

CROSSING FRONTIERS

A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS BY ESL STUDENTS

2016



ESL LITERARY MAGAZINE

Edited by

Professor O. Weston

Professor B. Altano



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Olga Weston
Brian Altano

For additional information, contact the editors at:

oweston@bergen.edu

baltano@bergen.edu

Cover art and design: Isabella Cirilli Altano

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A COLLECTION OF WRITINGS BY STUDENTS OF
THE ESL (ALP) PROGRAM AT
BERGEN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. MY COLLEGE - BERGEN	7
WHY DO WE LEARN?.....	8
ASIAN FESTIVAL AT BCC.....	10
MY LEARNING PROCESS – HOW TO WRITE IN ENGLISH	11
THANK YOU, BCC	13
ESL GRADUATION PARTY.....	14
2. STARTING IN AMERICA	17
ONE NEW THING I LEARNED	18
THE MOST IMPORTANT MOMENT IN MY LIFE	19
A STORY ABOUT MYSELF.....	21
3. MY LAND, MY CULTURE.....	23
AN INTERESTING PLACE.....	24
ALONE AGAIN	25
THE DOLL REPRESENTING MY COUNTRY	26
MY FAVORITE SAYING	28
MY HOME	30
TRADITIONAL HOLIDAY IN VIETNAM	32
VIETNAM IS A SMALL COUNTRY	35
4. FOR THE LOVE OF FAMILY	39
A GREAT DINNER	40
EVERY PERSON HAS DIFFERENT WAYS	41
MY ADOPTIVE UNCLE	43
MY BEST GIFT EVER	45
MY FAVORITE PERSON.....	47
AN ABSENT FATHER.....	49
BEING A STUDENT, MOTHER, AND WIFE	51
A PERSON WORTHY OF COMPASSION.....	53
THE MOST DELICIOUS MEAL	55
5. A HELPING HAND.....	57
TWENTY-FIVE CENTS.....	58
WHAT VOLUNTEERING MEANS TO ME.....	60
6. HOW WE LOVE.....	63
OLD SCHOOL LOVE	64
THE BEAT OF LOVE (POEM).....	66
7. PLAYING AND TRYING NEW THINGS	67
MY BARBIE	68
KNOWING THE UNKNOWN	69
8. THE SEASONS OF LIFE	71
THE SEASONS OF LIFE	72
BEHIND THE WRINKLES.....	74
IN A HURRY TO GROW UP	76

One

My College – Bergen

Oliko Abuladze
Republic of Georgia

Why Do We Learn?

We are in a new age, the age of information and global competition. We have no choice because we have to enter this world and the biggest key will be our knowledge. But why do we learn?

Sometimes we need to think about our problems, mistakes, present and future life. Maybe we have to know how to solve the problems; we have to know how to make a right decision which will be useful in our future life. But how? How can we do this if we have no education? You know, education gives you imagination, experience; it makes you creative and strong.

We were born and then we grow up. Our parents always make us study hard. Why? The answer is always the same and simple, "You, darling, must be very clever. You need to study everything to be successful in the future, not to live in poverty, to make money..." Also, they always tell us, "You must be better than me!" But generally, we should see two sides of learning. For example, one person is well educated and is very rich, but here is the other one who is also well educated but not very rich. What is better? Of course, when you earn more money than you need, it is perfect! But you know, money is not everything; with money, you can have power, but with brain you know how to use it correctly. I remember

one saying, "The most poor is a person who has only a lot of money..."

We learn to achieve our goals; we learn to have wealthy mind, to know how to become a person, to know what we are, who we are and to realize what kind of game life is. We should be educated to know how to fight in our life, not to be a loser in the end.

Money is only an opportunity to get everything we want. If you don't have anything in your head, you will lose your money very quickly. We all know that money is temporary; everything is temporary except knowledge.

So why do we learn? Because we want? No, because we need! We create our world. We live and believe, that every suffering has its rewards. A person who has more than "something" in his/her head will always be sure that if it rains today, the sun will shine tomorrow!

Dajin Jeong
Korea

Asian Festival at BCC

I can see many festivals at BCC. Among them, I went to BCC Asian festival with my friends. It celebrated Asian culture. This festival was celebrated with professors and international students. There were many interesting events in the festival. It showed us Asian food, performance, and dance. To be specific, I saw Indian dancing, line dancing, and Korean performance such as Korean traditional songs. My county is South Korea. So, I think that Korean culture is familiar to me; however, I felt that this festival helped me to know new cultures. I knew that Indian songs are very awesome. This one song is very popular in my country before. But I didn't know where this song was from. It was a surprise to me. Also, I learned an American famous festival line dance song. The name is *Cupid Shuffle*. I enjoyed this exciting part. Line dance is very amazing. In the end, everybody enjoyed the party, and then it was over. To sum up, I think that this festival helped me to learn a new culture. And that can remain as a wonderful memory. I want to go again next year with my friends.

Ernesto A. Pina
Dominican Republic

My Learning Process - How to Write in English

My first semester at Bergen Community College was Fall 2014. At that time, I took Foundations Writing because my skill in writing was very weak. My professor was very strict and gave me a lot of homework, so I had to write a lot of journals every week. For example, I wrote 27 journals during the whole semester. The process was hard and painful, but it was good. As a result, I got a B+ as the final grade.

My second semester was Spring 2015. I took Writing I between other lectures. At that time, my professor was not so good because he showed his lack of energy and enthusiasm. For example, he always read the book and sat in front of his desk. Then, I realized that I was very lucky with my previous professor. As a result, I also got a B+ as the final grade, but it was based on what I learned in the past semester.

My third semester at BCC was Fall 2015. I made all the arrangements to find a good professor for my Writing class because at the end of this semester I had to take a very important test named Exit Test. I was very lucky to find a section with my favorite professor that fit with my schedule.

I took the class with her and again it was hard with a lot of homework. As a result, I learned several techniques to write correctly. For example, I learned how to make a good outline and how to explain and give examples.

After three semesters, I learned so far that writing is a process. Before you start writing, first, you have to think about how to organize your ideas and group them. After that, you are ready to create the thesis statement. In my learning process of how to be a good writer in English, I realized that to be successful as a writer, you have to put your heart in each word that you write. It is like creating a little piece of art that takes hours to finish. In addition, the way that you write shows others your education level and your personality. For those reasons, the process to correct mistakes by the professor or tutor always has to be with gentle manners, encouraging the student to do it better each time. Moreover, the student can't think under stress because of the high level of stress has a negative impact on the learning process.

In conclusion, in my learning process of how to write in English, I had good and not so good professors. Also, I have learned how to be a successful writer and how to create a good article that my reader would admire.

Meiyu Jin
China

Thank You, BCC

My son is going to the second grade right now. Last Thursday, his school had a back to school night. This is a night for teachers and parents to meet. I was glad I could understand the teacher's methods and read my son 's handwritten letter. Actually, I remembered last year's back to school night. I went to the school, but I didn't understand the teacher. Also, I couldn't write a short letter to my son, so I just drew a picture for him. It made me very upset. After this happened, I decided to start to learn English. I thought that I am a mother. If I were not able to speak any English, I couldn't help him to study and talk to his teacher to solve problems for him. As a result, I've been studying English at BCC. Right now, I read English books with my son every night. This is my favorite time of the day. I will push myself with my own efforts for a happy life in the United States.

Tesneem Zahrawi
Syria

ESL Graduation Party

Everyone who attends a school, college or university looks forward to the Graduation Day, and so do I. On this day, a significant period of our lives ends to start another. I have attended the graduation party for ESL students of Bergen Community College. It was really a wonderful experience which gave me a push toward achieving my goal.

I was wondering whether the language gap might limit my performance in college and if I am going to make it or not. That was the main reason why I chose to attend this event. I wanted to touch base with other ESL students in all levels, especially those who are graduating, to listen to the success stories of them, to learn from their experience and hear how they overcame the language gap, to have an idea about their future plans and try to imagine myself in their position when I finish my ESL classes.

Lucky me, I found all I was looking for and learned a lot from this party. I met students who performed very well and got scholarships, and others who got job offers while still in college. From their success stories, I have learned that the sweet taste of success has to be preceded with a lot of hard work and planning.

From the experience that other students shared with me, I have learned that there is nothing impossible with dedication and hard work.

The ESL Graduation Party has changed a lot of my perspectives and priorities. Now I know that learning a new language is the base foundation for the next step for new knowledge intake in the college and university. It is exactly like creating a new building: the stronger the foundation is, the more stable the building will be. Now I believe that the success in my ESL classes is the start point of my dreams. Now I also believe that I will be able to break through and make the success in my next step.

All in all, I have learned a lot from the ESL Graduation Party which had major effects on my perspective, and absolutely that will show up in my attitude leading me to the best of my interest and helping me to achieve my goals, and hopefully I will be in the position of those successful students all over my academic life.



The ESL students line up to receive their ESL completion diplomas and scholarships during 2015 Graduation Ceremony.

Two

Starting in America

Alis Artyunyan
Bulgaria

One New Thing I Learned

There are different moments in your life; some are positive, others negative, but from all of them we learn something. A few weeks ago, I went to take my written test for a driver's license. The problem is that the test is not given in Bulgarian. I have to take it in English. Every day I studied very hard, but the level of my English was not enough to pass it. Always there were words that I didn't understand, and I made mistakes. However, when I went to DMV I was pretty sure that I would pass the test. I was not nervous, and tried controlling myself. Having said that, there were questions that I did not understand. The fact that I did not pass, made me more ambitious and I promised myself to study hard and to pass the next time.

Now the story about my driver's license has a happy ending. I did pass my test, and I have my Toyota Prius.

Alis Artyungan
Bulgaria

The most Important Moment in My Life

There are many important moments in our lives. Each one has its own importance, like high school graduation, wedding day, or having a baby. For me the most important day in my life was the day that I got my U.S. visa. This day changed my life forever. I will never forget that day and the strong emotions that I felt.

On the morning of April 27 of last year [2015], I went for an interview for a U.S visa. My father came with me for support. My dad gave me a hug for good luck, and I entered the interview room, realizing that this was the most important day of my life. I knew if I got the visa, my life would change forever. Also, I was aware of the amazing opportunities that America offers and the sacrifices that I had to make. I sat in the waiting room and waited to be called. Other people were coming out from their respective interviews with sadness on their faces. It was obvious that they did not get a visa. There were mixed thoughts going through my head whether I would get the visa. Precisely at that moment, they called my name. I asked if the interview could be conducted in Bulgarian, but the interviewer insisted that the interview be in English. After some intense questioning, there was a long period of silence. I said to myself that I would get the visa. The next thing I

knew, she was congratulating me on getting the visa. I was so excited that I could not believe it. As soon as I saw my dad, I started running towards him shouting, “I got it! I got it!” I hugged him and got emotional. My father applied for a visa three times and was denied. He told me, “The best feeling in the world is to see your children succeed where you have failed.” He also said that America is the best country to realize my dreams. I will realize all my goals because of my hardworking, persistent, and ambitious personality. I promised him that I would not let him down, and hopefully we will reunite on the American soil.

This was the most important day in my life because I realized that I am not a little girl anymore and I have to believe in myself from now on. I believe that life is full of difficulties with happy endings.

Lujia Dai
China

A Story about Myself

In 2013, I graduated from middle school in China. After many considerations, I decided to come to America to study. I was excited but nervous because everything was new: new friends, a new home, a new lifestyle, a new language. I really looked forward to my life in America. After I arrived here, I got to know many new friends and to learn the American culture. But time goes by and I started to encounter some difficulties. As an international student, I have to live with an American host family. First, I was really excited, but as time went by, I realized that we had totally different lifestyles and values. I have many misunderstandings with them because English is not my first language. In the beginning, we couldn't understand each other very well. I started to miss my family and home. After having gone through these problems, I have gradually realized that nothing can replace my family and home. The time I spent in America let me mature faster. Now, I can take care of myself without my parents. I had also realized how hard it was for my parents to send me here, and this motivates me to work hard and not to waste money or time. This experience is the big stage of my life. I have become more mature.

Three

My Land, My Culture

Vesna Manoleva
Macedonia

An Interesting Place

In the middle of the valley, rich with fertile soil, between the mountains Belasica and Ograzden, lays a small village with a few hundred houses called Radova. One of those houses is my parents' house. Around the house, there is a brick wall that gives a lot of privacy. If you look inside the fenced yard, you will see a small charming house with big windows and a white front door. There is a huge porch on which there are many beautiful flowers hung up on the rails. One wooden bench is also there. When you sit on it, you can feel the roughness of the wood, but you will see in front of you a beautiful garden filled with different kinds of trees which my father planted over the years. It is like a small orchard. On the other side of the yard, there is a big barn; it is used for keeping some animals. You can find some chickens, cows and a horse. There is a dog and a cat, too.

I love going there because it reminds me of my childhood days, filled with running, playing and dreaming. This small village is always going to be special for me, and I will always want to go back there.

Viviana Sevillano
Peru

Again Alone

I came to this country in 1988. I left everything in my country: my mother, my sisters, my childhood. I got married here, and I have four kids. I actually had a great time with all my kids. Each and every one of them have their own personalities and stories, but I enjoy listening to each one. Sometimes I feel alone because I miss my mom and my sisters. But three months ago, my cousin came to visit. She stayed with me all those months. We passed a good time together. We went to New York City and visited the Statue of Liberty. We shared time talking about family and our childhood. But today she is returning to my country. The time went by fast, and I feel sad because I'm again alone without my family. I hope she will be back, or other families would come to see me from my country.

After all of this, I conclude that everything happened to me for a reason. It is because God has good things for me and my kids. Now this is my country, but I am still feel alone.

Dianelba Cabrera
Dominican Republic

The Doll Representing My Country

In the Dominican Republic, we have many things that represent our culture worldwide. Music Instruments, our delicious food, the carnival customs, and other, but if I need to choose one thing to represent my country that will be “The Faceless Doll.” This doll is a symbol for the Dominican women and represents the art of our artisans. It shows the positive side of my people.

The Faceless Doll is a symbol that represents the role of the Dominican women. This shows the hard and constant work of our women every day. In my town, women work in agriculture such as on coffee and tobacco plantations. After they work, they go to the house to keep working in their mother and wife roles. Therefore, the authorities agreed that one way to say thanks to our women warriors was a monument with these dolls.

The Faceless Doll represents the art and quality work of our artisans. This craft doll is made with love and creativity. For example, our artisans make the dolls with mud and paint. They sell the dolls to make money for their families. So, if I show this doll internationally, the artisans will be able to sell more and, therefore, improve their financial situation.

Finally, to exhibit our artisans and the hard working women, I will be able to show the positive side of my people. For example, in a lot of countries, Dominicans are simple immigrants. People think that we don't have anything special, or our educational level is very low. Nevertheless, we have incredible artists, amazing women, and beautiful hearts.

In conclusion, I will be very proud to represent the culture of my country with the Faceless Doll: the hard work of our women, the incredible job of our artisans, and the positive side of my people. This will definitely help my country tremendously to have more respect worldwide.



Kyoungsuk Kim
Korea

My Favorite Saying

Many people are touched by famous sayings. Famous sayings are true and encouraging to people, but I thought they were just good sayings, and they didn't appeal to me. Now I have a favorite saying. A Korean professor said, "If you think whether to go or not, go. If you think whether to buy or not, don't. If you think whether to say it or not, don't say it. If you think whether to give or not, give it." My favorite phrase of all is, "If you think whether to go or not, go."

In 2013, I left my country and moved to Shanghai. It was hard to make the decision because it caused a big change in my family's life. My life in Korea was very stable. I was satisfied with my life, and my children were also happy with their life. My husband wanted to expand his business to China, and he thought moving to Shanghai would be better for his business, but it was not necessarily needed. The only thing I was dissatisfied with living in Korea was the Korean education system. I wanted to show the world to my children and I also wanted to experience another culture. When I couldn't decide in my mind, I reread the phrase. It was a perfect advice for me. I finally decided to move to China. Looking back, I believe it was a good decision for my husband, my children and me. My husband could understand China and expand his business to China. My children could have a global mind. I could meet good people and have good memories.

My son also likes the saying. He was a member of Boy Scouts in Shanghai. After he came to America, he attended an opening meeting of the Boy Scouts. I wanted him to join them because he was a little depressed with the difficulty of making friends. He didn't join them because he thought it wasn't as interesting as the Boy Scouts in Shanghai. A few months later his friend invited him to another Boy Scouts meeting. He was thinking whether to go or not. I said, "Do it as you want, but I'd like to tell you my favorite saying... If you have a good time there, it's luck. Even if you don't have a good time, you have nothing to lose." He decided to go. After he came back from the meeting, he was excited because he had a good time. Then he joined them. He has made many friends and really enjoyed the Boy Scouts activities. He said the phrase was very true and he was lucky to follow the phrase. Several similar episodes made him a firm believer in the phrase.

When we were kids, we thought simply. As we grow up, we begin to think complicatedly and therefore can't make decisions easily. We think about all the possible consequences. This phrase is very simple and wise. I want to tell the person who is thinking whether to go or not, "Just go!"

Lila Nikou
Iran

My Home

Home is the sweetest place in the world, where there is joy and happiness. Now for me, home is where I will close my eyes taking myself into my memory.

Every time I close my eyes, my thoughts keep flying back to my home. I remember myself sitting in my room, watching outside toward a big garden, and listening carefully to our robin birds chirping and singing on top of our biggest tree in the yard. There was a big yard around 1,000 meters in front of the nice big house. A yard had a lot of trees with different kinds of fruit such as apples, cherries, peaches, oranges, grapes, pomegranates, persimmons, walnuts and more. Also, there was a nice hut in the corner and a small pond by the side which was made by my grandpa. I see myself helping my grandma to plant some flowers every spring and watering them. I still remember the smell of the roses very clearly. I remember climbing the walnut tree in the end of the summer and using a big stick to pick walnuts off the tree, since I couldn't reach them. Next, in fall, it was the time to pick our pomegranates and persimmons every single year. I remember myself running through the neighborhood and calling my friends to invite them to my yard to play on the swing which was my favorite. I could hear my grandpa's favorite TV show, and in the middle of the TV show I often heard his snoring by the television; moreover, I could hear the tick tack sounds of our unique

mantel clock in the living room, which at that time, wasn't my favorite. I thought that sound was the most annoying sound in the world, and I tried to stop it secretly so it would not make any sound. Now, those times are gone, and I discovered later in life that precious childhood was the time period that was the most meaningful part of my life; however, things from the past don't just fade away - they are part of me. So, now all those unforgettable memories are always in my mind, especially my home, which has become my "Temple" in my heart. This is the place where I grew up, played, laughed, cried, and learned a lot of things. No matter where I am in the future, my memory will always sit firmly in my mind and in my heart because my home was and is the most special place in the world for me.

Van Nguyen
Vietnam

Traditional Tet Holidays in Vietnam

Every year, in the month of February, Vietnamese people celebrate the Tet holiday, which is like the Chinese New Year. Every Vietnamese person looks forward to the Tet. It lasts ten days, on three of which the businesses are closed.

There are many preparations for this holiday. Every family cleans up their house by painting the inside and sometimes by painting the outside to renew their house. Things like fans, cabinets, cars or motorbikes are thoroughly cleaned. After the house is cleaned, the whole family will buy new clothes to wear on Tet. We also buy beautiful flowers to decorate the inside and the outside of the house. For the outside of the house, we have marigolds, daisies, sunflowers, and lilies. The special flowers used for the Tet on the inside of the house are the Apricot Blossom from Southern Vietnam and the Cherry Blossom from Northern Vietnam. These two flowers are supposed to bring good luck and good fortune to the family for the whole year. The last thing a family is supposed to do before the Tet is to go shopping for very special foods.

Food is a very important part of Tet. There must be five fruits: papayas, mangoes, custard apples, coconuts, and watermelons. We worship and pray to our ancestors and ask for a peaceful life. These fruits have special meanings of money,

luck, health, and success. Also, pork, eggs, vegetables such as bitter melon, spinach, and corn are needed to be cooked for the entire Tet celebration. Ingredients for rice cakes and square rice cakes such as green bean paste and fat pork are bought. Finally, champagne, beer, and coke are also necessary for the celebration.

When all the food is bought, the ladies start cooking, and we eat for the whole Tet celebration of ten days. They cook Chinese braised pork, boil corn, and steam bitter melon with spinach which many people believe will let pain and sadness go away. Rice cakes are made with pork, green beans and then wrapped in bamboo or banana leaves. Some families who have money roast a whole pig or ducks.

After the cooking is finished, the Vietnamese wait for the fireworks to begin at midnight at a city park. The park is so crowded that you have to get there very early. People can also walk around and see the beautiful flowers and many balloons on the special street, which is called Flowers Road. Everyone wishes each other “Chúc mừng năm mới!” which means Happy New Year. Many people also visit a temple, a church or go to a cemetery and bring flowers or fruits to the grave where their loved ones are buried. Visiting grandparents during Tet is special to young people because they get a red envelope which has money in it. They wish their grandparents will have healthy lives until 100 years or more. At that time, the

whole family plays cards, dominoes, and checkers and has a very big dinner together. Another thing that is done on the third day of Tet celebration is visiting teachers and saying “thank you” for all their help. Fruit or food is given to the teachers. Travelling is also something that people who can afford it do during the Tet.

This is the first time that I was not at the Tet celebration in Vietnam; I have to say that I really miss it. I spoke to my family and they told me all about the fun they had and the delicious food they ate. I am hoping that this year of the “Monkey” will bring me good health and good luck in the United States.

Van Nguyen
Vietnam

Vietnam is a Small Country

Vietnam is a small country in Southeast Asia. Although it is small, it has a lot of natural resources. That is why it has always attracted attention from many powerful countries. They are America, China, France, and England. If I were asked to send one thing representing my country to an international exhibition, I would show them some pictures of Vietnamese people in periods of resistance against invaders. I will show how the Vietnamese lived, how they fought against the enemies, and how my country was at that time.

I want people of the world to know about Vietnam and the Vietnamese and about the fact that when they didn't have any modern weapons to fight the enemies until they won the wars and gained freedom for themselves. I will tell them about the "Vietnamese Mothers" who had their sons fighting on the battlefields, looking forward to their sons return in triumph. People do not know how the mothers felt when they heard the bad news. Their sons died when they were fighting. People do not see their sadness and hopelessness. They hid the tears and their pain inside. That was a heart-wrenching cry. One mother who had five sons, and all of them died on the battlefield. Who can understand that feeling? It truly hurts!

I want people to know the Vietnamese will and strength, especially Vietnamese people who were in the wars. During the wars, they didn't have food to eat, water to drink, clothes to wear, houses to live. They didn't have money. When the powerful countries came to my country, they robbed our fields, our houses, our food, and especially our women. They killed us when we didn't listen to them or fought back against them. They killed us wildly. Therefore, we had to live and hide underground. Although the Vietnamese are poor materially, they have strong will. In my picture, I will show how the Vietnamese fought the Chinese, the Americans, the French, and the English. We didn't have modern weapons. We used everything sharp in our house to fight the enemies. Not only men but also young children and old women fought. We fought for our country, we fought for our lives and most importantly we fought for our freedom. Freedom is not free. We had to pay for it with blood and great sacrifice.

Lastly, I will show how proud I am of the Vietnamese people. I will show the smile of the Vietnamese people when we won and chased the enemies out. People will see the happiness on their faces. They deserve to have freedom.

To win the wars against these big and powerful countries was not easy for the Vietnamese people. But they did. And I am so proud of our victories. It will be good if you could come to my country and visit our war museums. You will see all

the pictures of the Vietnamese battles. When I have a chance to show people around the world about Vietnamese people, I will definitely show these pictures.

Four

For the Love of Family

Meiyu Jin
China

A Great Dinner

My friend's parents came from China. They have visited their daughter for a month. I made dumplings and some food, and I invited them to have a dinner last night.

I have known my friend and her parents since when I was in elementary school. I was very excited to meet them. I felt just like meeting my parents. They brought some dried food from our hometown and Moon cakes. While we were having dinner, we talked about our hometown, the neighborhood, their health and our life in U.S.A. But one thing hurt my heart. They said they don't need expensive clothes, nor do they need good healthy food. They just want to see their kids and their grandchildren more often, and they want all their family members to celebrate holidays together. However, my husband and I visit China just once every three years because we have to work to take care of our children, and the airline tickets are expensive. Maybe this is the reason for my own. I thought I should try to visit my parents every Chinese New Year, regardless of all the excuses.

I dreamed last night. I had a big party with my big family in China, and we were celebrating the Chinese New Year together.

You Na Chung
Korea

Every Person Has Different Ways

Every person has different ways to live his or her life. When I was young, I thought my life was going to be the same as other people before my mother passed away. My mother passed away when I was fourteen. She died of heart attack. I was shocked because her death was unexpected. She was the only person I talked to, but she could not be here anymore. That made me sad and upset.

I felt the whole world was turned upside down. After her funeral, I could not go back to my normal life. When I had a hard time, my family tried to help me, but I became introspective and timid. When I think of something, I didn't want to tell anyone. I just kept all in my mind. That made my father and grandparents worried. So, they gave me an opportunity to go to America. They wanted me to experience another world from what I had, and I also wanted too at that time.

I came to America after I graduated from high school, and I have been living here for about two years. At first, everything was awkward. It was not easy to change my personality within two years. However, I met my roommate. She has a totally different personality from me. She tried to help me to cooperate with other people. Now I keep trying to listen to other people. Then I realized that there are

many difficult situations. I learned how they figure out the solution to the problem. I think my mother is still helping me. She has sent good people to me. I want to give back to people what I got from them and my mother.

Elizabeth Gomez Lopez
Colombia

My Adoptive Uncle

When parents opt for adoption, most of them choose little kids. They say that it is better because a teenager can have bad behavior, and the relationship may be unfavorable. Many teenagers had to stay in the orphanage until they turn 18 years old. This happened with my adoptive uncle, almost the same. He did not remember much about his childhood. A man found him on the street when he was around four years old. This man took care of him for a while, but he left him after. Since that moment, my adoptive uncle was abused for many years. His childhood and adolescence were terrible. My adoptive uncle did not have a name until he went to the notary's office for an identification. The man who attended him chose his name and gave him a last name. He also calculated his age. He was called John Jairo Castaneda.

When he became older, he started living for himself. For all his bad experiences, he lived sad, angry with his life and with God. He attempted suicide several times, but fortunately nothing happened. The years passed and when he was around 30, he met my uncle. They became friends easily. When my uncle knew the history of my adoptive uncle, he started taking him home. He gradually earned the esteem of the whole family. Although he was sad inside, with

everybody around he was an amazing person, funny and loving. No one could imagine all the pain he had stored in his heart. After a few months, he started living in my grandparents' house. At first, he was somebody who paid for living there, but it was not long before all my family treated him as a family member.

Twenty years have passed since he became an important part of our family. I cannot imagine how our life would be without him. An amazing man who now loves the life and is happy, but the most important he is now a man who knows that he can count on a big family that loves him and has chosen him without knowing his age or his past. The family has chosen him for his heart.

Actually, I am thankful with whoever abandoned him because thanks to them I have my uncle. The life of my family would definitely not be the same and my family would not be a complete family, had we not chosen him many years ago.

Kha Ai Dao
Vietnam

My Best Gift Ever

Everyone has some memories that are hard to forget. So do I. I have not forgotten my ten-year-old birthday on which I was given a special gift by my mom. It was a birthday cake. When I was a child, my family was so poor that we just had enough food to eat. Looking at other children who had their birthday party, as a child's thought, I just wished to have a birthday cake on my birthday. However, my parents couldn't give it to me. I thought that my parents didn't love me until I was ten. I still remember exactly that day. While it was raining so hard, I was sitting by the window in my pretty small room. I followed the rhythm of the rain which felt on the roof and sang the birthday song to myself. Suddenly, the light was off, and I screamed loudly in order to get my mom's attention. Nonetheless, it was so quiet, and my mom didn't answer me. I opened the door and intended to find my mom. When the door was opened by me, my parents already stayed there with a birthday cake for me. They said, "Surprise! Happy birthday, my daughter." I was crying because of this big surprise. I enjoyed my birthday cake, which was a small cake with yellow flowers and a tiny pig; it was so simple but brought a hard-described feeling for me. That was my first birthday, and that birthday cake has

been my best gift ever. I can't forget that feeling. What's more, I figured out on that day that my parents had always loved me, but I just didn't know that.

Vesna Manoleva
Macedonia

My Favorite Person

In every person's life, there is at least one special who is like "fresh air" when you think of that person or when you see her. Somehow we are all influenced by each other and also we are learning from each other. For me one of those special people who have helped me grow is my son. His warm, cute eyes have warmed my heart.

We have been through many things together. For example, I taught him how to ride a bike. I enjoyed that time of encouragement. He likes riding his bike during summer. Sometimes he complains if something is not as he likes it to be but most of the time he is helpful, and he likes playing with his little sister.

Legos are one of his favorite things. He can spend time building houses, cars, planes, and he pretends that he is driving them. I like the sparkles in his eyes when he's talking about something that he is interested in or when he watches his favorite TV program.

Soccer is his favorite sport. He goes to his soccer practice without a problem. Indeed, I enjoyed spending time with him.

This little boy makes me see the life as I have never seen before. His love and his expectations are giving me the strength to “keep going” and show me that the world is a good place to live in.

Dianelba Cabrera
Dominican Republic

An Absent Father

It was summer of 2002. A young pregnant girl went to the hospital to give birth to her first baby. Her husband was out of the country, but her family supported her. Four months later her husband came to meet his baby boy for the first time. She was very happy and lucky to have him as the father of her child. But she knew that he doesn't stay with them for long.

Eight months later he come back to celebrate his son's first birthday. She wanted to have that moment forever and took a family picture. She put this picture in her baby's room with a phrase on it, "Mommy, Daddy and Me." It was the first and only family picture for this baby.

The years passed quickly and the child was growing without his father. He begins to ask himself, "Why my father doesn't love me? What did I do wrong?" But he never said anything to his mom. He didn't want to hurt her feelings with something that she could never fix.

When the child was ten years old, his mom and he came to the United States, the place where his father was living at that time. His only dream was to find his father. His mom secretly helped him, and the father finally accepted to meet his son after nine years. The father was carrying old album pictures and said to his son,

“I don’t have anything to offer. I don’t have an answer for all your questions, but I always carry your pictures with me.”

That day the father promised to the child that he wanted to stay with him as much as possible, go to the movies together and stay together for Christmas. That day was the last day that this child saw his father. Almost five years have passed and this boy is still waiting for all his answers.

This is my son’s story, and I’m the woman who receives my son’s gifts every year on Father’s Day.

Yanet Batista
Dominican Republic

Being a Student, Mother, and Wife

Studying when you are a mother and wife is a challenge to any woman because women have many obligations even if we do not work outside the home. We need to have a desire to excel, will power and especially support of our family. In my personal case, studying in this country is one of the multiple opportunities that the system offers, but it is not easy because I have a husband and two daughters which demand much of my time. Now, I require more time to complete my assignments than before, and I prefer to stay in a quiet place to concentrate what is almost impossible at home. A good example of that is sometimes when I'm doing my homework and my younger daughter tells me if I can help her with her homework. My husband calls and tells me if I can go to the bank, or my older daughter needs me to take her to one or another place. When I return to continue with my homework I cannot remember where I was going. At that moment I say, "Nobody said it was going to be easy."

Not everything is bad, and this has something really fun. I'm doing classes with one of my daughter's friends who started college this semester. When I saw her in class, I said "I'm a student like you." She could not stop laughing. When I returned to my house she had told my daughter who could not

stop laughing too. The experience of sharing classes with students with the same age as my daughter reminds me of the time when I started college in my country full of dreams of becoming in a great professional.

Now, I can see the life from another point optimizing my time and trying not to lose enthusiasm.

Yanet Batista
Dominican Republic

A Person Worthy of Compassion

Everyday people come our way to leave us some kind of lessons. That is the case of a man from Argentina who I met in my first job in this country. He was a lonely person, sometimes arrogant and rude. He did not believe in God. He never cared for his children or relatives living in Argentina. He always said that he did not need anyone. He usually visited my job twice a week. One day, we got a call saying that he had a heart attack when he tried to enter his house. At the hospital the doctor tried to save him using her leg. A few days later bacteria infected his leg and the doctors amputated it. That situation was too much for me. I had no idea how to look at him or what words I could tell. When I arrived to the hospital I thought I was going to see a sad man, but he had a big smile and was in a good mood. At that moment I thought that sometimes we believe that our problems are bigger than problems of others. We usually complain about insignificant things and we put our attention on the little things we need and do not appreciate how much we have.

A year later he died alone at home. One day someone found him lying on the floor. None of his family was interested in receiving his ashes. Only a few friends

were in his funeral. Many times we go so fast in life to make money and we do not appreciate the most important thing in life - our family - because life is too short.

Kyoung Suk Kim
Korea

The Most Delicious Meal

The most delicious meal in my life was my mom's meal I ate when I was pregnant with my daughter. Some pregnant women want to eat sour fruit or the food that they didn't like before pregnancy. Some pregnant women really want to eat the food, but they can't eat it when they see the food. I didn't do that but I couldn't eat well for weeks in the early pregnancy. I felt nauseous when I smelt some food – not everything. I felt nervous at that time. It was my first pregnancy and I didn't adapt to my new married life because I was pregnant as soon as I got married. I think it made me sensitive.

My mother-in-law cooks well. Many people say her food is delicious and my children also like it. Her Kimchi is especially delicious. She used to make it and give some to us. I also liked her Kimchi but I couldn't eat it in the early pregnancy. At first, I thought that was because Kimchi had a strong smell. I couldn't eat other food that my mother-in-law cooked. Her food is delicious but it has totally different taste from the food my mother cooks. My mom's food is mild; it is neither salty nor spicy nor sweet. I can feel the taste of the ingredient itself.

One day, I visited my mom and had lunch with her. I didn't feel any nausea from the food smell. I ate a lot and it was the best meal in my life even though it

was a very simple meal: rice, soup, some side dishes and Kimchi. When I was young, I didn't think she was a good cook. After I got married and became accustomed to a strong flavor, I forgot the taste of my mom's food. However, my body still remembered it well.

My mom is old. When I visit my mom, we often eat out or either my sister or I would cook for her. It has been a long time since I ate my mom's food last time. I miss my mom and I miss her food.

Five
A Helping Hand

Kha Ai Dao
Vietnam

Twenty-Five Cents

Helping people is my gusto, and looking at people who are happy is my happiness. However, because of twenty-five cents, I made a person sad. I have felt ashamed about that until now. Last week, I was enjoying my favorite bread with my friend, Erna. It tasted so well until a girl with short hair came to me and said, "Can you give me twenty-five cents to buy a sandwich? I have lack of only twenty-five cents." I looked at that girl, and my thoughts told me not to give money to her because I thought that she was a liar. My mouth was opened, and I said, "Sorry, I don't have twenty-five cents." Instead of seeing a happy face, I felt some embarrassment appeared on hers. Suddenly, I heard a familiar voice, "I have." The voice was from my friend. Erna gave money to her, and her happy smile made my thoughts become ugly. I told Erna that that girl would be a liar. The answer from my friend was so light but strong enough to win my devil thoughts. "If she were a liar, I still would give her twenty-five cents. She was asking for money for food. Helping others has never been bad." I turned around and saw that girl was paying money for her sandwich. I couldn't say anything. I didn't know if I felt shame for my friend, that girl, or myself. My favorite bread

became not so tasty in my mouth anymore. Since that day, I have learnt that I lose nothing when helping people. Sometimes, twenty-five cents also make people feel happy. Money can't buy happiness. If you can do it, just do it.

Gumju Kim
Korea

What Volunteering Means to Me

Sometimes, we easily judge things only by their results, but I have experienced the process. I think that the process of how the results come to be is beautiful and meaningful. My name is Gumju and I came from South Korea. I look back on last year's fall semester when I became a part of the family that is Bergen Community College. I am a serious student, and I don't want to miss anything. I remember one of my first assignments and I remember hearing Professor Lieb (in Speech II) recommending us taking a look around at the Volunteer Fair. Since then, I built a fascinating activity for myself, something that was important to me in a special way. Sometimes, I hear my classmates asking me if I had the time to volunteer. In the end, volunteering is up to your choice. This choice came last year, and I am so grateful to have said yes to a volunteering opportunity. I started volunteering at the Jewish Family Service, and I visit a disabled man named Jamie every Friday to talk to him and be his friend. I find value of compassion and service from volunteering. When some people volunteer for materialistic gains, they lose sight of what helping really means. On my way home every Friday, I always feel happy from having learned something new every time I visited Jamie's house. Outside activities such as this really encouraged me

to use my ability to help others and to reflect what it means to help someone. I remember that my very first day of volunteering was cold and wintery, but inside I was sweating. While I am volunteering, I have many different emotions at the same time which makes me even happier.

Volunteering has become my regular schedule. I hope that this will go on because it makes me and the person I am helping happy.

Six
How We Love

Elizabeth Gomez Lopez
Colombia

Old School Love

Love is something that everyone wants to get in their life. Especially for women, love is like a goal. Unfortunately, some people do not want to compromise, so this goal is each time hard to achieve. I have heard, “Since sex got easier to get, love got harder to find,” and I agree with that. Now love is harder because no one wants to take the time to build good relationships. Guys make decisions without thinking. They just want to have a good time and do not think that may have consequences, such as pregnancy, STDs and new marriages that could be future divorces. I believe that we need to build relationships the way how our parents did it. I think that my parents have had a good relationship and they have had success because they had an old school love.

It could be weird that someone as young as me wants to have something different and serious, but I think that love is something serious and if you are not serious with it, you cannot get it in the way you want it. In my parents, I have seen the kind of relationship and love I have wanted for myself. My mom has told me how she and my dad took the time to know each other. During their relationship there were respect, compromise, waiting, loyalty and trust. They told me that all of those things helped them to build a good relationship. Before making any decision,

they could be sure about what to do because they had spent enough time to know if their feelings were real or not.

Actually they did not have sex before their marriage. My mom told me that waiting until marriage was important because she was sure about my dad's love. She knew that my dad was with her for her personality – for her, no for her body or what she could offer him. They both told me that while they were dating, their love was more real because “true love waits.” If someone can wait for you, it means that that person really loves you. They also have told me that a relation must be of three: a woman, a man and God. They said that they had not done it without him.

Living an old school love would be amazing. I really hope to get it one day. I trust that there are still people who think that the true love exists and goes beyond the aspect or what the other person can offer. Love is compromise, loyalty, trust and respect. Love requires time and dedication. I know that I need to learn many things about love, but I am sure that I am going through the right way and someday I could have my own old school love.

Yanibel Pena
Dominican Republic

The Beat of Love

Love is like the wind,
You feel it like the ocean,
Confusing like the storm
That never leaves the surface,
it won't stop until you please,
Until your heart fall,
Like a river that lost its water,
Eyes that cry like water but love like potion,
Until your heart let go,
Love like the wind,
You feel it like the ocean,
Confusing like the storm.

Seven

Playing and Trying New Things

Kha Ai Doa
Vietnam

My Barbie

During our childhood life, everyone had his or her favorite toys. Some liked their toy cars, their toy animals, and so on; but for me, I loved my Barbie which my father gave me when I was in elementary school. Her beautiful face, blonde hair, and a good body in a white dress made me want to stay with her every day. She was so poor. She had only a white dress before I sewed some cute new dresses for her. She was always excited when she was with me because I always saw a smile on her face. I loved sleeping with her every night, and so did she. Whenever I felt sad, I forced her to listen to me. I liked talking to her about things that I couldn't talk about to anybody else because I knew she would never share it with others. Sharing with her my sadness, I felt so relaxed and comfortable. We were friends until a cat stole her, and I haven't seen my Barbie ever again. She was not only a lovely toy but also a lovely friend during my childhood. For adults, maybe the toys are just senseless things; however, for children, they are treasures. I still miss her, a toy which had a soul, just as I would miss my childhood memories.

Dianelba Cabrera
Dominican Republic

Knowing the Unknown

Some folks usually like to stay in their comfort zone. Others have more of something that they call adrenalin. This is spark inside of you to do risky activities. But what happens when you are a comfort zone person and you meet one who enjoys to discover new things. Well this is what happened during my summer vacation in Cancun, Mexico.

My boyfriend and I planned to do some activities during vacations. We went to Chichen Itza pyramid, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. It is the perfect learning activity for me. But the next day he chose to swim in the ocean with the whale sharks. Even though he knows deep water, it still terrifies me swimming with the whale sharks.

In the beginning I thought that he just wanted to scare me. But once we sat in the boat my nightmare started while my dizziness and nauseas was fighting to have total control of my body. We sailed for an hour until we found the place where whale sharks came to feed. Thanks God they are vegan and they only eat planktons.

When we arrived in the middle of nowhere, I tried to wake up but I just heard people ask me, “Are you ok?” After a while I finally got up. I saw my boyfriend wave at me from the sea saying, “Come on, just do it.” While I was praying, “God please get me out of here.” But for the first time in my life I felt a little sparkle inside of me and I just jumped into the water.

Once in the water everything became very quiet. I could hear my breathing, my heart and my thoughts perfectly. I turned my head down, then I saw it. I saw the whale shark just below my feet. The biggest animal I had ever seen. I felt his soft skin in my fingers or probably I just felt my own fear. I was petrified. For a couple of seconds, I forgot how to breathe.

Fighting for my life, I swam as fast as I could to the surface until I saw the boat. Then I could breathe again. I have to say that I had never seen such beautiful colors down there. Or how the sky and the ocean were just one.

Today I’m proud to say, “I did it” even though probably I will never do it again. I’m happy to have known what was unknown to me. I’m proud because I showed my courage to myself.

Eight

The Seasons of Life

Dianelba Cabrera
Dominican Republic

The Seasons of Life

As a child we learn about the four seasons of the year. Teacher and parents show us the differences between one and another. As an adult I realized that we experience the same changes as the trees throughout their lives. It's when our four seasons mark our own story.

When a person is born he/she has all the beauty the parents can give him/her. They take care of us as gardeners take care of their most prized flowers. However, in our spring life only we can decide in which direction we want to grow, like my plant on the dining room table. No matter what position I put it, the leaves always grow looking at the window where the sunbeams come every morning.

As a young adult, we feel stronger than ever. This is our summer life time. We usually think that we are wiser than our parents and we can survive without them. We are very proud of how we are and we just enjoyed the moment. Similar to the flowering trees in the park where everybody enjoys their strong branches and their incredible shades to protect us from the bright sun in summer time.

In our adulthood, we begin to mature as the leaves of the trees mature in autumn. We probably appreciate more our loved ones, we have learned from our life experiences and probably our seeds are already beginning to germinate

somewhere. In my opinion autumn is the most wonderful season because we can appreciate the beauty: life changes like the amazing change of colors that nature offers to us.

Finally, it is the old age stage. We begin to lose our physical beauty as the beautiful autumn tree loses its leaves in winter. Perhaps it is not as strong as before but strong enough to keep standing. We are not as happy as we were before, maybe because our gardeners aren't with us anymore. Probably because the rain washed our seeds far away from us, or just because our time is near the end. Nevertheless, we are proud to have offered our branches to support others. We are proud to show those marks on the old tree trunk because we can tell the story behind our marks.

In the end, the tree never dies because new leaves will grow in spring. But the essence of our roots remains in this tree forever. And one more time a new story begins behind the seasons of the life.

Elizabeth Gomez Lopez
Colombia

Behind the Wrinkles

Most people are afraid to have wrinkles. Society has somehow determined that wrinkles are synonymous with old age and as a result many people, especially women, opt for cosmetic surgeries. I used to think the same way. I was 16 years old and I had already planned a cosmetic surgery for me in the future. Fortunately I had an experience that changed my way of thinking. Once after I went to the nursing home Missionaries of Charity in Colombia, my way of thinking about life and beauty changed. At first it was difficult because I went to help the nuns with cleaning, but I ended up with helping to care the old women. So I shared a lot of time with them. They were very special to me. Although at first I did not know how to help them with care, they were patient. I always could see on their faces, behind their wrinkles beautiful smiles. Although most of them had already lost some teeth, I found in their smiles love, peace and joy.

All these ladies had been abandoned by their families. I remember that one of them was found in an abandoned garage. I heard many sad stories from them. Sometimes they told me the same stories again and again, but I did not say anything to them because I knew they just enjoyed sharing their experiences and feelings with someone else.

I visited them every Saturday, and gradually I learned more about them. Apparently, they were just simple old women, with many facial imperfections, but they were more than that. I learned many things through their stories. Behind their wrinkles there were wisdom, love and courage. You can see these qualities only from someone who have gone through the years if he or she has been living the right way.

I missed a lot my “sweet ladies” and how I called them. Although I do not know how they are now, I pray for them as they thought of me. Possibly most of them do not remember me anymore, but I can say that I will remember them forever because in each kiss, each loving hug, each sweet smile and each story they transformed my heart. Now I am not worried about my future facial wrinkles. Instead, I am worried for my heart wrinkles. I want to use my heart like my sweet ladies and in the future when I have my own wrinkles I will appreciate a life full of love, courage and wisdom.

Dianelba Cabrera
Dominican Republic

In a Hurry to Grow up

Most people are in a hurry to grow up when they are children. In a hurry to be independent, to explore and to make they own decisions. In a hurry to run away and have their own life. I was one in particular. However, when got there, I wished I could go back in time, to be a kid again.

I was growing in the countryside with my grandmother. I remember her sweet way to wake me up every morning. She caressed my face while she whispered in my ear, “The roosters are singing, it is time for you to wake up too”. It was so sweet. But now I wake up with a noisy alarm. The roosters in my childhood have turned into the city traffic noise. Nevertheless, I could still feel my grandma’s hands on my face for one last time.

In my hurry to grow up, I used to use my mom’s makeup to make me look ten years older than I was. Now, on the other hand, I’m buying a thousand creams to look a little younger.

I run away in order to find my identity and my freedom. Maybe I found it or probably I came to be a slave to it, my own adult world. Now I understand that I left my freedom in my grandma’s back yard, and in the tree that was my hideout

during “the war” between my mom and me. The tree was where I was the queen in my magical world.

As time passed, I have begun to understand that we often don’t appreciate what we have until we have lost it. I know now that my mom didn’t want to bother me; she wanted to prepare me. I realized my childhood was amazing and that there was no need to rush to find my future because I lost the time to enjoy my present. Maybe if I could go back in time, I would want to see my grandma and to tell her how I miss hearing her voice every morning, and to say thanks for being my grandmother.

Now I am the mother to my son who thinks that I am bothering him. Now I am the adult who needs to keep her feet on the ground. I’m the adult that learns every day how to stay happy as I was as a child.

