienced growing up a brown Asian girl, and I hope that one day, my mother and I can restart that conversation and come to an understanding.

"Asian-American" has just been an umbrella term that doesn't reflect all Asian people. Just like Intersectional Feminism, Asian people of all spectrums need to be represented in media so this ideology of Asian Americans only having light-skin can be destroyed. Dark-skinned Asians are a marginalized cultural group within a marginalized group. We are invisible minorities within an invisible minority. Constance Wu told *The Cut* magazine, "If you watch any show that stars white people, white people aren't coming up to them like, 'Thank you for showing my face on the big screen.' Because they see their faces in popular culture all the time and many different iterations of their face, whether they're the cool girl, the nerd, the hardworking girl, they get many things. We get one or two stories. So, my biggest hope is that this gets the ball rolling in terms of different Asian American perspectives." Asian people are not just Chinese warriors and that one random Asian girl with the purple streak in her hair—Asian people are superheroes, we are the shining heroines, and we need to be represented.

Most of the Millennial Generation and Generation Z have been proud and more open about diversity, but have they forgotten that colorism is still amongst us? If we want to see change in our future generations, we must make sure that our children don't "grow up hearing the anti-melanin sentiments we did" (Mariam). We also must remind our children that beauty is more than skin deep, and that they are beautiful regardless of their skin color. If you're black, you're beautiful;

If you're brown, you're beautiful; If you're yellow, you're beautiful; If you're white, you're beautiful. Let's expose our children to media that display People of Color in a positive way. Let's encourage our children to play with other children who look different than them. Let's boycott makeup companies that don't offer a wide range of foundation shades. Most importantly, let's not teach our children colorblindness. Let's teach them to see color and appreciate the greatness it brings into the world. Dismantling colorism in Asian and in all communities will not be easy, but it must start somewhere.



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*Athina Souphaphan is the only child of two Laotian immigrants. The fear of survival during the Laos Civil War led her maternal grandparents to put their five children on a small boat and travel to a refugee camp in the Philippines. After 6 months of living in Bataan, they finally made their voyage to America. Growing up in South Minneapolis, her parents survived by the help of food shelters and crammed apartment complexes. After many years of working hard, her parents eventually resided in the northwest suburb of Brooklyn Park where she was eventually born and raised. Athina is passionate about caring for people and is an advocate for mental health. Athina is a Scorpio Sun with an Aquarius Moon meaning she has a passionate soul and humanitarian qualities. In her free time, she enjoys snuggling with her cat, discovering new music, binge watching *Game of Thrones*, and spending time with family and friends. She is 99.9% sure she wants to work in a field of Psychiatry, but Brian Baumgart helped her discover a new passion in Creative Writing. In her lifetime, she hopes to bring more awareness to mental health and give back to rural communities in Southeast Asia.*

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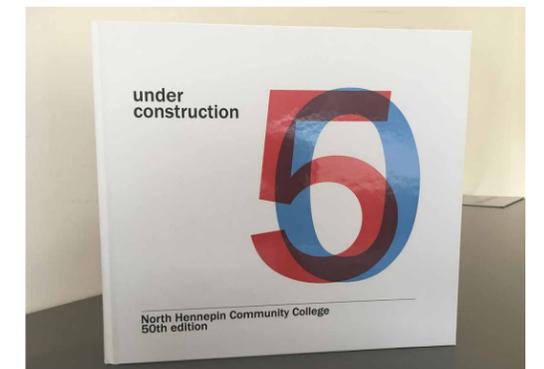
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