

Building Bridges, Telling Our Stories

Written by the Human Rights Class at Newcomers High School

Edited by the St Luke's School 8th Grade Class

Fall 2010- Spring 2011



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Julie Mann and Kim Allen, Human Rights Day, 12.9.10, Newcomers High School

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Dear Readers,

In this publication, you will read the stories of my incredible students, all new immigrants to the United States. They have agreed to take the brave and difficult step of telling their stories, though often full of painful and challenging memories, because they believe that in sharing their stories, perceptions of immigrants may change.

Immigrants have been under attack in recent years, mainly due to lack of awareness and stereotypes about who immigrants are and why they come here. It is our hope that these stories will help to end these negative attacks and build a bridge between my students and those who haven't had the pleasure of knowing them.

It is also our hope that through their stories, we will help to educate the world about the rich and wonderful people my students and their ancestors are, the extraordinary experiences they have had, the goals and dreams they have for their lives here, and the enormous value they add to this country.

These stories were also a gift for my students. In the process of writing them, they came to learn about their own lives, their rich histories, and their families' histories.

Finally, my Newcomers High School students have been working all year with 8th grade partners from the St. Luke's School. These human rights buddies are learning about immigration as part of their social studies curriculum, with their dedicated teacher Kim Allen. The St. Luke's students edited all of my students' stories, helping them to improve the content and perfect the grammar, spelling, and punctuation. Though my students are older than their St. Luke's buddies, they are all new learners of English and benefitted greatly from their 8th grade partner's language skills. My students' stories have become part of their 8th grade buddies' immigration research and helped to ensure that their buddies had a comprehensive picture of who my students are and where they are from.

We hope you enjoy their stories, and perhaps this publication will inspire you to write your own life story!

Julie Mann, Newcomers High School
Spring 2011

Dear Readers,

In the years since Julie Mann and I met and conceived of this partnership between our schools, I have grown as a teacher and as a human being by learning from her students. In addition, my students have had the opportunity to work with Ms. Mann, an outstanding educator who complements my school's commitment to human rights and social justice.

St. Luke's School students, who are in the 8th grade and attend an Episcopal School in Greenwich Village, benefit from all the advantages of fast-paced Manhattan and the privileges of an excellent private school education. At the same time, our school community is committed to learning about and contributing to our diverse city. How fortunate we are that the remarkable and, quite frankly, often brilliant young immigrants of the Queens-based Newcomers High School enrich our lives through letters, projects, and visits to each other's schools.

This recent project, in which my students read and edited the autobiographies of their buddies, reinforced long-standing lessons in our curriculum at St. Luke's School. Not only did we learn about the heart-wrenching accounts contained in the individual stories of these students, we also noted patterns of resilience contained in the immigrant narratives. Each year, my students had undertaken a major research paper about immigration as a part of an academic unit, in addition to their work with their buddies. In introducing this unit, I'd always said, "Be careful not to make assumptions about who is your doorman, or who is your nanny. You don't know what he or she has been through to get here."

Just before the recent Egyptian revolution, I was driven home from the airport by a car service; the driver was an Egyptian engineer. He'd left his country because he couldn't make a living in Cairo and, like so many parents of students at Newcomers High School, made a choice to take a chance in America. His daughter, age 16, was attending high school in Queens. Incorrectly, he was chastising himself for not having accomplished anything in his life. Then I thought about all those parents of Newcomers students, and of all of you students, too.

My hat is off to you. We at St. Luke's think you have accomplished a great deal, and we stand in admiration. Welcome.

Kim Allen
St. Luke's School



Diane Kandel and the digital stories crew: Tashi Lhamo, Sangjukta Sen Roy, Check Diop, Jeannette Neto, Kamy Kalenga, and Weifeng Wu

The Journey That Changed My Life

Written by Erblina Aga, edited by Juliana Orejuela

When I first met Erblina in person, we were both very shy. We enjoyed doing the activities that were planned for that day and we laughed together and had a great time. I wish I could see her more often. Erblina is such a great and fun person that anybody would love.

~Juliana Orejuela



My name is Erblina Aga and I am 16 years old. I was born and raised in Albania. I lived there for almost 11 years. Growing up beside my parents was probably one of the best gifts that I have gotten in my life.

My childhood was a normal childhood, just like the childhood of many other children. I used to play dolls everyday with some of my friends. I had a lot of regular days with my family, friends and cousins. Toys played a big role in my childhood.



The human rights in Albania are defended. There is no discrimination against people due to race, sex or age. The only human abuse I know of that happens in Albania is human trafficking. A lot of girls get robbed or forced into prostitution. It hurts me to see how many girls who are my age are forced to do something that they don't like to.

Albanian culture is very unique in its own way. The music that the older generations listen to is folk music, but now everything has changed and young people listen to all kinds of music such as house, techno, and hip hop. The main meal of the Albanians is lunch and it usually consists of a main dish and a salad of fresh vegetables like tomatoes, olives, and peppers, dressed with olive oil, vinegar and salt.

My parents were born in Albania. My father was born in Diber, Peshkopi and my mother was born in Tirane, which is the capital of Albania. They went to the same university in Albania and that's where they met. After they got married, my father moved to Albania so they could be together.



Diber.



Tirane.

I was 12 years old when I found out that we were going to move to New York. I used to come to New York almost every summer because we visited our cousins. In the beginning I felt happy because it had always been my dream to live there, but after a while I realized that I had to start a new life and that I had to be away from my best friends, some of my relatives, and a lot of other people. My mom and my dad told me and my siblings that we were going to move here four days before we left. We moved to New York because my father was asked to work for the Albanian Consulate.

We came here on June 3, 2007. The trip was very long and it was the first time that I traveled for that long. It was hard for a person who is used to moving the whole time, to stay in a chair for almost 10 hours. It takes 11 hours to travel from Albania to New York.

When I first came here I lived in my uncle's house. I didn't want to be here because I left all my friends in Albania and my relatives too. I didn't know anybody here. I cried for one week because I felt very lonely. There was an empty hole in my heart because I knew that I wasn't going to see my friends and family in Albania everyday anymore. I didn't even want to go to school here because I was sure that it was going to be extremely hard for me to find new friends and get used to what people do here.

Now everything has changed. I started going to school and I've made a lot of friends. I like the American culture. Many times I have been asked, "If you could go back to Albania, would you want to live there forever or here?" My answer is to live here because I am very used to everything here and if I return to Albania I will miss everything that I do here and all the friends that I now have. Even though I still have friends there, I think it is easier for me to just go and visit them every summer than moving back again and starting there from the beginning.

A typical school day here means waking up in the morning and getting ready to go to school. I have classes until 3PM and then I socialize with friends. I spend my free time talking to students and practicing my favorite sport after school, volleyball.

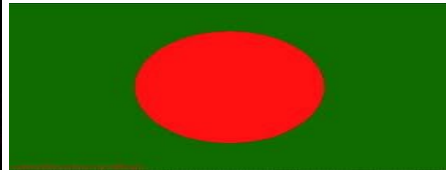
My short term goal is to finish high school and go to college. In the future, I see myself as a really good lawyer or business women. I want to live in a big house and have a happy family. I see myself as a really nice person who would love to help everybody, have a great life and be happy.

Telling My Story

Written by Arefa Akter, edited by Alessandra Lampietti

Arefa Akter goes to Newcomers High school in Queens. She is 18 years old. Arefa has been my buddy since September of 2010. We have been exchanging letters since. We met for the first time in December of 2010 and we had a lot of fun. Arefa was kind, sweet, and smart and I am glad that she is my buddy.

~Alessandra Lampietti



My name is Arefa Akter. I am 18 years old. I am in 12th grade. I am from Bangladesh. I have lived in the USA for almost 2 years and 6 months. I study at Newcomers High School. I will graduate from high school in June 2011.

I was quiet in my childhood. I felt uncomfortable when I met with someone new because I felt very shy when I talked. But I was happy in my childhood. I always listened to my mother. I never did anything without my mom. My mother and father love me a lot. I have one brother and one sister, both older than me. I am the youngest one in my family. I live with my family. I have never lived without my mother.

One day, my mother got sick and she had to go to the hospital to see the doctor. The doctor kept her for a week because she had something wrong with her leg. I was crying when I heard about my mom because I had to live with my sister. She is 7 years older than me, but still I missed my mom. At night I couldn't sleep without my mom so that whole night I didn't sleep. In the morning my older sister cooked for me and for my brother. She made rice pudding for us, and she put it on a dish and she put that on the floor. I was walking and I didn't see the dish. By mistake I fell down on top of the hot dish with rice pudding and I burnt my face. One of my uncles took me to the hospital and I didn't go to school for while. One month later I felt little better but I still have a problem with my face. That day was really the worst day of my childhood and a remarkable event in my life.

When I was four years old I started elementary school. I went for admission in one elementary school. The teacher did not accept me to because I was four years old but I looked younger. My older brother took me to school and told the teacher that I was old enough to study. My brother applied to 5 schools for me, but none of them accepted me. So, later my brother took me to a large city where I have an uncle who is the teacher of the city school. He knew about me and admitted me.



We used to live in a smaller city of Bangladesh, but we all moved to a larger city. I started my school from 1st grade and I finished in 5th grade and received a scholarship. After my graduation from elementary school I started my high school from 6th grade. In high school there was lots of competition for grades. We had to study a lot and memorize homework for tests. In my class we had 480 students and I was the third best in my class. In school we had lots of fun and a party every three months. We had many kinds of shows which were really fun. We got to go on a picnic ever year. I enjoyed my school a lot, and I still miss it.

I like to read novels, watch TV and listen to Bengali, Indian, an American music. I love to travel, hang out with my friends, do gardening, and dance. My favorite type of food is spicy and sour I especially like to eat Bengali food. My favorite

clothes are Bengali and Indian dresses but also I like to wear jeans with a nice top. I don't like to stay at home because I think it is boring. I often go out to a new place and learn new things. I want to learn more because I believe it is really important for me and for my future life.



In Bangladesh we do not have human rights for all people. People are abused in many ways, women most of all. Women are restricted by men, who always try to control women. Men think that women do not need an education or a job. Most of them have religious barriers and believe in superstitions because they want women to stay home. Women cannot go outside, or shop. If they do go out, they have to cover their whole body. Most of the palaces still have child marriages. When boys are 15 and girls are 13 years old, their parents start to get ready for their children's marriages. When women have their first child and it is a girl, the men think it is bad luck for the family. The men want sons because they think a son can earn money for them and can earn a dowry when they get married. Many women do not have freedom, rights, or equality because men and women are not equal in Bangladesh.

In Bangladesh we have many people but our country is really small; we do not have enough space for many people. Men and women have to work very hard to earn money. We have lots of day laborers. Most of them do not get paid enough for their work and they are insulted in many ways.



The politics of Bangladesh take place in a Democratic parliamentary representative republic. The Prime Minister of Bangladesh is the head of the government. Executive power is exercised by the government; Legislative power is vested in both the government and parliament. The Constitution of Bangladesh was written in 1972 and has undergone thirteen amendments. In Bangladesh we have a

female Prime Minister. The government does not control the country very well and everyday there are many fights. Every day people are dying because they fight each other.



Amar Shonar Bangla, Ami Tomaii Bhalobashi is the national song of Bangladesh. Bangla music is divided into three categories, classical, folk and modern. I like to listen to all kinds of music, especially Bengali, Hindi and English music.

Bangladesh is one of the largest Muslim countries in the world. About 80 percent of Bangladeshis are Muslims. Most Bangladeshi Muslims are Sunnis, but there is a small Shia community. About 12 percent of the population is Hindu. There are significant numbers of Buddhists and Christians in Bangladesh. My religion is Muslim and I was born in a Muslim family. I have to follow all the rules that the Muslim religion has. I always have to pray five times a day. When I was in Bangladesh I used to cover all of my body to go outside, but now I do not do it, because it is my choice. Many people like to do it.

I like to be a Muslim girl; I also like to follow all the Muslim rules. Every year we have two holidays. For one holiday, we have to fast for one month. You cannot eat anything when you fast. When one month is finished, the next day is our holiday. That day we buy new clothes, and we eat many different kinds of food. The second holy day is three months later than the first one.



In Bangladesh we have many different kinds of food. I like to eat every type of food that is allowed by my religion. We are forbidden to eat pork, ham, and bacon. My favorite meat is chicken; I like beef as well. We also eat many different kinds of fish. I

like spicy and sour food. I don't like sweets so much. I eat rice everyday with vegetables.



Bangladeshi women habitually wear Sari's. Traditionally, males wear Panjabis, Fatuas and Pajamas. Hindus wear dhoti for religious purposes. Today, the common dress for men is shirts and pants. I like to wear Indian and Bengali dresses, for example saris, salwer kameez, fatua, langha. I also like to wear jeans and t-shirts, but I don't like to wear short cloths. In the summer and the winter I like to wear different kinds of clothes. I like use cotton cloth or any kinds of cloth that is comfortable for me. My favorite color for cloth is pink, black, and blue. I like to go shopping every month and I like to wear new clothes.

My parents are both from Bangladesh; my grandparents are also from Bangladesh. My great, great, great, grandparents are all from Bangladesh. Before, in 1947 Bangladesh and Pakistan was one country. In 1971, Bangladesh and Pakistan were separated from each other. During that time my grandfather died because Pakistani people killed him. This is really sad and I feel bad for him. I never met my grandfather. On my mother's side I met my grandma. On my father's side I never saw grandma and grandpa because they died before I was born.

I came here for a better education and to have a better life and have a better future. In my country we do not have access to a good education. I came to America on September 29, 2008. It was a long journey from Bangladesh to America, and it took two days and one night. The journey was 25 hours without stopping. We had to take another plane to Dubai so we stayed for a night.

When I first got to America my life was so ordinary. I felt lonely and missed my county. I have changed a lot since my move. At first my life here was boring and not really easy for me because I did not speak English. I didn't have anyone to help me. I told my mom that we should go back to Bangladesh. Also, I thought about my Bengali friends because I had lots of them. Here, I did not know anyone. I thought it would be really hard to find a friend who was from my country. When I started my school I met many different people who were from all over the world. I also made many Bengali friends. I was so happy. I did not speak English at that time, but my friends helped me out. When I started speaking English, I changed. I am used to the

American culture now, but my culture is completely different. Now I am used to American clothing. I feel comfortable and easy when I wear these clothes. I like to wear these things now, but at first I felt shy. I like to live in America but I still love my native country. In the future I want to go back to Bangladesh. I want to finish my school, and I would like to go to college. When I finish my studies, I want to become a teacher. Not for high school but for elementary schools, because I have always loved children.

My Life as an Immigrant

Written by Jonnathan Arias, edited by Luke Oldham

In the few months that I have known Jonathan, I can say that he is a kind-hearted and life-loving person. Throughout my correspondence with him, he has displayed himself as a smart and friendly 18-year-old who is in touch with his Ecuadorian roots. As you are about to read in his story he has had quite a journey from Ecuador, and although he has only lived in the United States for 3 years, he definitely has the makings of a patriot.

~Luke Oldham



My name is Jonnathan Arias. I am a native of Ecuador and 18 years old. I am in 11th grade and I've lived in the U.S.A. for approximately for 3 years. I like it.

I want to tell to all of you my story. I will begin with my childhood, a very nice and interesting time. When I was two years old my parents immigrated to the



United States of America to get a better future. They felt there were more opportunities to find a job and make money to have a good life. My grandparents and my uncles took care of me and they taught me all the values that every person needs in life: respect, responsibility, and honesty.

When I was a child everything was interesting for me because obviously I missed my parents, but my grandmother and grandfather gave me all the love that every person needs when he/she is a child. Also, my parents always called my grandparents asking about how I was and saying that they missed me a lot and very soon we would be together.

I remember typical days at home with my family. I would wake up late sometimes and my grandmother was waiting for me to eat our breakfast together. After that we had long conversations about what we wanted to eat for lunch because that was the main question that everybody asked. Most of the time we wanted different things but in the end we made one decision about what we wanted to eat and everybody agreed. This sounds funny, but we always did when all my family was together.

In my first days of school I was very excited and nervous because I was going to meet new kids and teachers. It turned out to be very nice because on my first day I made many friends and I started to love my school. I have to tell you that in the school I was very friendly, that's why I have many friends and even a girlfriend, but this is a secret that nobody in my family knows.

For high school, everything was the same because on the first day, I was very excited because I met new people, and new classmates who came from other schools. When I was 16 years old my parents came to my country to visit me and visit my family and that is something that I will never forget because we did everything together trying to make up for the time from when we were separated.

My native country Ecuador is a small but a very nice country with friendly and adorable people who like to work hard to make their dreams come true and have a good life to protect their families. Some aspects are negative as in other countries. For example, in my country there are small groups of people that violate other people's human rights. For example, some rich people use money as a factor to discriminate against poor people just due to the appearance of their clothes. This makes people get angry because everybody has the right to respect and be respected by everybody. Another problem in my country is the political situation; sometimes politicians do good things and sometimes they do things that are prejudiced towards certain people.



In contrast to this, there are interesting things to show you, like different kinds of music and food. In my city Cuenca, Azuay, we have a special food called guinea pig and in Spanish it is the famous cuy. Also the corn called mote in Spanish is the typical plate of food that is different from foods in other cities. Music in my city is called the rockola which is the typical music that everybody listens to when they are with their families or friends.

My country is divided into three regions called Coast, Sierra and Oriental and these regions have different types of climates: in the Coast region the weather is hot, in the Sierra the weather is cold, and in the Oriental the weather is hot. My country is a beautiful place that you can choose to go for vacations, because you are going to meet new people, it will be fun, and you never will forget it.

Now I am 18 years old and finally, after many years of sadness, separated from my parents, I have the fortune to say that we did it. Many were the tears that my mother and father cried for me; now our first dream has been granted because we are together with my little sister who is two years old. We are very happy enjoying every moment together, trying to recover the special moments we missed when we were separated.

My life her change in a good way because with my family, I have more inspiration to be a good person, a successful person and for that I have to work very hard studying, be responsible with my homework to first graduate from high school, then go to a college and be a professional to have a god job and help my family and others persons who needs my help because this can be the best way to return all the love that my friends gave to me. I hope one day have a family with a beautiful and good wife, with many babies and give to them all the love the same or more love that my parents gave to me and teach them all the values that every person needs to be successful in life.

Something that I want to say about immigration is that it doesn't matter where people come from, it doesn't matter what religion you are, it doesn't matter what skin color you have or whether you are an undocumented person in this country. We are

the same: we are humans and all of us have the same rights which must to be respected. We all came to this country with the intention of working very hard to have a good life and build a better future for our children.

My Journey

Written by Crystal Cabrera, edited by Lily Seibert

The first time I met Crystal Cabrera was in December 2010 when my class took a trip to Newcomers High School. I had a lot of fun that day getting to know her and many of her friends. She was funny, thoughtful, and proud of her heritage. This is the story she has written that includes her childhood, background information about her family, and her life now. Her story is descriptive, thorough, and a pleasure to read.

~Lily Seibert



My name is Crystal Cabrera, and I'm seventeen years old. I'm from Ecuador and I've been living in this country for 3 ½ years. Right now I'm in 12th grade at Newcomers High School.

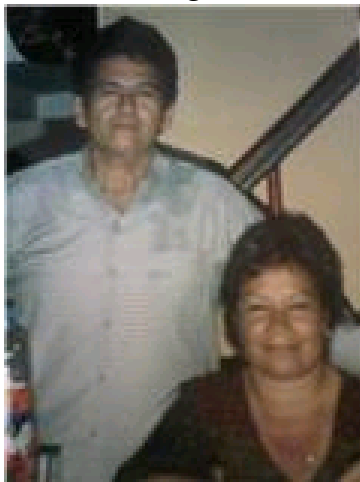
I remember that my childhood was very happy and harmonious, funny and in union with my family and friends. A typical day at home was with my siblings and parents around, my mom cooking, my brothers putting some music to entertain her, my dad



watching soccer with my older brother, then lunch with all the family at the table, laughing and talking.

A typical day at school was talking with my best friends, passing papers during class, doing homework and studying. During lunch sitting in the courtyard, eating and laughing at anything, then playing around, running from side to side until we had to return to class. Most of my free time I would spend with my best friend, either at home or at the park. We used to ride our bikes in the neighborhood while talking and making fun of each other. I remember that in my country the presidents were corrupt because they weren't focused on fixing the main problems the country was going through. I remember I enjoyed watching a TV show named Floricienta with my sister and many other shows on MTV. My favorite food was my mom's.

My entire family is from Ecuador: parents, grandparents, great grandparents. My parents say that when they were kids everything was so different from how things are now. In my dad's childhood, he says that he would play soccer and go out with friends for fun. However he started



working at a very young age because my grandfather came to the United States and left my grandmother alone with him, so he had to help her economically. My mother's childhood was different from my dad's. She went to school and didn't have to work, but because she was a girl, my grandparents were very strict with her and she wasn't allowed to go out frequently. She would spend most of her time at home playing with her siblings and watching TV or reading. Both my grandparents on my mother's side passed away a few years ago. On my dad's side, both my grandparents live here in the United States. My grandfather has lived in this country for over 40 years, but I have no contact with him. My grandmother came to this country before us - my mom, dad and siblings.



When we received the news that we were coming to this country I was surprised. It was a shock for my entire family. My grandfather on my dad's side had requested a Visa for my dad and the rest of our family more than 10 years ago and none of us were expecting to receive it. We went to the consulate and they gave us three months to leave. It was so hard for everyone, especially my dad. We had to leave everything we had, all our lives. The worst thing was that my older brother couldn't travel because he had reached the age of 21 and was removed from the papers.

We suffered a lot, none of us wanted to come, but in the end my parents decided that the best thing to do was to move. We arrived here on March 27th of 2007. As I said the reason why we came was because my dad thought it was better for us to come here because the economic situation in Ecuador was kind of tight and we couldn't miss the chance of getting new opportunities.

At first I didn't like being here, all I wanted was to be in Ecuador. I cried a lot, I felt very depressed and everything reminded me of my country. I couldn't go anywhere because I didn't know anything or anyone. I just wasn't happy and my whole family felt the same way. One of the hardest things was that I didn't want to accept the fact that I had left everything I loved to come to this foreign country and be unhappy.

After the first couple of months things got better, especially when I started going to school. I met new people and made some friends. Finally I started going out to distract myself. I identified with my new friends because all of them had gone through the same situation as me. A few weeks later, my parents found a job at the airport and things at home got better too, but still I missed my life back in Ecuador.

After three years living here, things have changed a lot. Before I didn't like being here, now I feel like I've become more independent and responsible. Although I still miss my country and love to return there on vacations, now I know I won't live in Ecuador ever again. Here I've found opportunities that I won't find in my country. I know here I'll have a better future and if I go back to live in Ecuador I'll have more difficulties getting what I want. I am used to doing things alone. I work to get my own money to buy whatever I want and to help my parents with the home expenses. Now I prefer to watch TV shows in English rather than in Spanish. My favorite shows are Degrassi, The Jersey Shore and Family Guy. I still love my mom's food and that's something that won't change.



like to

A typical day for me in this country is going to school and meeting with my friends, going to class, listening to the teachers, participating in class, and doing whatever I'm told to do. After finishing school I usually talk to my friends before going home. At home I help my mother if she needs me to do something and talk to her about my day or hers, then we eat with my dad and maybe with my brother if he is at home. The rest of the afternoon I usually take a nap and then do my homework while watching some TV.

In 20 years I see myself as a professional, with my career set and my goals achieved. I hope to be a successful woman. I'll be an interpreter at an international company and I'll have a good position. Maybe I'll be still living in the United States or maybe in other country, but I'll always return to my country often. If I have children, I'll make sure they know what my roots and culture are, and they'll know my story and will understand how hard my life as an immigrant was.

My Immigration Experiences

Written by Melissa Calle, edited by Blythe Calderley

This is a story about Melissa Calle. She is an 18-year-old girl, and she came from Envigado, Colombia four years ago. She is very kind, funny, and fun to talk to. I am her buddy, and we write letters to each other. I always have fun writing letters to her and learning about her. This is the story about her immigration to New York City. ~Blythe Calderley



My name is Melissa Calle. I Am 18 years old, I am from Colombia and I came to this country four years ago. I love sports, especially tennis, soccer and basketball which I play during the school year. I go to Newcomers High School and this is my last year. I've been studying here since I came on August 24, 2007, and that's how I learned how to speak English. I've found that many people in this country have lived through almost the same experiences as me; some of them don't have the same luck I have because I've had everything I need and more.

In my childhood my dad used to work in a glass factory as the supervisor; my mom used to be a tailor. They were both born in Envigado, Colombia. I used to be the baby of my house so all the attention was for me. I used to have fun playing outside

with my friends and cousins. I enjoyed my life when I was a kid and I didn't have any difficulties.

When I grew up a typical day for me was to wake up early in the morning (5AM) get ready and wait for my school bus to pick me up and drive me up to school. Once I got there I had to wait until 6:30AM for my classes to start. In Colombia, school used to be different because once you passed the year, you kept taking the same classes but a little bit more difficult, and if you got into 7th grade, you'd take more classes. At a minimum, you had to take 13 classes or more. Also, teachers came to you

in your classroom, which normally was the one you had for a year. You took all your classes in that room except for gym and drawing. This meant that you had to get along with the same people for a year. Usually it was really fun and classes weren't that hard.



During the weekends or vacations I used to travel or go to some other places around Colombia. It was really fun. There was no way for you to get bored, because even if you stayed home you'd find something to do; your cousins or

friends were always there sharing time with you, everybody was always there when you needed them, and you used to know everybody that lived around you. Everything was perfect.

In Colombia our culture is very diverse with a broad range of district groups that have unique customs and accents, social patterns and cultural adaptations. They are classified into three cultures, interior, countryside and coastal regions. Covering about 440,000 square miles (1.14 million square kilometers and the Pacific Ocean), Colombia is connected to Central America and Panama. Colombia borders Ecuador, Perú, Brasil, Venezuela and Panamá. Colombia is famous for coffee, bananas, sugar and flowers. Colombia also has great biodiversity with 1,550 species of birds and over 13,000 species of plants. Colombia is also known as a nation of mixed race.

The big change in my life started when I was doing really badly at school, not only with my grades but with my behavior. I started doing things that I wasn't supposed to be doing because of my age and because of my health. I used to go to COLEGIO LA PRESENTACION DE ENVIGADO, one of the best schools in Colombia. Teachers were really strict so they kicked me out of school when I started misbehaving and doing silly things. After that my mom went to many schools and tried to get me in, but she thought that it would be much better if I came here for a while and tried to figure things out for myself by thinking about what I did before and what I really wanted for my life.

After we came here, my mom asked me to stay and try to change my attitude and my behavior and to realize that here I was going to be much better and I was

going to have more opportunities than I was going to have if I stayed in Colombia. At first I didn't want to stay but later on I realized that it might be the best for me and that maybe this was the type of opportunity that I needed to change and get my life on track.



I've changed a lot. I grew up and I became mature. I also learned from my mistakes and I realized that for everything you want in life you need to work a lot and always give 100% I also learned that you can never give up no matter how hard everything feels in that moment . I also understood that life can be hard at times, but there's always a solution for everything. Once you start growing up you see how things work in real life and how important it is to take charge of your own responsibilities and set your own goals to be someone in life.

In the future, I see myself as an educated person with a good career. I also see myself living in an apartment in Queens, maybe Astoria or Forest Hills. I also see myself coaching, either soccer or tennis and if I can maybe basketball. I actually can't imagine a future without playing sports. I have a lot of dreams and goals that I would like to come true. If I have a choice, I would love to stay here in New York.

My Story

Written by Jonathan Chungata, edited by Ian Stewart

Jonathan Chungata is an 18-year-old immigrant from Ecuador who arrived in the United States in April, 2007. His parents regretfully decided to leave him behind in Ecuador to live with his grandparents, after they moved to the U.S for economic reasons. They wanted to provide more opportunities for their children, but the separation unexpectedly lasted 13 years. His experience in America has been complicated, and initially his new country took quite a bit of getting used to. However, he has successfully settled into a new, exciting culture, and he hopes to make America his permanent home.

~ Ian

Stewart



My name is Jonathan Chungata. I'm 19 years old. I'm from Ecuador, and I've been living in this country for almost four years. When I was in my first two years of life, I was in Ecuador with my parents, and I was close to them. But for the rest of my childhood they weren't with me. It was sad because I was only two years old my parents made the decision to come to this country, so that they could give me a better future. I stayed with my grandparents, aunts and uncles.

As a child, when I was living in Ecuador, I went to school, did what the teachers said to do, and studied hard. I was a very good student. I had fun playing with my friends because my parents weren't with me to enjoy my childhood with them.

My native country Ecuador is a democratic country, and in my point of view there is much more freedom in my country than in this country. In my country, if you are 18 years old you can do whatever you want. However in this country you have to be 21 years old to do whatever you want. This is why I like my native country, but now I've gotten used to living in this country.

My parents are from Ecuador, and they lived in the same province, Morona Santiago, when they met each other. My dad asked for my mom's hand but my grandfather didn't want my mom to be with my dad because he thought that my dad had a lot of girls. So my father decided to take my mom to live with him, and my dad married my mom. In time my grandfather realized that my dad loved my mom, and they loved each other.

My grandparents are the people I am most grateful for. They took care of me when I was a child. My grandparents had six children, three women and three men. My grandparents are good people who care about others, and like to help others. I was really close to them. I'm talking about my mom's parents. Where my grandparents lived was a small town where everyone knew each other, and the people were very good friends. Actually it is the same town where my grandfather lives now.

My grandmother suffered from a disease that doctors could not identify, and that was something that made me feel too sad. My grandmother suffered a lot because the disease was slowly killing her and one day she died from the disease. That affected me very much because I loved her and she loved me. I was her favorite grandson. But I think it was the best for her so she wouldn't suffer anymore. But it was a great loss to all of us who loved her, especially to my grandfather. After the death of my grandmother I lived with my grandfather, aunts and uncles.

Well when my parents came to this country they called me, and told me they were going to take me with them. I was still a child and didn't think my parents would send me to this country. Then when I was almost 15 years old my parents called me quite excited, and told me that the papers or visa for me to come to this country were arranged. At that time I didn't know whether to be happy or sad because it was news that would change my life completely. Also, I didn't know whether to be happy because I was finally going to see my parents after almost 15 years, or be sad because I was going to come to this country and leave the family with whom I had lived all my childhood. The news left me very sad because I was going to move away from all my friends, and especially my grandfather, uncles and aunts. But that was my destiny.

I came to this country on April 5, 2007. My journey to this country was very long, and was one of the saddest moments of my life. I was leaving the family that raised me, and took care of me for a long time. At the same time I felt anxious to be in a country very different from mine and also anxious about going to see my parents. When I arrived at the airport my mom, and my brother were waiting to pick me up, but I realized that my dad wasn't there. I asked my mom, "Where is my dad?", and she said that he was working, and therefore he couldn't come. I wasn't upset about it because I understood that my dad was working.

When I first came to this country it was very difficult for me because I spoke almost no English, and also because when I entered the school I didn't have any friends. Also when I first came to this country, it was all very sad because I missed the family that I had left in Ecuador. Now, after living here for a while, everything is very different. Now I'm a teenager and I understand why my parents brought me to this country. They just wanted a better future for me. Now even if I'm not with my family in Ecuador, I'm with my parents and that makes me happy. Now I have many friends and I've learned to speak English. Today I have learned to live with American culture. I love the music in this country especially rap music which is my favorite. But that doesn't mean that I've stopped listening to the music of my country.

A typical day for me in this country is going to school, and after class is finished, I go home and do my homework. When I get home sometimes it gives me a feeling of sadness because most of the time no one is there, and I spend most of my time alone. When I get home my parents are working, and when my parents come home, I'm already sleeping. This is not good but I've gotten used to it.

We all have our dreams and goals. My dream is to have a career, and to work to help my parents. My goals are to finish my studies, and to have a good profession. Everyone has a picture of where and how we see ourselves in the future, and mine is living with my family in this country, or in my country. I don't care where. The only thing that matters is being happy, as a person who works and helps the family. In the future I imagine myself as a person who works hard, and a person who is responsible.

The Roots That Led to Me

Written by Maciej Deptula, edited by Gabriel Cavanaugh

I met Maciej in December, 2010. After writing letters to each other, we met in his high school, Newcomers. This school is only for immigrants like him. When I met Maciej, he was open to meeting all of my friends and me and his attitude brightened up the whole room. Here is his story.

~ Gabriel Cavanaugh



My name is Maciej Deptula and I come from Poland. I am 16 years old and I am in 11th grade. I was born on November 24, 1993 in the city called Szczytno. I have lived here since June of 2008. My childhood was great like I hope everyone can have. When you are child you don't think about other problems; you just care about having a lot of fun and I miss that so much. I used to play with other kids from my neighborhood; those days were the happiest in my life.

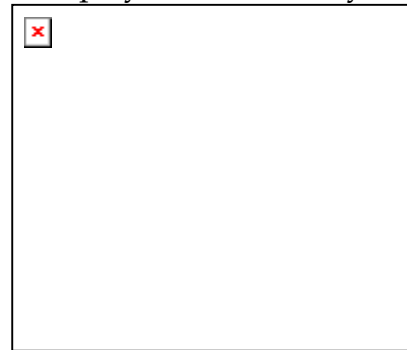
The typical days in my home with my family



were good. I lived with my sister, parents, and my grandparents, since my father went to the United States of America in 2006. We tried to spend our days together and we always ate dinner together. During the summer we always tried to travel. We traveled in our country and also in other European countries.

School in my native country is similar to school's here, but in my opinion in Poland you need to study more than here. For fun I used to play soccer with my friends or just meet with them, or play some computer games.

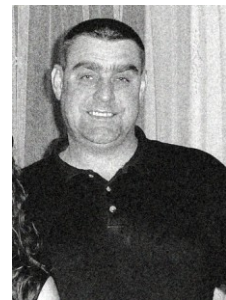
In my country the only one violating other people's human rights are Skinheads. This is the organization of people who hate the immigrants, people with another skin color, and homosexuals. They also believe in some Nazi ideas.



The political climate in Poland is fully democratic. I think it is very similar to the United States government. We are allowed to vote for a President and a Political Group, and we also have a Senate and a House of the Representatives.

Polish culture is important for us. Every region has its own costumes but the national music is the same and so are national dances. My favorite national food is the dumpling. My favorite movie is "Potop" by Andrzej Wajda.

My parents are Danuta and Jaroslaw Deptula. They are from Poland, from a nice and big village called Lipowiec. When they got married they moved to the city where I was born. They were neighbors and they knew each other from kindergarten. Both of them had a happy childhood but they also were working to help their parents on their farms. My mother hated summer vacation because she had to work hard all summer, that's why she said to herself that she would not do physical work when she became an adult. My father was also working on the farm to help his parents but he enjoyed that more than school. Then he went to the army and after that he became a fireman. My mother was good in school and she is so smart. But my father, he didn't like to learn. For fun they met with their friends and played with them.



My
father



My grandparents are Stanislaw and Czesia Bakula, and they are the parents of my mother. Czeslaw and Lucyna Deptula are the parents of my father. They all come from villages. My grandmother is from village Chudek, my grandfather is from Klimki, villages in Poland. They had a poor

education because they lived during very terrible times during and after World War II. My grandmother on my mother's side was very smart and she wanted to continue her education but her mother didn't have enough money to continue the education, so she had to work.

My grandfather on my mother's side had a very difficult childhood because the Nazi soldiers murdered his father. My grandfather told me that they just came to his house and were searching for something, and then they took some papers and his father away. My grandfather didn't exactly remember what kind of documents they took, but his mother told him that they took personal documents and also a U.S. passport. The Nazis said that he would go home in a few minutes, but he never returned, and they never found his body. They also took his mother to prison because she gave bread to the partisans. So he had to work with his siblings to survive. I cannot imagine kids living by themselves for two years.

My great grandfather and great great grandfather were born in the United States. Then my great grandfather moved to Poland and got married to a Polish woman. I feel very curious because I wonder about some of my family here. My great grandfather had many siblings and only he and his two brothers moved to Poland. The other siblings stayed here. I would like to know and find them.

My grandparents from my father side were also born in villages. My grandfather was born in Poland in Surowe and my grandmother was born in Stare Kiejkuty also in Poland. I know that the father of my grandfather on my father's side was fighting in World War II. He fought in 1939 in Poland and then when Nazi Germany took over Poland he immigrated to England and joined their Polish Army Corps. I also know that he fought in the battle over Monte Cassino. My grandfather on my father's side told me about his father. He said that he enjoyed being in the army because he wanted to fight for freedom. He immigrated to fight because he couldn't imagine himself living without freedom. After the war ended he came back to his family but four years after he came back home, he died. My grandfather used to tell me a lot of stories about his father and his adventures.

The first person who came here was my father. My mother was here for only one month of summer. After two years we decided to move to the United States so we went to Warsaw and then to the U.S embassy and we got visas. Then when we came here we got green cards. We came here for a better education and opportunities and also to live in the capital of the world.

My journey was so exciting because I wanted to see New York. The journey itself was seven – eight hours long. Life here was weird when we arrived; the strangest thing for me was the garbage on the street, and also I saw many different cultures here, which was different than in Poland. But also life here was good and fun because we were visiting so many nice places in NY. Also I meet my first friend very fast so I

had a lot of fun.

I've changed since moving here. I am more confident than before, and I feel like I fit in the society. I don't know exactly how I have taken on American culture but it just happened. It wasn't hard because my culture is very similar to American culture. I like "Family Guy" just like others Americans.

I don't know exactly what I will do in the future. I change my mind all the time, but I want to be successful in life. In 20 years I see myself having a wife and kids, also a house and good job. I don't know what I will be doing, but I was thinking about becoming a pilot. I think I will be living in the United States but I am not so sure. I want to go back to my country. I imagine myself as a gentle and intelligent person, and also successful in life. I will be a person who enjoys life and is happy with what he has.

Life as an Immigrant

Written by Diprojith Dey, edited by Sean McGowan

Although he is still learning English, Dipro, as he come to be called, has a great attitude and an amazing sense of humor. When I first met him on Human Right's Day at Newcomer's High School, he was immediately welcoming and telling jokes. Behind this humorous front, Dipro is filled with passion and integrity. He is the kind of kid you have a heated debate with, then turn around and hang out with the same day.

~ Sean McGowan



My name is Diprojith Dey and I'm 18. I am currently studying at Newcomers High School in 12th grade. I am a newcomer to this country and I am from Bangladesh. I came here about one year ago. I'm really happy to share my experiences from my past. At first it was hard for me to adjust here because of three reasons. Language was my first problem. I came here knowing little English. Secondly, I came here in the winter time. It was cold outside and the weather was completely different than in our country which is much warmer than here. And the third reason is cultural differences. When I went outside I saw difference faces. I saw black and white faces that I didn't see in my country. The food was also difference than ours.

I have great memories from my childhood. I like to remember these memories. I never saw any violence at that time. All I remember is a time full of happiness and a peaceful life. I used to live in a big family of 16 members. My grandfather, grandmother, uncle, aunt and cousins also lived with us. My father and mother had to work in the morning, so I had to stay home with my grandmother and grandfather. My cousins were older than me so my uncle took them to school. I had to pass my morning time with my grandfather. I wasn't bored because my grandfather always took me to the mall with him. He also took me to his friend's house and he played cricket with me. My whole family came home at three o'clock.

I started school at six years old. It was not far from our house. When I started school I was nervous and scared, but my teachers were friendly. I started to enjoy my school. We used to celebrate each other's birthdays in school. We also visited historical places together.

Bangladesh is a developing country and most people work hard to live. The population is huge. But the government works hard for the people's rights. We got our independence from Pakistan in 1971 and now people have the right to live in peace. The political party works for the people. Altogether it's not so bad.

People of my country are very friendly. We like to work together and share our wealth with each other. We speak Bengali, like Bengali songs, foods and movies. We are the first country who sacrificed our blood for our country. We love our language. Most of the people in our country are Muslims. There are also Hindus and Christian people in our country. We respect each other's religion. Pohela Boishakh is the first day of our Bengali year. Women wear saris and men wear lungis on that day. We celebrate this day all over the world. We also celebrate our independence day on the 16th of December.

As far as I know my parents are from India. My grandfather came to Bangladesh about 50 years ago when my father was two years old. My great grandfather was from India. They came to Bangladesh for better living.

One day my father told us he would like to come to the United States because the United States is one of the most developed countries in the world. At first my grandfather was not happy about that. I was totally shocked. It was hard for me to think I would leave my grandfather, cousins and my school. But my father told me we were going there for better living conditions, and I would get a better education, and also have more friends than here. He also promised we would come every year to visit my grandfather and grandmother.

My father took us to the United States Immigration Office. They gave us some paper work and told us to pay an immigration fee. After three days my father went to their office with all the paper work completed. They took our passports and told us

that they would call us after the process was finished. After some days they sent us a confirmation letter and told us we had to visit their office again. Then they gave our passports back and told us we were ready to go. My father said yes and confirmed our air plane tickets.

The time started to fly. Time ran so fast and it was time to say goodbye to all. It was really hard to imagine that I would not see their faces for a long time. I spent my whole childhood with those people. It was a 24-hour air plane ride from Bangladesh to America. When I got on the plane it was really fun. I sat next to the window, and I was waiting for the plane to fly. I saw outside and it was really awesome. Our plane stopped in Dubai after 5 hours. I was tired. We took a 30 minute break and then got back on the plane. After 14 hours we reached the United States.

I was nervous when I entered the airport. I saw all kinds of different faces. My father told me to hold his hand. People were speaking English. The police were holding guns and checking our bodies. It was really scary. It was cold outside. Bangladesh is a warmer country. In that moment I felt I had come to a new and different place. My aunt gave me a jacket to survive. It was a memorable journey.

After I came here I changed a lot. I saw some new faces that I had never seen in my life. The roads are not same, lifestyles are not same and the language isn't same. My father rented a small apartment. We lived in a big house in Bangladesh, so it was really hard for me to adjust. I didn't have my TV and computer. I got bored in my house. I used to speak Bengali in my country but here I started to speak English. It was a huge change.

After a while I started to take on some of the American culture. I started to like American music, movies, food and especially TV shows. My father bought a new TV for me. I started to go outside and adjust to the weather. I started to like hip-hop songs and dance. American Idol is my favorite TV show and I watch lots of American movies.

As an immigrant teen I joined Newcomers High School. Here it's really fun to mix with people from other countries. I really like to live in Queens. It's an immigrants' living place. I am also doing community service for The Queens Center. It's fun to work there. I also work in Duane Reade on the weekends I really lead a busy life. I never think about the fact that I am an immigrant who came here only one year ago.

Everyone wants to be successful in life, everyone has their own dream. I think without a dream life means nothing. I would like to reach my dream after 20 years. I would like to be a businessman. I hope to run my own business. I really like to be here in New York. I don't want to have to leave New York to live in my native country. I would like to become a good New Yorker.

Discouragement Is Not Ivoirian
Written by Check Diop, edited by Max Wilson

I have known Check Erick Diop for the last two years of my life. We have been communicating through letters and I know him well enough to say that Check is one of the greatest guys I have ever met. Check is the type of person who embraces both his Ivorian culture and his newfound American culture with gusto. Check took a leap of faith by coming to America to live with his mother whom he had not seen since he was a young child. However, because he is such a positive, enthusiastic person, he was able to adapt to his new life quickly. Hardworking, athletic (he loves to play basketball), and ambitious, Check embodies all that is best about the immigrant experience in America. I feel lucky to call him a friend.

~Max Wilson



Check Erick Diop, second of the name. I am a 17 year old boy from the Ivory Coast. I have light black skin, and I am slim, tall, and smart. I am in the 12th grade at Newcomers High School. I came to the USA in July of 2008.

Sometimes I sit down and think of how my childhood in my country was full of joy and good moments. I was always surrounded by good people. In the town where I grew up, almost everybody knew each other, and they looked after each other's kids. From school to home, it had always been great. At home my dad was like the big boss, because he was the only one everybody respected, the only person to pay all the bills, and feed us, and make sure we studied hard, and ate well. Two times a week he would take us out, to visit one of the biggest buildings in West Africa, which was The Hotel Ivoire. It's located in the capital of the Ivory Coast, which is Abidjan. I still remember the first time I saw it, if I am not mistaken, I was just 5. My dad said I was basically hypnotized by the beauty of that wonder.

School was also very fun, but very hard. Teachers would whoop our behind for every missing homework assignment. Trust me it doesn't feel good to be punished in front of all of your friends, especially the girls. Some teachers wouldn't stop until they saw tears. It was just horrible but it made us work hard. Then, at home you might get punished as well by your parents. And when you were a teacher's son like me, you had to bring good grades home, or be ready to endure the anger of your father.

Strong, with dark skin, nice eyes, as tall as 6'2", my dad was respected by all in the community. Everybody knew him for his wealth, and his loud voice. People were more afraid of him, but on the inside he was a kind and great father. On Wednesdays, dad would allow me to play my video games, or go to my friend's house. Soccer and handball were my favorite sports.

I also had very challenging moments. When I was eleven years old, I moved from my dad's house and went to live with my mother's mom. She lived in a very cool neighborhood. It was at a time when gangs were really frequent. With some of my friends that I already knew since when I was born, we started to do some bad stuff. It all started at home: we stole our parents' money, and we started to disobey our parents' orders.

As more time passed, it felt like we were getting stronger, so we wanted to do bigger things, such as smoking, drinking and have sex. Soon enough, the crew wasn't just formed of just five little kids, but now there were 11 mad boys ready to show that they were GANGSTERS. We were inspired by a Brazilian movie named "La Favela", which reflected the story young Brazilians who were living in the projects called 'favelas'. We then found a name for our crew from that movie, which was "The Microbes". We smoked all kind of things, marijuana, cigarettes, and even heroin. We made a name for ourselves very quickly in the neighborhood: we robbed, and had several gang fights for territory. The crew became even larger very fast, and over time, stronger.

Now we weren't only kids, some of us were in our 20's. They were the ones who would go rob people. We just had to keep the guns. We all had a knife, and were

always walking in a group, in case someone wanted to attack one of us. People knew us, from everywhere. And again, it was getting really serious. Very fast I realized that it wasn't a simple game anymore. Or trying to be cool, or looking tough. People were seriously getting hurt. A lot of my friends were caught and sent to jail every day. Some of us got stabbed almost to death, and had to run away from home.

Now the strong young “noushi” (how we call gangsters in Ivoirian slang) were just some normal kids. Most of us, especially the younger ones, started to realize that it was way too dangerous. Some went on to be real robbers and they paid a lethal price. I still have some thoughts for them, and miss them every day. In one way or another, deep in my mind, I am still a “Microbe” it's just that I know that I don't need to hurt people to look cool, or be tough. I sometimes, see people trying to act tough or join gangs here. It kind of makes me laugh. Because even though it's a different country it's still the same issue. And I perfectly understand that.

Here I've made a lot of friends: they are all from different countries and somehow they went through the same situation as me when they were in their countries. Our similarities made us become best friends. In the United States, there are a lot of gangs too. We are well aware of that and we don't want to make the same mistakes we did when we were in our countries. So we study hard, and give the best of ourselves to make our parents proud.

People in my country wouldn't say it, because we all lived in a very peaceful way since our first president, but there aren't many human rights in the Ivory Coast. There was only one political party. Every time someone tried to create a political party, the day after that person was killed. Nobody complained, because even though we had only one political party and the same president all the time, life was still very easy, and the people felt good. My dad was always saying “God bless that old man”. He was referring to the president Felix Houphouet Boigny. But ever since his death in 1993, the year I was born, things have really changed. Life has become much harder. Everything became more expensive, poor people were getting poorer and the rich richer. Instead of working for the people, the new government was spending the country's money.

People in my country LOVE to dance, and almost every day a new dance come out. We love partying, and having fun. Abidjan has been called by other countries “la ville du show” which means the city of fun, because of the varieties kind of food, and good music and all of the night clubs. Ivoirian people knew a lot of suffering during the colonial period. It's as if we decided we have been too miserable for too long and now it is time to have fun. So everyday has to be celebrated as if it's the last one.

“Discouragement is not Ivoirian” is a famous quote in the Ivory Coast, which basically means that whatever happens, Ivoirians never let themselves down; they stay strong, and stay happy. Also there are about 60 different ethnicities in the Ivory

Coast. Each ethnic group speaks a language different from the others that is unique to its own culture. I am a "Bete". These are people from a neighboring country, Liberia. They were the first people to arrive in the Ivory Coast, and were followed later by several other ethnicities from other places. The country was founded and given the name Ivory Coast, because of the wealth of the land, and the immense amount of elephants that it had.

My fraternal grandfather immigrated to the Ivory Coast less than a century ago, from Senegal. He came to the Ivory Coast to make a fortune. He started a small business of cows, then bought a small plantation, and later owned one of the biggest bakeries in the region. He later brought over my grandmother, also from Senegal. After just a year, they gave birth to their first child. They had in total more than four kids together, before my grandfather married three other women. He then had four wives, and 19 kids, 11 men, and 8 women.

My dad was the second of my grandfather's kids. My dad used to tell me that before, only the three oldest girls of the family were allowed to go to school. The others had to stay home to take care of the house and cook. Even though only three girls were allowed to go to school, that was still a big number back then. At the time, dad said "girls had to be at home and boys in school or working the land". Grandpa, made a huge exception by allowing three of his daughters to go to school. They had a large family house, where each of my grandfather's wives had their own room. The women would sleep two in each room, and the men, two to three in each room, depending on their ages. My grandfather would eat his meal with the two oldest men. The women would eat all in a group with their mothers. The others boys would eat all in two groups. My dad told me that life was very easy because everything was cheap, and simple.

My grandfather was very strict, but knew a lot of stuff. They called him "The Big Tree". Dad said " the day The Big Tree fell down, all the birds flew away, and never came back to unite." He referred to his brothers and sisters, whom after my grandfather's death each all followed a different path, with the money they earned from what my grandfather left at his death. Dad always told me my grandfather was a real man; he was strong and seemed to know everything. Dad said even sometimes grandpa would throw the "cories" and predict the future. My father said somehow my grandfather felt his death coming and started to teach everything he knew to his sons. Everybody had a special assignment. My father's was to make sure that the bakery kept on working and the family stayed together. My father failed, since the family is divided, and the bakery is not at its best right now. My dad should have prevented that from happening, and since he couldn't, he failed.

It was just one night like all the other previous ones. When my phone rang, it was my mom. "Hey mom," I said. Without even losing a second she asked me if I missed her, if I was thinking about her, if I wanted to see her, and if I wanted to make

her proud. Of course, I said yes. She asked me if I would be happy to come live with her. I have to admit I was shocked. My mom had lived in the United States, since I don't remember when. She left my father when I was only three years old. Ever since, all I knew about her was her voice and some pictures. Nothing hurts more than to grow up without your mom next to you. People say that it's hard for a kid to grow up without his father, but I say it's impossible for a kid to grow up without his mother.

I knew I would sooner or later go live with her. It took a year for the preparation and the papers to be all in form, before my great departure. I think I left just for the good image. I believed that when people went to live in the United States, they were usually rich and people respected them a lot when they came back to their country.

On July 15th, 2008 I put my first foot down on US soil. Everything was so different for me, from the way the people talked, walked, even ate, to how houses were built. I have changed a lot since I came here. Physically, I have become bigger, stronger, and better looking. My skin color has become brighter, and I have become much taller. I also have gotten more mature. I have learned so many new things and new sports like basketball, American handball and tennis. Ever since I came here, I must admit that my life style has changed and even the way I walk. I walk much faster now because I've got to walk to get to the subway.

"Everybody Hates Chris" is my favorite TV show, and I love eating sweet chicken and rice. I also love sweet potato pie and apple crumble pie. Rap and R&B are what I listen to most of the time. They are my favorite kinds of music. At home I've got to take care of my brothers, and do the laundry. Speaking of brothers, I have two younger brothers who were born here, and two older sisters that immigrated with me. During my free time I hang out with my friends, go to the mall, or play basketball in the park. In my 'hood, we basically all know each other, even if we don't always talk to each other. Between teens, most of the time it is very hard to break the ice for the first time, but it's still great.

I always do my best in school as I do in my personal life. I want to be either a very successful businessman or a great lawyer. After I have served for 10 years in the US Marines, I am planning on living in Monaco, or in Manhattan, because of the way they dress, and or because I love islands. Still, I really want to go back to my country, hopefully I will be rich enough to help my country, create job opportunities for young Ivoirians, and help in its development. However, I want to stay as humble as I have always been, a good man who helps others. I want my name to survive forever as one of the people who fought to try to make this world a better place, with no hate.

So Far Away

Written by Alisher Guseynov, edited by Jack Steinberg

I first met Alisher Gusneyov through the buddy program that our schools shared. From the first letter he wrote me, I could tell he was an interesting, outspoken person. He told me that he aspired to become an American, and that he would use the opportunities given to him by this new country. He is hardworking, and America could use more people like him. ~ Jack Steinberg



Hello my name is Alisha. I'm 18 years old and in my senior year at Newcomers High School. I was born in Russia in Moscow. I used to live in Moscow and in St. Petersburg. It's my third year in the United States. When I arrive here I didn't speak any English. That was very funny because my teachers were trying to talk with me and I didn't understand anything they were saying to me. I was studying English in my country but it was British and many words that I knew were different from English words. My culture in my country is not different from the USA, it's the same as here. In my country when we were kids we used to go out and play games after school, going on trips to many other places.

When I was a little boy, I went to kindergarten like all little kids. I used to love to go there because I had many friends with whom I could play many different games. I used to love playing soccer when I was little. I thought that I would become a very famous soccer star. I used to live with my mother. My father died when I was three years old; I don't really remember him. My mother gave me everything I needed to have and she treated me very well. I spent very good times with her. She always said to me that we have to respect people no matter what, that we always have to respect older people and that we always have to fight for our rights. When I was six years old I started swimming and that was a lot of fun for me. Also when I was seven years old I went to school. I really didn't like to study because the classes were so long and I had to sit in one place for forty-five minutes. It was crazy for me but then later on I really started liking it, because my teachers were so nice and funny. They always knew how to make our class happy and do work at the same time. The music that I use to like when I was little is by Premier-Minister; this is the group who had the best songs but now this group doesn't exist anymore.

Like I said before I don't really remember my father but my mother told me many interesting things about him. He was a police officer and everybody else knew him in my city because he was a person who respected everyone no matter what people did to him. My father was Russian and my mother was from Azerbaijan but she was born in Turkey just like my grandmother. My grandfather on my mother's side's father was Russian and my grandmother was half-Turkish, half-Azerbaijani. They knew the Russian language because they were living in Russia. My grandfather was fighting for the USSR during WWII. He told me how it was during the war. It was very sad because he told me that many of his friends, his brother, and even his father died fighting for our rights and the freedom that we have now. He always told me to fight for everything that you have and don't let anybody take it from you because it's yours. He also told me that everybody is equal and that I always have to treat people nicely if they are nice to me.

When I finished ninth grade in my country, my mother told me that we were going to the United States. I was so sad because I didn't want to leave my country; I had everything there: my school, my team, my home, my dogs, my grandparents, and I didn't want to lose everything, but my mother explained to me that sometimes in our life we have to start everything from zero, that's how life is. We came here for me because my mother wanted me to see the entire world and felt it was a very good opportunity for me.

We came here when I was 15 years old. When we just came I didn't speak English and I had no friends. I really missed my native country. I was very shy and afraid of speaking. I thought that maybe people wouldn't like me because I didn't speak English and they would think of me in a bad way, but then my mother told me "just be yourself and it doesn't matter what people say about you. I will always love

you because you are my son". I felt proud and I wasn't afraid to talk even if I didn't know anything. I knew that one day I would learn English and would be free to speak with anyone I wanted.

Now I'm eighteen years old and you may ask me, "Who are you now?" and I will tell you that I'm Alisha who learned English, who knows what I want to do in my life. Now I listen to American music, watch TV, and go to the movies just like a normal person who was born here. I have many friends who I love, I have a girlfriend, I'm part of the swimming and volleyball teams, and I really enjoy my time here. Many of you may say, "But how did you get over your feelings?" I will tell you that in the school that I went to I saw many people like me who didn't speak English, but I saw that everyone of them was trying so I decided to try and not give up no matter what. As an immigrant I will say that we are people who want to be ourselves. I'm who I am and no one will ever change that. I don't really care what other people say about me maybe they hate me, but I know that the people that I love will never say anything bad about me and that's what makes me who I am.

In 20 years from now I see myself living in a big house with five kids. I will live with my mother and my wife, two dogs, and have a big family. I would love to become a lawyer and live in California because it's so beautiful there. When I become a lawyer I would love to help immigrant people fight for their rights and tell them what rights they have. I will help not only immigrants, but anyone who needs my help. If he/she is not able to pay I will help them anyway because money is not important for me in this life. The most important thing is what people will say about me.

Unforgettable Experiences

Written by Fernando Guzhnay, edited by Ian Stewart

Fernando Guzhany is 18 years old, and moved to the United States from Ecuador in April, 2008, when he was 16. He came to the U.S to join his parents who had left him to live with his grandparents when he was a child because they were trying to build a better life for their family in America. When Fernando first arrived he was delighted with the summer weather, and he played soccer all the time. However, as summer changed to winter Fernando saw another side of his new country that he did not particularly enjoy. In Ecuador the weather is always warm, and Fernando was not used to the harsh change of seasons. Over the last couple of years Fernando has gotten used to his new country, and he likes his school and his friends. Ultimately he hopes to get a good education in America and return to work with his family and friends in Ecuador.

~Ian Stewart



My name is Fernando Guzhnay. I am 18 years old. I am in 11th grade. I'm from Ecuador and I have been in the USA for two years.

I will talk about my childhood. Well when I was 4 years old my father left me in my country (Ecuador) and that was so sad for me because it is difficult to separate from your dear parents. He left me alone because he wanted to give me the best things and a better future. That's why I can't be angry at him for leaving me alone. After my father left me I went to live with my grandparents. Life for me was happier with my grandfather because I had a lot of friends with whom I played.

Four years later I had another farewell which was also hard because now it was my mom who was leaving me alone. After this my life changed because my grades in school went down. I felt really sad but one year later I got used to that life without my parents being alone most of the time. Although it was sad, I had to accept.

In my country I did a lot of things for fun like build kites, ride a bicycle and play soccer all weekends on the little land behind my house. That was really fun because when I was baby I liked to do things like that.

In Ecuador, human rights are the same as in this country. The children can't work and all people have the same rights. If they commit a crime and if they are found guilty, they are judged, and sent to jail.

The most beautiful thing in my country is the weather. It is always the same weather and the temperature is a little warm. My culture is wonderful because we have songs, clothes, and food that we recognize as Ecuadorian.



We all have a story and I'm going to tell the story of my family. My family history is sad because they had a hard life. They had to work very hard, and they didn't have the resources to study. They were very young and worked very hard to help their parents because they were so poor, and they couldn't help their children. My parents are both from Ecuador and their names are Luis, Mariana, Eudofilia, and Eziquiel and they had a big experience. When they started to be a family they had a lot of problems. They had no home in which to live and much less food to eat so they were very poor.

My immigration experience was sad and at the same time very hard. I left my country in on April 24, 2008. It all started when I arrived late to my home from school, and at that time my grandparents asked me if I wanted to go to the USA. And I asked

myself why my grandparents asked me that. I replied, "I don't know", but I thought this would be the time to change my life. So then my answer was "yes". Then my father called me from the US and he told me how life in the US was. My decision was yes, so I started to get my passport.

Three weeks later I was ready to leave my country but when I left it gave me so much grief and sadness to leave my grandparents. I had to be strong, and this was when my adventure started. I came here without papers. I have had a lot of difficult experience because it is very hard to move to this country and live in this country. It is most difficult for undocumented people like me to survive in this country. I had to suffer a lot because I had to cross the border. To cross the border you need to be strong and have faith in God. When I was crossing the border was when I realized that one must always evaluate the things we do to our parents. When a child suffers in the flesh, they are suffering more than or equal to their child.

When I arrived in this country I thought that everything was nice, and when I arrived in this country it was beautiful because it was summer time all the time. We could go out to play soccer. But when the winter started it was so ugly because here it is a lot colder and I am still here. I realized that behind the beauty, this country is hiding a dark side.



Today my life is different because I have a lot friend in my school. And I already got used to this life and these traditions. My life has changed in many ways. Now I like to be responsible in school. Also if my parents give me a limit to stay out I just obey them. I help my parents any way I can, so now I feel better than when I was in Ecuador. My lifestyle has improved. Some of my hopes now are to graduate from high school, then go to college, and in 20 years I want to be an electrician. I want to go back to my native country Ecuador, and work in my country with my family. It is the most important country to me for it was where I was born and grew up.



This is Me

Written by Guy Kalenga, edited by Owen Silitch

I first started to talk with Guy in September of 2010. Immediately, I could tell that he was funny, nice, and outgoing. Later on, after meeting him at Newcomers High School, I learned that he is one of the best friends somebody could have. He is loyal and will always have your back. There is no wonder why he has so many friends.

~Owen Silitch



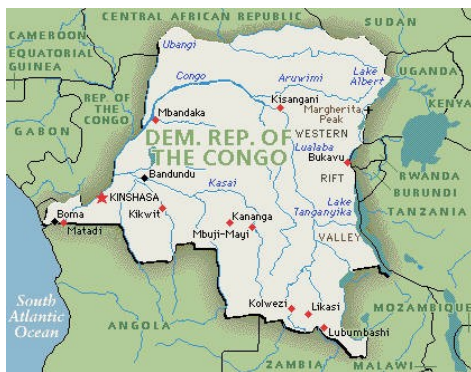
My name is Guy Kalenga. I'm 18 years old and I am in 12th grade. I am from the Democratic Republic of Congo in Africa. I have been living in United States for almost four years. My childhood was great there. I had many friends and always got everything I wanted as long as I was behaving well and doing well in school.

Talking about school, in Congo, from 1st grade to 8th grade, school started at 7:30AM- 12:15 noon and from 9th grade to 12th grade, it was from 12:30PM - 5:15 PM, every day except Saturdays. School there was really funny, same as here. It was fun for me and all my friends. We all gathered together and had fun by playing soccer or other games.

Everyone in the Congo has the right to have any religion they believe in and other rights, but there is no freedom of speech. There, if you say something that the government doesn't like or is against the government, you are in deep trouble because the government will think that you are a danger to them. It is like you're trying to oppose them. Otherwise you are free to run for any public office.

Also there is much violence in Congo. There is no respect of human rights, women's rights, and children's rights. Women and children are targets of war, especially on the west side of the country. Most women are raped, and young children are given weapons to fight during the war. As result of that, young children with guns are breaking into houses, stealing money, raping women and girls. Even my father was a victim of the civil war. My father was killed because the people, who were working with him, thought he was giving secret information to the rebel party, since he was in the same ethnic group as them. This happened during the war of 1997.

It is very hot in the Congo, like the summer time here, and it has a tropical climate. Most Congolese people like to sing and dance, and comedy is their favorite. Most shows or movies are very funny. We listen to rap, hip hop, and over most films, music, and clothing are American. The Congolese love the American style.



My father came from Lubumbashi all the way from the south east part of the country and my mother came from the west side of the country in the Bas Congo where Boma is located. My grandparents on my father's side are both from the same place as my father. From my mother side they are both from the Bas Congo. My mother's father was a soldier, my father's parent's were rich middle-class citizens.



I found out that I was coming here two days before we travelled. We came in United States because our mother was here. My mother moved to the United States four years before we got here. We came here on December 6, 2006, on British airways.. My journey was like that of a son of a president. Everywhere we went people came to greet us and showed us where to go.

My life here in the USA was unhappy the first days because it was a huge transition. Finding a new



school and making new friends was really hard because no one spoke my language and nobody could understand me. Now my life has changed a lot, I have many new friends from all over the world: North and South America, Europe and Asia.

Some of the things that all Americans of my age do are go to school parties and have fun. I enjoy all TV shows such as Sponge Bob Square Pants, Family Guy, My Wife and Kids, The 70's Show, Suite Life on Deck and Cartoons on Nicktoon. I love to listen to hip hop, pop, rap, and gospel.

Life in school is very funny. I have loving and caring friends who never want to see me in a sad mood. They are always there, whether you need them or not. At home I also have caring and love waiting for me.

In 20 years I see myself in a high position, working hard to maintain peace in the world. I will be living in New Jersey or back home. I'll be like Barack Obama seeking peace in the world.

Excelling above life's expectations

Written by Kalenga Kamy, edited by Nicole Teckchandani

It is truly difficult for a child to describe the sufferings and pains some have gone through in life and still stay strong. For Kamy Kalenga, life was no walk in the park. She had to deal with death, parting with most of her family, and leaving her country. Kamy has been so brave throughout the process of writing her story. I have known Kamy since September, when I immediately liked her and wanted to be her friend. Despite the hardships Kamy has faced, she has shown how one can move on and enjoy what is left of life.

~ Nicole Teckchandani



My name is Kamy Kalenga and I'm 17 years old. I am from the Democratic Republic of Congo. This is a country in Central Africa. I am in 12th grade now. I've been living in the United States for about four years. I love my native country very much. I like to call it the "MOTHER LAND" because it's my home, my love, and it means a lot to me, more than anybody can imagine.

It's in the heart of Africa, because it is situated in central Africa.

My childhood was one of the best parts of my life so far. I was so quiet, a kind of a girl who didn't really like to share anything. I didn't have lots of friends because I was shy. I had two friends, one of them was my cousin and the other one was my neighbor. At school I couldn't express myself or share my thoughts, I would agree to everything people were saying just because I didn't have any belief in myself. Yet my life was great. I had my beloved mother there for me whenever I needed her, and my brothers and sister. And my cousins, whom I love very much, were also there, playing all the time, dancing, telling stories and jokes late into the night. I had fun at school, especially in third grade. It's was the time of my life that I wish to go back and relive again.



My sister, my mom and I



My cousin Dezy

My country has great music. Congolese music is fantastic. A lot of people love music from my country. We have some



talented singers, dancers and artists who are so professional at what they do. Despite their talent, they do not make enough money, but they still continue doing it because they know how much



people enjoy it. Music is the one thing that I can count on and be proud of, the one thing that I can say I will never miss my country so much. I am my wonderful family and



forget no matter what. I dying to go back to visit friends.

In my country people are allowed to have the right of freedom of religion, but there is no freedom of speech at all, although we do have free elections. People do vote in the elections; just like here, only adults can vote. People can't share their ideas with the government; when they see something wrong they can't say that thing is wrong because if they do, it won't be



good for them. So people stay silent. The government abuses people's human rights. People are suffering, dying and a lot of women are getting raped, especially on the west side of Congo. In the war, there are soldiers who are raping women as a weapon of war. They do whatever they want to do with no mercy. There are a lot of women in the hospitals trying to get treatments for a disease called fistula, because they were brutally raped, not just by one person but by a lot of people. It's chaos over there now. Hopefully peace will come one day.



My parents met each other when my mom was in her last year of high school. She was a senior when she met my father. My father came from Lubumbashi, in the south of Congo. And my mother is from the west side of the country in Bas Congo. My mother's parents were from the same side as my mother, and my father's parents were also from the same place as him; they were rich and middle class citizens.

Unfortunately, I didn't have that chance to meet them and neither did my siblings. And my mother's father was a soldier, he was a great man according to my mother. He was nice to everybody, he had a good heart. He wanted to help people in need. My mother's mom is still alive and she's wonderful. She's still back in Congo, and she used to cook for us and do our laundry all the time. I really miss her. My father and my mother fell in love with each other and they got married. And we the Kalenga are the result of that love.



But as I'm telling this, my father is not with us anymore. He died in the civil war. He was killed because people who were working with him thought he was not loyal. They thought he was giving their secret information to the rebel group because he was of the same ethnicity. This was during the war of 1997. I don't feel good going deeply into this story because it makes me think too much about him and I feel really bad. He passed away when I was only four years old, so I don't remember him at all. I only have one memory of him, and that one and only memory means a lot to me. It's all I have of him, and I'll cherish it all my life. I used to regret not having seen him alive and not having lived with him. But I have found out that that everything happens for a reason. It has its purpose for happening, so I don't regret it now, but appreciate it. If it hadn't happened I would not be where I am right now, and I wouldn't be the way I am. So now I don't regret not having seen him alive.

For me, coming here to the United States was sad. When I found out that I was going to come here I was happy because I was going to see my mother again after four years. I was happy because I wanted to come here to see this beautiful country and all the artists. But I was sad to leave my family and my cousins and last but not least my

country. I was crying at the airport seeing my uncles who came with us to the airport. We were all crying because we didn't know if we would ever see each other again.

Then we came here on December 6th, 2006. I was 13 years old when I came here. My mom came here first and she worked hard for us to come here and live together as we used to live before. She got here four years before us. Our trip was tiring, we took three different airplanes and spent hours on each airplane. We got so tired however it was good get to see different things in the countries in which we were passing through. It was very interesting.



I didn't like being here at all. I missed my family back in my country even if I was here with my mom and my siblings. I still felt like a part of me was not here. It all got worse when I started school, I didn't speak any English so it was so hard for me. Also I didn't like the food, so I was not eating at school.

After awhile, I was still living here and going to school and I knew that I was not going back to my country, so I had to learn to like my new life and I did. After a period of time I started to enjoy living here and everything about this country. I can honestly say that I enjoy living in the United States. As much as I want to go back to my country, I don't think that I could go and live there forever because I will miss my life here so much and all the wonderful people and friends that I've met.



My life has changed a lot. I'm more outgoing now than I was before and my way of thinking about people and the world has changed as well. Before I was not trying to think about why people are the way they are or what makes people do certain things that they do. I was judging them directly without trying to figure that out. I couldn't accept things as they came to me; I lived in a world of regrets. I was not being myself. I was not able to share my voice for things that were important to me. I was just there, just that little girl.

But now I don't agree with people when I think they are wrong. I speak from my heart and say what I think is right or not right. Now I know life's true facts more than I did before, and I make my decisions based on that. I say no when I don't agree with something or someone. I have faith in myself. I follow what I think is best for me when I have options. I try hard to be real and just be me. My dressing style has changed as well; now I like to dress like Americans because I'm living here now. It's so stylish. I like to watch American movies, TV shows, I like to watch American's Next Top Model, and especially listen to American



music. My favorite songs are "Hold Ya" by Gyptian, "Rude Boy" by Rihanna, and "I'm Not Afraid" by Eminem. I love Puff Daddy, Beyonce, Tyra Banks, Usher, and Kanye West. I know that me being in this country is not an accident. Where I am right now is all part of God's plan for me and I'm intending to live it, love it and take advantage of it.

I have lots of my own dreams for my future. In 20 years I see myself working hard as a dental nurse, making money. If God wants I would like to have a family at that time, my own family, my children and a good husband ☺. I want to become a role model for other people. I want to be a helper for others in need. I want them to know that they can trust and rely on me any time they need me. I enjoy helping people and I can't wait to do it.

My Story

Written by Michael Kevin, edited by Jack Steinberg

Michael Kevin was the second buddy I was introduced to. He is a hardworking young man, and he provides for his family simultaneously while succeeding in one of the best high schools in America. He was thrust into American culture immediately after stepping off the plane, and was working within weeks. He tries and works so hard, and shows how persistence gets you ahead in life.

~ Jack Steinberg



In November 2006, I came to New York. I came here to pursue my studies and work in the US because Indonesia's economic crisis is affecting me personally. It wasn't my choice to come here but it was my parents'.

When I got to New York it was a very tough time for me. I found it hard to adapt to life in the US, especially in New York. In New York, people are busy with their life and jobs; sometimes they don't even have a chance to be alone with their family except on Thanksgiving. Also, living in this busy city is like living on a jet plane which makes me feel time goes so fast.



My life in Indonesia was fine until the late 1990's when an economic crisis affected Indonesia badly. A lot of people lost their jobs, and many of them ended up living under the highway with their kids; they had beg for money at the red-lights and stop signs. Sadly, I'd say that Indonesia became like this because there were many people working for the country involved in corruption or nepotism.



Another problem in Indonesia is that many fanatic Muslims like to protest in a violent way such as burning down bars, churches and in 1998 they held a very large riot against Chinese and Christian people. Their biggest enemies are the Christian and Chinese people because they believe that Christians and Chinese people have a better life than they do. They work hard but native Indonesians are too lazy to work hard to

get a better life for themselves. They blame their problems on the Chinese and Christians. It's a good thing that I personally didn't live through that crazy time, even though sometimes they discriminate against me.



My Story

Written by Tashi Lhamo, Edited by Coco Hailey

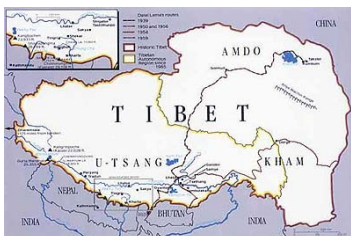
The first letter I received from Tashi Lhamo was the most heartfelt and wonderful letter I have ever read. She wrote about Tibet, school, her hopes, and herself. She described in detail who she was in only a few words. She has been through many adversities and struggles, yet she glows with hope. Tashi is a kind and understanding friend who is passionate about her culture and her education.

~ Coco

Hailey



Life is not easy. We have to face many problems in our life and we should always try to struggle through rather than stay behind. Life wasn't easy for me and my family, living in our native country Tibet, but somehow we managed. I was 7 years old when we migrated to Nepal. It was really sad leaving everything behind and we were not sure if we



could make our life better in Nepal. We had to leave Tibet because we were badly treated and were tortured by the



Chinese Communist Party. My family decided to migrate to Nepal for a better future as we were unable to spend the rest of our lives in Tibet. My family was insecure about our future. It was in the year of 2000 when we left Tibet to migrate in Nepal.



It was really hard for us to settle down in Nepal as we didn't know anyone and had no idea of anything. It was hard for us to learn their language and cultures. When we first came to Nepal, we first lived in a monastery which is still there. It was in the place called Swoyambhu. My

parents had to work very hard for use to live and for us to get a good education, which was the most important thing to them.



After three years, in 2003, my mother somehow managed to fly to the United States of America. My mom got the visa by luck when many of the Tibetans were sent to the U.S.A. My two brothers and I had to spend our childhood without our mother and my father had to spend many years without his wife as well. I was lonely because we didn't have our mother when we were in need. I had to look after my brothers as my father was still working in the same monastery.

Actually, my mother wouldn't leave if we were allowed to settle down in Nepal with full protection and safety. It was still very hard for us to live there. So, my mother applied for us to be here in the U.S. and it was like a dream come true. I had always prayed to God to be with her again. Finally, the day came when we could see our mother after all those years and we got here in 2009. It was the greatest feeling in my life and it was the most valuable time for all of our family members knowing that we could be with each other again forever. I thank this country for giving us an opportunity to be with our mom again.

When I first got here, I was 15 years old and I was really afraid as well as nervous at the same time seeing strangers everywhere I went. It was difficult for me to get into all the new things such as the transportation system which is still very confusing. Even though we learned the English language in Nepal while living there, I found it difficult to speak English in NYC because people here speak so fluently. I think I'm getting better at it now.

I found the American cultures totally different from my Tibetan culture but I like the American culture as well. People over here don't hesitate to say what is on their mind, and they are not scared of asking someone for help. The police here don't

abuse people if they protest, but in Nepal when we protest against anything, we would be beaten by the police or put into the prison. I like this country because we are free and have a lot of opportunities if we study well.

My life here in NYC is really fun. I have my family with me and I like my school as well. There are a lot of students from different countries and most of them are really helpful and friendly. Time passes so fast. I feel like I just got here a couple of months ago but then I realize that it has been almost a year and a half. Everybody here is really busy with whatever they do and like them I am busy with my school's activities. When I get home, after school, I feel very tired, and I love when Friday comes. I get excited about the weekend where I can stay home and relax.

Ultimately, I want to be a doctor and I know that I can make it if I can put a little more effort towards my studies. If I can make my dream come true then my parents, as well as my family will be so proud of me. I really like helping others because I think that when we help others when they are in need, we will be helped by them in the future. After my career, I would love to have a small family because I think we all need a life partner in our old age. With these things, I would like to conclude my writing here. And once again, I would like to thank U.S.A. for giving us such opportunities in life and uniting my family again.

Thank you AMERICA....with much love and respect, Tashi Lhamo (Tibet)

Life

Written by Heng Liang Lin, Edited by Max Wilson

Heng Liang Lin and his family, like many other immigrants to the U.S., have made sacrifices to achieve the American Dream. Because his mother came to the U.S. when he was just 10 years old, he had to take on extra responsibilities. Heng has done so with flying colors and even today, he works hard in both school and his jobs. Heng has had to work extra hard to learn a new language and to adapt to a new culture. What is more amazing is that he has done so while shouldering responsibilities that few other teenagers his age could handle. His goal in life is to return to his village in China and help those who are less fortunate than he is. With the life skills he has acquired through hard work and perseverance, he is certain to make his dream a reality.

~ Max

Wilson



My name is Heng Liang Lin. I am an 18-year old boy. I'm from Fujian, China. I lived there for 15 years with my family, except my mother, because she went to the United States when I was almost 10 years old. I lived in the village with my siblings and my father, brother and sister; they are both older than me. My father was cooking for us every day, but I didn't like everything he cooked. He always forced me to eat

and this made me feel badly. I miss my country so much and my little village. My village was like a big family. We saw each other every day. People knew each other very well and helped each other. Also people were very friendly.

My childhood was very happy; I could do whatever I wanted. I usually played with my brother and sister. My brother would come to the shop to play pool. It was the most fun time and there was nothing else we could play in the village. That made me very good at pool, even though I hadn't played it so many years. I still remember how to play it. Sometimes I would go to the lake with my classmates; we wanted to catch some fish. We jumped into the lake and caught fish. Most of the time, we couldn't catch anything. I didn't go to kindergarten because my mother put me into First grade twice. The first time, I didn't know how to write, even a word. When I was taking a test, I wrote my name in the line of the record. Everyone was laughing at me.



The second time, I was so smart; I could recite a whole book in Chinese. On every test I got a 100. I was the best student in the school. In my village, there was a lot of child abuse. When my test grade was lower than 85, my mother would punish me and make me kneel on washboard for a very long time. It

would make my knee hurt very hurt. Also some parents use feather duster to punish their children. After my mother left, my grades went down. Every morning nobody woke me up to read my books.

All of my family members are from Fujian, China. My father always told us, we needed to save money all the time and help others. He believed this because when he was young, he was very poor, they didn't even have food to eat. My grandfather died when my father was 10 years old. My father's family didn't have the money for a funeral for my grandfather, so they snuck out in the middle of the night and buried my grandfather. They couldn't tell anyone. If someone knew, my father's family would get into trouble. It's the culture of my village, and it's unlucky for everybody.



When I was studying in middle school, my mother called me at lunch time, she asked me, "do you want come to United States?" My answer was yes. I missed my mother so much. I came with my family on June 24th 2007. I felt so happy about it. After I came here, I felt uncomfortable. There were a lot of things that were different. Such as, in school in China we had a 10 minute break after every period. We went to a big

playground to play games and I knew almost everyone in the school. I didn't need to cook for my family. Life is very different here. My school is different, and now I have to cook because my parents and siblings all have jobs. A few weeks after I came, I was 16 years old. My mother's friend helped me get a job which in a factory that carried alloy to cars. I accepted it. I worked for a month, and I made \$1000. That was very a lot for me, but I gave 2/3 to my mom, because she needed the money.

Today, I feel tired because my family forces me to work. I don't want to do a job during the school time. So every summer, I find a job in another state. Last summer, I went to South Carolina by myself. I took the bus there. It took 14 hours. That was an exciting time. I never had gone that far before. I had a job as a waiter. The first day, I messed up everything. I didn't print the bills correctly. Then I learned what to do and I made a lot of money. I made over \$5000 in 50 days. My mother and I feel very happy because we can live together. We don't have a TV in our house, and we don't like to watch any TV shows. I have played an American computer game which is called Free Style Street Basketball. I like this game so much.

In 20 years, a lot will happen to me. I hope every wish comes true for me. I hope I can go back to my little village with a lover and live there. Also I will be a kind and quiet person, and I will try my best to help less fortunate people.

Reborn

Written by Weiwei Liu, Edited by Peter Carzis

Weiwei Liu and I have had a correspondence for the last five months, and met for the first time in December. Weiwei immigrated from China to New York, where he currently attends Newcomers High School, one of the top schools in the city. He left China a few years ago to seek financial prosperity. Though the path to immigration was treacherous for Weiwei, as it is for most, he now lives in Queens, in one of the world's freest countries. ~ Peter Carzis



My name is Weiwei Liu, I'm 18 years old and I'm a senior at Newcomers High School. Three years ago, I left my country China and came to America. My country is a big country, not only because it has an area of 9.6 million square kilometers, but also because it has 1.3 billion people. My whole family is from Fujian, China.

I like my country. I can't ever forget the small partners who played with me when I was a kid. We laughed, we cried, we also could spend a whole day catching a grasshopper. But good times don't last long. We had to make a move to another place, and it was not the first time. One of the reasons we did that was due to political repression. Because China has such a huge population, the Chinese government created a law called family planning, which says that one family can only have one child. I have a sister, and my mother told me that I was born in an old house on the foot of a hill. My family had to hide me there; otherwise the government would force sterilization and abortion on my mother. I'm a lucky guy, and I survived. And it was not over yet; we had to hide even when I was injured with a burn, because the government would punish us, with a huge fine, and force my parents to do tubal ligation. Once my mother did this, she could never become pregnant again. So we had to change our home again and again until my mother accepted this punishment, and did this cruel surgery.

Life was rough for my family. We were poor, and my parents decided to borrow money from others. Nobody wants to leave his/her own country. Only if there is a serious issue, we have to make this step. I am talking about my family. We almost didn't have the ability to pay the interest of the loan each month. It was like a bottomless pit where we couldn't see the future. My family thought they would not pay off this huge debt with their slender income. Finally, they made a hard choice, which was to borrow more money and try to illegally enter into the U.S. They thought they could make more money in the U.S. My father tried first, but he failed. The customs examiner found him and sent back him to China. I didn't have much time to see my father in my childhood. He went to Spain after he was sent back from America. After a few years, my mother tried to do the same thing that my father did, and she succeeded. I was 8, when my mother went to America. I wasn't sad on the day she left. I felt like she just went to a better place and we would meet each other soon. I didn't think too much. But when she called me in America, there was a lump in my throat and I didn't speak because I knew I would cry. It was a sad feeling that I never had before. I knew she had the same feeling as me.

After my mother won the case and applied for family emigration, my father, sister and I finally could go to America legally. It was a long journey for me; we spent about one and half days on an airplane. But I was so excited, I hadn't seen my mother for seven years, and finally we could live together. I said to myself in my mind, "Freedom country, I am coming." But things were not going very well. I found it was not the life that I thought. In school, I was as dumb as an oyster. I was afraid to talk in English. I could not communicate with classmates due to my poor English. I locked myself in my room after school, and I hated going outside.

Things improved when I went to church, and made a lot of friends there. Thank God, we learned together. There were uncles and aunts in church who taught me and encouraged me a lot. I was totally changed; no fear anymore. Also, I like to practice

my English now, because it's really useful. I have tried to integrate into the American culture. And now I like to spend more time outside. I've joined some after school programs and have a lot of fun. On the weekends, I like to spend time in church. Also I do some community service, such as cleaning the church, helping with typing, and book keeping.



I'm so happy today that I have many friends here. We can help each other when we have troubles, like a family. I go to school, hang out with friends on the weekends, and spend time with my family. I am satisfied with my life today.

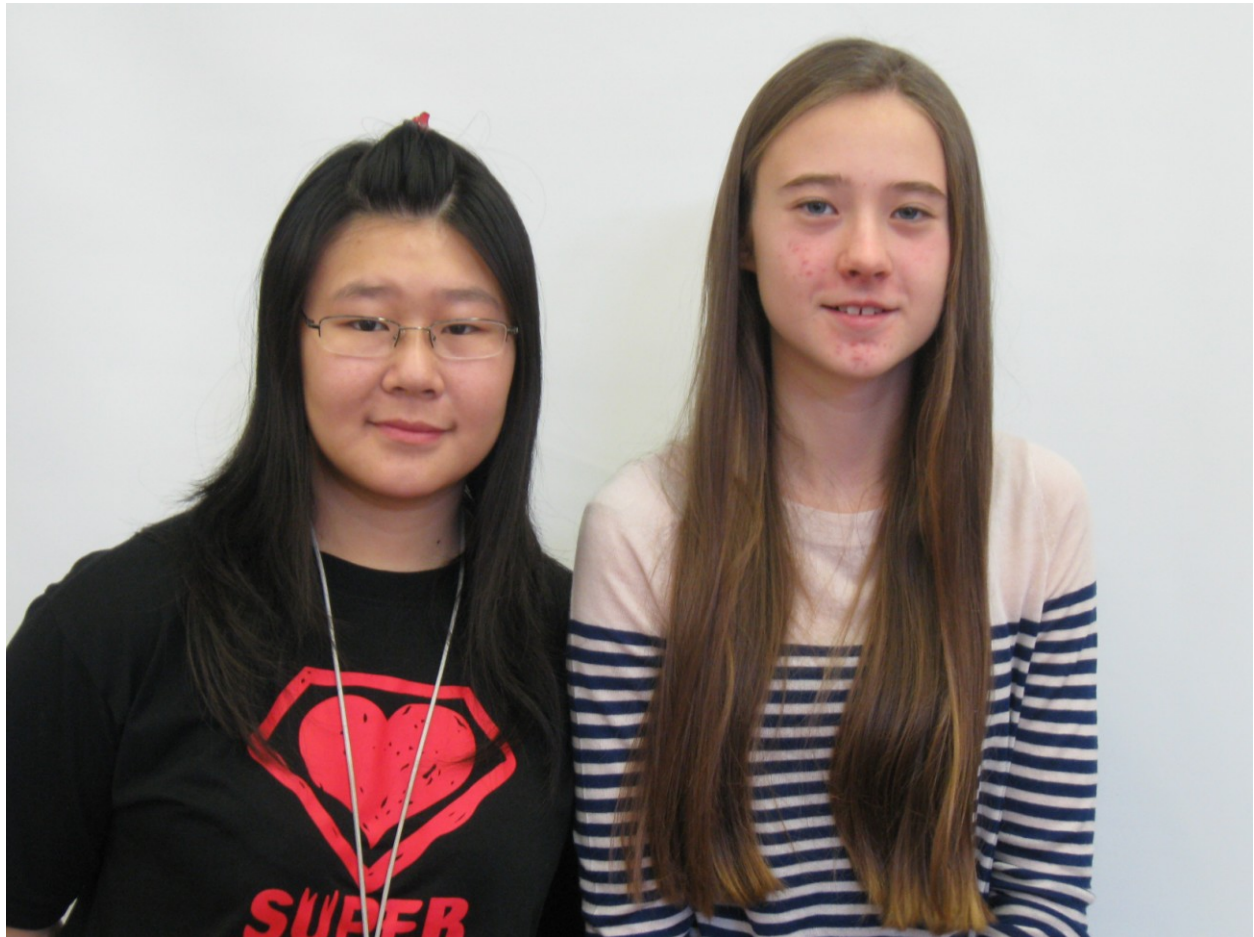
I am applying to college now. In the short term, my wish is that I can get into college and start to step into this society. I hope I can get a good job after college, so that I can ease the financial burden of my parents. I'm not sure where I will be 20 years later, but I am pretty sure that I will work as hard as I can to help this society, and exert the little strength that I have.

Huge Value

Written by Wenyu Liu, edited by Niamh Micklewhite

Wenyu is a very fun, kind and sweet girl. I remember when I went to Newcomers High School for the first time this year, Wenyu was waiting right at the front and had a present for me. Whenever she sends me a letter, I can tell she puts a lot of effort into it because she has drawn loads of little flowers or animals all over the page. Wenyu and I are a good match because we both like the same things. She is also very funny.

~ Niamh Micklewhite



My friends with me (2008 in China)

Hey! I am Wenyu Liu. I am 18 years old and in 12th grade this year. Do you know where the 2010 World EXPO happens? In my hometown — that is Shanghai.



Time passes fast. I look back and realize that I came to America almost three years ago. Let me talk about my childhood. I have a pair of the best grandparents. I lived in China with my dear grandparents until I was 16. This was my favorite time in my childhood. I was born in Japan, and then my uncle took me home to China! My parents got divorced when I was two years old, so I don't have any memories of my happy childhood with my dear parents. They never were simultaneously there. This is okay, because I had my lovely grandpa and grandma.

My grandparents are both disabled people. My grandpa has severe arthritis, so he can't stand or walk for a very long time. He also looks like a cooked shrimp because his vertebral were bent when he was a young man. He went to a very cold place when he got arthritis. His unhealthy body didn't affect his work. My grandpa was a great worker in an arts group. My grandma is blind, but she is very strong. Can you believe she is a teacher? In truth, she is a blind teacher, and her job is to teach blind children. That is not easy!

When my grandpa died, I felt my kingdom was broken up. When I left my country, and my poor grandma, I felt my blind grandma's world was destroyed, too. We had each other for so long, and I was grandma's eyes, but now, she lost her eyes again. This meant my grandma would live alone, for my father and my uncles lived in other cities all over the world.

When my mother took me away from Shanghai to New York City my grandma's cries bruised my heart. Suddenly, our lives felt like scenes in a movie playing in my mind: we were in a park, and my grandparents were watching me pass over a bridge alone. Some things I will never forget, like our old house, sleeping on the old bed together, and grandma playing the old piano with me and grandpa singing Pavarotti's "My Sun". Those are the treasures of my life.

China is my country, but I feel very distant now. China is developing very fast, and nothing is impossible because it is China. People are starting to think carefully about human rights in China. The Chinese don't have laws to limit people or protect their human rights, but we have a developing sense of human rights consciousness. I think a better China will wake up and we will have new laws about human rights.

When I was seven years old, my mother left China for America. My mom wanted to give me a better life, so she always tried hard, and never gave up. In 1998, it was hard for her to live in America because she didn't speak English, she didn't know anything about this strange country, and she needed a job and to earn money to give to our family. Americans didn't help her because most citizens didn't like



the Chinese. My mother told me stories later about when she was bullied or mistreated by other people. My mom didn't tell us when it was happening, for we lived in China and she didn't want us to worry about her. My mother sacrificed everything for me. For example, she earned and saved money that she gave me to go to college, and she bought a house for me in China.

My mother took me away from China because she said I would have more opportunities in the USA. In 2008, I moved to New York City. It was a disaster for us because we had a serious case of the flu. We ate and slept with the virus together for 16 hours in the aircraft. For almost two months, we lived in a confused world.

When I was cured, I started to be curious about NYC. For example, people don't have Halloween and Christmas in China, but the Chinese have Qing Ming Festival and Spring Holiday (They are similar to Halloween and Christmas, but bring different customs with them.) I love Halloween and Christmas day because they are so funny! I love summer holiday too, because there's no homework!! (LOL)

Learning English was hard for me. I remember when I went to the post office for the first time. The staff asked me my address, but I didn't know what it meant. I was fearful and nervous, for I couldn't understand English and I couldn't waste a lot of time because many people were behind me. I didn't know how to say "can you repeat that again?" so I just looked at the postal clerk's eyes. I think the clerk couldn't understand why I was thinking about my address for a very long time, as if I didn't know where my home was or where I lived. That is funny, right? I've learned something in these two years. I know I must talk with other people in English, so I talk in the park, on the street, and at the supermarket. My English teacher tells me I also should watch TV in English and listen to the radio in English, because that will improve my listening skills. Today, I can understand simple words and sentences in English, and I can read easy books in English. I do not fear or feel nervous any more now because I think I can understand it better today.

I want to be a veterinarian because I don't want to see any animal die. I remember a winter day, when I was walking with my puppy, and I picked up a sparrow on the street. One eye of the bird was injured. I tried to save the sparrow, but the end was sad. The bird died, and I couldn't do anything for its life. I want to do something for animals, so this is why I want to be a veterinarian.

My dream is to have a warm house, get married to a handsome man, and have two children; one girl and one boy. The house can be small, my husband doesn't need to be very rich, and our children don't have to be very smart. I would teach them a lot. I will learn to be a teacher, once I have done my community

service. I discovered children only obey serious teachers. You can't always be gentle and smile. Sometime you have to make an "angry" face to these naughty children, but their cute faces won't let you stop loving them.

My parents were divorced, when I was two years old, so they didn't stay by my side and I don't have a lot of memories about my parents in my childhood. I don't like this empty memory of childhood. I don't want my children's childhood to be like mine, and I don't want my marriage to be like my parents'. I want happiness for my whole life, and I will bring happiness to my family. My happiness will lead to my family's happiness. This is why I always learn how to live in happiness. I can't take responsibility for my parents' choices and I am thankful to them for raising me. I learned a lot of things from their life.

I will live in NYC for a long time, and have a good job, and earn a lot of money. I will have my best friends, and I will bring my grandma and my father here so I can live with my mother, my father, and my grandma together. I will make this my goal for the next 11 years. Maybe it will become true in the future.

My Life in Progress

Written by Angie Lopez, edited by Niamh Micklewhite

Angie is a very nice girl who comes from Colombia. When I first met her, she was standing on a chair to try and find me. Something I really like about Angie is how much she loves her family. She talks a lot about them in her life story. I think that Angie and I are very similar.

~ Niamh Micklewhite



I was born on September 27, 1992 in the emergency hospital in Bogota; Colombia. At the age of three I started school. In my first year of kindergarten I learned many things. I learned to read, write, add and count to 200. My mom always helped me with my homework and made sure I turned it in on time. I loved school because I played with my friends from Monday to Friday, my school was not so big, so we knew each other really well and it felt like home. I was on the choir team, dance team and volleyball team with all my friends. We used to have an amazing time together.



My mother woke me up every school day at 6:30AM just to be at school at 7:30AM and I got out of school at 12:30 every day. It was a routine for me. Every day I napped till 4PM, did my homework, played some more and by 8PM I was in bed and asleep getting ready for the next day. On weekends I would go out and visit my grandmother, my aunts or uncles, and on occasions, I would go to a party. I would always visit family because I have a big family. I would always go out with my mother, sister and brother; my dad was always traveling due to his work.

Colombia politics are a lot like politics in the U.S. We have one president who's elected for two terms if chosen by the people. The only problem in Colombia is security. Our streets aren't as safely patrolled or taken care of like here. There is a lot of crime and kidnapping over there. Our downfall as a country is our terrorists who want to harm our people; it's a lot like guerilla warfare.



Colombia is one of the first producers of coffee, coal, and rare Colombian flowers. We have various artists like Juanes, Shakira and Carlos Vives. We also have a famous baseball player named Edgar Renteria and a great writer named Gabriel Garcia Marquez. Also we have a variety of races, cultures and different types of food in every



region of the country. Everyone has their typical plate and it is different everywhere.

My parents met really young. My mother was in high school at the time. They were married a year later; they always wanted to have three kids and they worked really hard and struggled to raise us right. They wanted to teach us that family was the most important thing, and that education was a must. My father was born in Melgar-Tolima which is a city where the weather is hot, the streets are so nice, and the people are really polite and nice. Once my dad finished school, he traveled to Bogota, the capital, where he met my mother, and is still living there today.

My grandfather drove a truck making deliveries all over the country, delivering Colombian products. He is a tall man and very dedicated. He loved telling stories about his crazy adventures during our get-togethers. Every Sunday we had our "family day" where he used to tell us his stories. It was cool to know everything he went through, and how life was before. When my grandmother was pregnant, she chose to stay at her mother's house. On Mother's Day my grandfather went to look for my grandmother to serenade her but he didn't know she was in labor in the back room where she gave birth to my mother. They both decided to call her Maria Piedad.

My parents got divorced when my mom decided to come here and we stayed with my dad while my mom was obtaining our papers to come here. It was the

saddest thing that ever happened to me. I cried a lot and got depressed because my mom wasn't with me anymore and I was just 10 years old. It was the age I needed my mom the most, but after awhile I realized that I had to spend more time with my daddy. I knew once we left Colombia everything would change again and that I would be missing him and crying for him. I decided to be strong and to show my dad how important he is to me and how proud I am of him because he was a father and a mother at the same time, and that is not easy. And when we came here after four years of being without my mom, I missed my dad a lot. My siblings and I knew that we could go visit him whenever we wanted, but it's still not like seeing him every day. It's hard for me...I wondered why happiness could not be complete at all.

When I moved to the United States, I first went to Miami while my mother was preparing for our stay in New York. She was looking for an apartment, a school for me, and some activities for us because she knew we were going to be bored here alone without knowing anyone. I lived in Miami for three months with my aunt, uncle and my cousin. I liked Miami because I had a good time there with my family. When I came to New York it was the winter time and I had never seen snow before. I had only seen it in movies and it was a great experience with my siblings, playing and making figures and touching the snow.

I started high school in September and I was so nervous. All the new students were in the library, but I was quiet and shy because I didn't speak that much English. I noticed many of the new students were from my country so we began to get to know each other, and little by little I made friends and my nervousness went away.

Now everything is different and I have a lot of friends. I am also happy here and even though I miss my family in Colombia I don't want to go back and to live there; I just like to go for vacations. My life and future is here and I love this city and this country because it has given me a lot of opportunities and I'm not going to waste them.

In 20 years I see myself being a great pediatrician, helping a lot of kids who need my help, having a wonderful family, and being prepared to learn new things to contribute to the overall Success of this country.

Fighting to Be Successful

Written by Sylvio Luongo, Edited by Michael Ryder Sammons

If I were to have one word to describe Sylvio, it would be caring. He cares about the sports he does, especially soccer. He works hard in school so that one day, he can have a job concerning finances. I one day know that he will achieve his dream because of his hard work. When I met Sylvio, he told me about his family, particularly his grandmother. He told me how much of an influence his family has had on him because his great-great-grandmother and his great-great-grandfather were immigrants to Brazil. Because of this Sylvio is working hard in the U.S.A., like his family did in Brazil.

~ Michael Ryder Sammons



My name is Sylvio, and I am 18 years old. I am in 12th grade at Newcomers High School. I am from Brazil but, I have been living in the U.S for two and a half years. My childhood was normal and calm. My friends and I used to go out to play soccer in the backyard of our house after school. Also, we used to go to school from 7AM to 12PM; we had less time at school, but the same number of classes. The only difference was that the classes were 45 minutes long. After school getting home I watched cartoons on TV, my grandmother cooked food for me and my cousins. My grandmother loved

to cook.

In my country they respect almost all human rights except some politicians who are corrupt. In Brazil the climate is always hot. In the winter it is hot, and in the summer is super hot. This climate is good because you can always to the beach play some sports like volleyball or soccer, have fun. The typical food in Brazil is potato fries, with rice and beans, and meat. This is my favorite food too. Everybody likes that food in Brazil. My grandmother used to make it every week for me. Some of the music that is very famous in Brazil is Samba which is a music made to make you happy. You can dance it alone or with a partner. Many people dance samba during Carnival, which is a typical event in Brazil that happens every year. Each school of samba tries to do the best to be the winner. During Carnival, many musical groups go in the street to sing to the people in public and people have fun in the street, eating, drinking and dancing.



My family history is kind of mixed. My maternal grandmother told me that her grandmother was an immigrant in Brazil, who came from Portugal. And my grandfather told me that the father of his grandfather was from Italy and they were also immigrants in Brazil. I don't know much about it. But I know that they all started with first steps in Brazil to be successful, and they are role models for me. They inspired me to do the same here in the United States.

I feel more Brazilian than Portuguese and Italian, because my father and my mother are from Brazil and I grew up with the Brazilian culture and language. Maybe for my grandparents it was difficult to adapt to living in Brazil, but they did, just like I'm doing here in the United States of America. It is not easy learn a new language and migrate to a new country, but with time you can adapt yourself to the language and the culture.

I have had an interesting immigration experience. When I was three I came to the US with my sister and my mother. We came to the U.S for more opportunities in life. Than when I was six, I went back to Brazil with my grandmother. But my mother and my sister stayed in the US. I lived without my mother and sister for about eight years. After this I went back to the US to study in high school. I missed them a lot but today I am happy because I get to live with my family again.

My life today in the U.S is good, but in the beginning it was difficult to adapt because in NY the people are always too busy. It's a city that never stops and I was used to living in a calm city. Now I've already spent 2½ years in the U.S so I adapted myself to the culture, the city, the style of life and I like it. My life in the US is normal. I wake up every day at about 7AM to go to school. I take a shower, drink my coffee, and then I take the subway to school. After the subway I go to school to study. In the fall,

after school, I play on my high school soccer team, because I love sports. When I get home I eat, take a shower, spend a little while on the computer, do my homework, spend some time watching TV and go to sleep. My life is a normal life like every teenager in the world.

My goals for my future is go to college, study finances and investment and earn my MBA. I want to go to college because I want to be successful in life and help my mother who worked very hard for me. I am going to do the same for her so in a few years she can relax more than work. Also, I want to be a professional in life and independent too. In the future I will have money to have a well stabilized life for my family. One of the things that motivates me most to be successful and never give up is knowing that many people around the world can do it , so I can do it too!

Making My Future

Written by Daniel Maldonado, edited by Sean McGowan

Our class was introduced to Newcomer's High School in seventh grade, and we have formed a bond from then on. Everyone I have met there has been a buddy to me, and has graciously welcomed us into their school. Daniel fits this description and more. I have only met him in person once, but we have been sending letters back and forth for several months. I could tell from his first note that he was a brave person who overcomes hardships like no other, and I hope to keep in touch with him in the future.

~ Sean McGowan

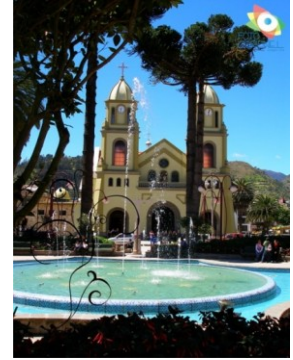


My name is Daniel Maldonado, and I was born in a small town in Ecuador called Gualaceo. Right now I live in Brooklyn, NY. I am 18 years old and many people don't believe my age because I look younger. When I was a little boy I had a beautiful childhood. I had my mom and my dad. Those days were great. I always played with my mom and my father and they always protected me. I had a lot of fun. I like seafood and my mom always cooked delicious



meals such as “Ceviche,” (a sea food meal), “Humitas,” and “Llapingachos”. The perfect time in my childhood was when I was four years old and my mother was going to have my second sister.

My mom is from a small town near Gualaceo, called Gulag, and my dad is from Gualaceo. My mom works as a baby sister, and my dad works as a plumber. My grandparents are from different places. My dad told me that his grandfather was a soldier who fought against the Peruvians, (a war between Ecuador and Peru), and his grandmother came from the capital of our country, Quito. My mom says that her grandfather comes from the same land where she was born, and her grandmother comes from a small town near Gualaceo. My mom doesn't remember too much about her grandparents, because they passed away when she was young.



In our country human rights are not well valued. There is a lot of sexism by the males. There is a lot of abuse such as political corruption. Our governors always work for money instead of looking for what the people need. The economy is not good.

My native culture, I think, is great, because of our art, such as music. Some examples are: “San Juanitos,” and “Pasacalles.” Our artesian designs such as clothing and hats made from wool are other examples of Ecuadorian art. Also we have our food such as “Cuy” (a delicious dish from “La Sierra”), and the folkloric dance. I like how our people enjoy our culture and how they live.

(My dad Vicente, my mom Rosa, me, my sister Claudia, my sister Viviana, and my young brother Romel.)



When I was 8 years old, my father left our country, and he came to the United States, because of the bad economic situation that we had. Those days were the saddest days of my life. I didn't have the hero that every child should have. I didn't have a chance to get advice from him. I wasn't living alone but I had an empty space in my heart. He left us because he wanted to help us. He was supposed to stay in the US for three years and then come back to our country. He didn't. He stayed in this country nearly nine years.

When I was turning 15 my mom also came to this country; the time that I needed her most, she was not there. It was very sad. My sisters and I were going to stay with an aunt. She wasn't a good aunt but my mom didn't have another choice. When I was turning 17 my parents brought us to this country, and all those bad memories were erased when I saw them again.

Leaving my country was the most uncomfortable feeling that I had experienced in my whole life. When I had to say good bye to my friends, to my family, to the little dog that we recently had, the feeling that I experienced was very strange. It is very difficult to describe in words what I am feeling right now. Life continues.

It was great at first in this country. Almost everything was new. I had new clothes, a new bed, my own computer, and a new room, which I had to share with my brother. The kitchen was awesome; it had hot water, something that in my old kitchen we didn't have. I could say that everything was perfect, but nothing could replace the empty space that I had since I left Ecuador.

Now I can see that this country is not as I saw it at first. Everything has changed. I had to go to school and was left back by three years because of the language barriers. In Ecuador I was a senior, and in this country I entered at the school as a freshman. In this country there are a lot of different cultures, languages, and foods. It is kind of strange but I had to deal with it.

I have a lot of dreams for my life. I like music and how string instruments sound. I would like to become a professional musician. I also like math, and if music doesn't work I would like to be a math teacher. My big dreams are to have my own house, with my own car, a small family and a stable job. In the near future I would like to study music recording or be a math teacher.

My Journey

Written by Angelo Martinez, Edited by Gabriel Cavanaugh

I met Angelo in December of 2010. We were paired to be buddies for human rights class, so we wrote letters to each other before meeting at his high school, Newcomers. I am very glad I met him because he is very in touch with his culture; when I first saw him, he was speaking Spanish to some other students. He has a very interesting cultural background as well as his immigration story is fascinating. Here is his story.

~ Gabriel Cavanaugh



My childhood was weird. I was born in Peru as were my parents. When I was five years old, I moved to Argentina with my mom. She said that in my country people didn't get paid well. They used to work many hours for not enough money. That's why people without a good education used to send their children to work selling candies in the streets. I never did this because my family wasn't that poor.



I grew up in Argentina where I made many friends at school. My mom always used to give me what I needed and I was happy. Every day I used to go to school in the morning until 4PM, after that I use to stay outside playing soccer with some friends. When there was a party I used to meet some friends to go there in a group. On the weekends I used to be with mom. On Saturdays we used to go to McDonald's, and then sometimes we used to go shopping around there. I loved that lifestyle. During the weekdays, my mom used to work the whole day. That's why mom gave me a dog as a gift for my birthday.



One of my favorite Peruvian dishes is “arroz con pollo” (chicken and rice with some vegetables). This photo is of “papa a la Huancaína” (potatoes, eggs, lettuce covered with a delicious cream made of milk, cheese and some more ingredients). Coming here, I knew that I would miss Peruvian food. I really love my country's food as do many people from many countries around the world. People say that Peruvian food is the best and I agree with them.

My father has lived in the USA since I was born. We used to talk by phone sometimes. On special days like my birthdays or Christmas, he used to send me many gifts. I was really happy at that time. But then the situation in Argentina got bad. The economic situation was not good, and my mom didn't make enough money. After a while she began to look for another job. Despite the troubled economic situation, she kept giving me what I needed.

One day she told me something about going to Spain. There was an opportunity for a good job; I was 17 years old. She moved to Spain for a better life for us. I couldn't go, so I had to stay in Argentina living with an uncle until she could take me there. During that time, without my mom, I felt a little bit of freedom because nobody punished me if I came home late. But I missed her and nothing was the same as before.

After a couple of months my father called me, telling me that my papers to move to the USA were ready. This meant that I could go to live in the USA with him. After my mom and my father talked it over, they decided I should go to live with my father. So it happened. Before I turned 18 years old I was living in the USA.

It was a little bit hard to live here. In the beginning it was cool because I was excited to come here after watching many movies about Manhattan and many cool places in NYC; but later it became difficult. Life here was too different from where I had lived before. I had to get comfortable here because it was my new home. I attended a public school and after a year I began to work. I had many immigrant experiences.

In Argentina people are very racist. They bully Bolivian people due to their skin color. They also used to talk badly about Peruvians and other immigrants. But I didn't care. Sometimes I didn't say that I was from Peru to avoid that kind of discrimination. They never knew I was a Peruvian guy because I talked like Argentinean people; I had lived there for many years, since I was a kid. But here in the USA I didn't feel afraid to be honest about my origins because here there are many people from many countries around the world and they know what an immigrant feels like to be in a country that isn't yours. I came to this country with a dream to get a good job, make a lot of money, visit my parents, and give my mom a great life.

Telling My Story

Written by Jeannette Neto, edited by Morgan Judge-Tyson

This is a story written by Jeanette Neto. Jeanette's story is truly inspiring. She has had a more difficult life than the average person, but she still made it through with confidence. She never fails to have a smile on her face. This moving and motivational account is one to remember.

~ Morgan Judge-Tyson



My name is Jeannette Neto. I'm 17 years old. I am a senior at Newcomers High school. I'm from Ecuador and I came to United States 3 years ago with a residency card.

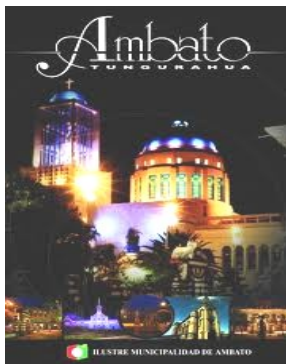
My childhood in Ecuador was not so good. I had enough love from my mom but I always needed and missed having my father's love. He immigrated to the US when I was just six years old. That made my life incomplete, but fortunately my mom knew how to help me without my dad's



presence. She always took care of me and my two siblings, acting as our mom and dad at the same time.

My country's bad economic situation was the main reason why my father had to immigrate. Unfortunately, my father could not get a good job in Ecuador that could support our family's basic needs. He came to the US to realize the "American Dream". He used to send money to us when we were living in Ecuador. It wasn't that much money but at least we had food and clothes. After a long time of trying to get a visa to come here, we finally got it. I was 14 years old when my father told us that we got a green card. We started packing and saying goodbye to all my friends and family. It was really sad to leave a country where I had had spent many years of my life.

I really miss my country because I cannot forget its beautiful culture which I grew up with. One of the things I miss the most is its food. My favorite dish is "Ceviche" (shrimp soup). Even though my mom sometimes cooks it for me here, its taste is not the same as the one in my country. Here it's difficult and expensive to get the ingredients for Ecuadorian food.



Regarding traditions, there is a special one which I really miss. Since I am from Ambato, people celebrate a traditional day called "Carnaval de las Flores y las Frutas". People party a lot and enjoy a beautiful parade. This event in Ecuador is just one example of many beautiful traditions I used to enjoy.



As far as I know, all of my great grandparents' generations are all from Ecuador. They were farmers and loved to live away from the city. My grandparents had their own ranch where they produced sugar and liquor. Unfortunately I didn't have the opportunity to know their ranch or my two grandfathers because they died before I was born. The only grandmother that I have left is still in Ecuador and I miss her so much.



I had to immigrate here because in Ecuador our economic situation was



insufficient for living. Once we got here, our family problems got worse. Starting a new life here, learning a new language and adapting to a new culture was difficult. As time went on, my father developed pancreatic cancer and it grew complicated. I had been living here for only three months

when my father got so sick that he had to stay in a hospital for one month. That month was horrible for me because I watched my father fight between life and death every day. Later, the doctors said that his disease was incurable and soon he was going to die.

My mom decided to take my father back to Ecuador because a funeral here was too expensive. My Mom and Dad left my siblings and I living at my aunt's house. Those three months without my parents were unhappy and lonely. On January 19, 2008 I got a phone call from my mom. My siblings and I found out that my father died. I wanted to be at my father's funeral but my family's bad economic situation didn't let me go to Ecuador. In that moment I felt that life had stopped for me.

After my father died, my mom came back from Ecuador. My mom helped me get through feelings of lovelessness and other problems. I used to think that God did not exist because He had made my life so unfair. My mom wisely helped change that idea about God in my mind. She gave me much more love than before. I'm getting better dealing with my father's death. I do not share this information with other people because it always makes me cry, but at least I believe that God exists and He is good. My mom is my best friend because she changed my life when I really needed her.

I remember that used to hate this country during my first year of living here. Everything here seemed ugly. I was so unhappy and I was ready to go back to Ecuador; fortunately, at this time, a teacher encouraged me to get involved in different activities at school to help me to get out of my depression. I followed her advice and I joined the basketball and tennis teams. I also joined the student government of my school. These activities helped me change my point of view about this country and made me feel that I did exist in the world. As an immigrant in this country of opportunities I realized that I was very fortunate to be here. Now I do not want to go back to my country because if I work hard here I will have a better life. This is why I've been trying to do my best in life, especially in my academic education, because I know that it's one of the key elements for a successful future. Also, working hard and learning in school has helped me to focus less on my father's absence.



Fortunately, now I think that life is fair and that sooner or later my father had to leave this world. In other words, this experience taught me to see every problem in a positive way. Also, it made me realize that life is the way it is and we cannot always have everything that we want. I would give everything in my life to have my father next to me so that we could enjoy my achievements together, but I prefer sometimes to cry about his absence than to see him suffering with his painful and incurable disease. Moreover, I'm not the only person in this world who doesn't have

her father. In life, there are much worse problems than a father's absence. In fact, in life, bad and good things happen for something good. I mean that when something seems to be a misfortune, it really isn't because the struggle is what helps you to become a better person in life.

Also, I think my story is a great example for other people who might be suffering a similar or worse situation. I want them to understand that these experiences in our lives just make us stronger and wiser, even if they hurt so much. People who don't see their tragedies positively are just going to make their lives worse. That's why I accepted my tragedy, and now I feel inspired to always keep going. Therefore, my next step is to go to college and keep being a responsible student. This goal drives me to succeed and achieve my goals. In 20 years, I see myself as a great psychologist with a PhD. I want to be very independent from my family, to have my own house, car and to live in Manhattan, a city I love, that never sleeps, The Big Apple.

My Life

Written by Sakib Rahat, edited by Briyana Martin

Rahat Sakib is a 16-year-old born in Bangladesh. Rahat moved here from Bangladesh when he was 13. He has a great respect and appreciation for his birthplace. Even though I have not yet met Rahat because he joined the class later, I look forward to meeting and talking to my buddy in the future. ~ Briyana Martin



My name is Sakib Rahat. I'm 16 and I was born in the heart of Bangladesh, in the capital city Dhaka. I moved to the U.S.A. about 2 ½ years ago at the age of 13. Even though I haven't been back to my country since then, I still have a huge store of memories from my country and for almost three years I've been living with the help of those memories. I hope to go back soon.

My life since childhood has always been extraordinary. Even though I am really confident and one of the loudest characters in my school, I wasn't like that always. When I was little I was really shy. But thanks to my neighborhood, which was a super place to grow up, I was able to overcome my shyness. I grew up in one of the best neighborhoods in the whole country. Everyone looked out for each other and was very loving and caring. And in my 13 years living there I never heard of any injustice

or crime happening. Thanks to my parents, I was lucky enough to go to junior high in my neighborhood, where I was a good student. And after that I went to one of the best high schools in the country. And I was part of an excellent friend group and the debating club. I spent my entire time in high school surrounded by them. My typical day was like this: wake up at 10 am, leave for school at 11:30, and my school time was 12pm-5pm. After school I had debating club and spent time with friends in the café. I was usually back home around 9 to 10 pm, then dinner, TV, movie and go to sleep at 1 am. Despite my love for my native city, one thing I dislike is the student political situation, which is a little violent. At the same time, it also gives power to the students, allowing them to express themselves and also improve their education.

My family is also a big part of my life. They have been with me while growing and I believe that whatever happens to me in the future or whatever already happened to me so far, they always support me. In my country my family was really big. There was me, my mom, dad, my brother, six cousins, two aunts, two uncles, and my grandpa who lived with us. Also, my grandpa and grandfather from my dad's side lived in our village. I find it really amazing that both of my parents are from the same village, a quiet and peaceful place. Every opportunity I had, I used to visit there to meet my grandparents and my relatives and friends.

Because I am so close to my friends and family in my village, coming to this country was extra hard for me. I think we learned about the immigration process in 2006. We were late because of a little misunderstanding, but it was decided that we were going to come here in early 2008.

My parents made this decision because they felt I was getting spoiled, and my grades were low. I felt a great deal of family pressure because I was the "role model" for my cousins, and they were afraid that if I didn't succeed, I would take my cousins down with me. So they bought me here to fix myself. In other words it was a punishment for me and my brother. As the months passed, I just partied, hung out with friends and got ready to come here. When I stepped into the airport, leaving my family and friends behind, I felt my heart pounding real hard and every beat was like a bomb dropping.

The journey from there to the U.S. was great because I had never been on an airplane. I stopped in England and Dubai on my way, and I was lucky enough to visit them. And when I came here I felt better. I was super excited while going to my cousin's house from the airport because I never saw anything like that (the night view of NYC) and it was more amazing because it was really different from my country. I fell in love with NY in a moment, and I said if this was a punishment, it was the best punishment ever.

Well as I mentioned before I fell in love with NYC the day I came here. And the day I came here the restart button of my life was pressed. I got back to myself quickly

thanks to my friends and teachers at Newcomers high school. To be honest I can't express in words how much I appreciate what Newcomers have done for me. I love this school and I owe the school big time. As far as adopting American culture, well, I always thought of American culture as global culture. And I adopted it in many ways for example: the language, clothes, music, friends, food and many others. I started to watch American shows like Glee, The Jersey Shore, etc., and also started to listen to many American bands and singers. Now my daily routine goes like this: wake up at 7, leave for school at 7:30, school from 8:23AM to 3PM. After that, I have after school until 5, then I hang with friends and reach home around 6PM, then I get on the internet, eat dinner, and maybe go out for a bit.

All these changes in my life have taught me to believe in my life and enjoy it. Like other people I have goals too. I want to be a lawyer because I love to talk. And I want to fight, not for money, but for people. I also want to represent my country in foreign affairs. And also I want to become a person which the whole world, especially my country can feel proud of. One desire I have is to do something great for my country and eliminate hatred from the world.

Well, writing this story gave me a flash back of my life and brought back good memories. Now I remember what happened to me when I came here which I had forgot for a little while. I'll try my best to help any new Newcomers students. And as far as my dreams go, I know sounds little bit crazy and difficult but I've never given up a fight and never will. As Obama said "Yes we can!", therefore I do believe yes I can and nothing is impossible.

My Moment

Written by Lovely Richardson, edited by Oona Wagner

Lovely Richardson is full of life. When I first met her at Newcomers High School, I instantly noticed her bright smile and enthusiastic energy. Lovely is from Haiti and the earthquake affected her and her family a great deal. However, Lovely doesn't let that get her down. She is extremely proud of where she comes from and writes about Haiti with a very positive, sophisticated tone. Lovely is truly lovely.

~ Oona Wagner

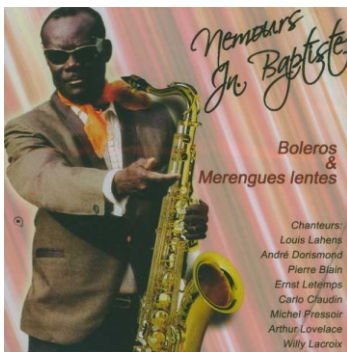


Hello, my name is lovely Richardson. I am 17 years old; I am in twelfth grade which makes me a senior. I think of myself as a native Haitian though I've been living in the U.S. for about three years now. My story is quite interesting and confusing at the same time, because I was born here and sent back to Haiti when I was three months old.

My childhood was the happy part of my life because I was treated like a princess surrounded with families and friends, people who loved me and cared for me. I lived the best times of my life in Haiti and what made it more interesting was spending my days at school, with teachers who yelled at you to do your work. I don't

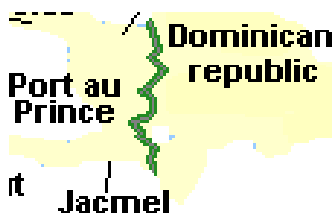
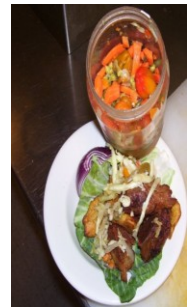
find that here, but back home I had someone running after me, pushing me forward when I made a false step that would eventually hold me back. Instead they were there to guide me on my path. The teachers were so fun and also mean to me; they would hit me to study, they didn't care if I was hungry; whatever they wanted me to do I was forced to do. Young Haitians have no right to refuse; teachers act like your parents and not even our parents can say anything. Our parents want the teachers to whip us; to them it taught us good manners.

I had had so much fun growing up in Haiti, being around all my friends and my younger cousins. In Haiti it was so hot out, every single day except in December, when it isn't very cold, but kind of chilly and it rains a lot. During rainy season, we would go outside in the rain to bathe and play around. We had great fun even though our parents were scared to leave us outside all alone playing; they would stay up in the balcony to watch us so that no one would kidnap us. Our parents had many other fears: they were very much afraid of each other, afraid to walk out late, afraid to speak their mind, because they know many people are involved in gangs and other dangerous activities.



We have many interesting things in this little country of ours called Haiti, such as our culture and our beliefs. We have different kinds of music such as "COMPAS", which is a slow dance or fast depending on how you prefer to dance it. It was created by "Nemours Jean Baptiste" in 1957. It can be performed in as many ways as you desire. We also have "HIP-HOP KREYOL" which was created by "Master J". There have been lots of changes to young Haitian music.

We also have very good food back home. "GRIOT" is made of fried pork, pepper and salt, and you can eat it with any kind of topping. We Haitians usually eat it with plantains or rice. It's pretty tasty when it's spicy. I remember my father often ate it when he was drinking alcohol so that the spicy part wouldn't make him drunk. We have "BENYEN" which is a desert that is very sweet. It's made with bananas, flour, sugar and baking soda, then after mixing everything up together you fry it in oil.



My mother was born in the Dominican Republic, grew up there for about twenty years, and then moved to Haiti to live with her first husband. My father is pure Haitian, he was born there, lived there for almost his whole life, but then came here to the United States and found my mother whom was here as well. According to them I was born here, but my mother

had to leave this country because of a lack of papers. She didn't have them when she went back to Haiti for two weeks and they had to redo my birth certificate. I have no



idea why because I still had the previous one from here. Now I have two birth certificates. On one I'm named Marie Evena Richardson and on the other I'm named Lovely Sarahgine Richardson. My grandmother's father was actually "Alma," a German married to a type of people Haitians define as "les bourgeoisie" or "Blanmanan". The place where my grandmother was born is called Moles St Nicolas located in the "Nord-Ouest" (North West) which was a stop on Christopher Columbus's first voyage to the Americas on December 6th, 1492. This is typically the reason why they called them "Blanmanan", because they are very different from us; they are white in skin color, and speak differently, they speak mostly French or English.

I found out I was coming to the United States when I was 14 years old. My mother never really wanted me to come because she always defined the US as a place where I would lose my respect and dignity. She thought coming here would change me in a way where I would not be proud to be Haitian and that I would lose my culture and my beliefs. She was right in some ways. I came here on November 6th 2007 with my father and my two aunts. It was my grandmother's wish for me to come so that she would know me better. She hadn't seen me since I was one year old and she decided to get me my papers back to live with her. She told me about how hard it was for her to complete these papers because of the situation my mother faced. For me, what happened to my mother was the best thing that could have ever happened because I got to live and experience Haiti. However, it wasn't always great for us in there because everything costs a lot. My mother worked but she only get paid a little bit every month to take care of three children. It wasn't easy even because she had to pay for our education, house and much more.

I have changed a lot, because the culture here is different, schools are different, even my way of living is different. As a matter of fact I have very big dreams of my own. I haven't faced any type of discrimination yet but I've seen it and I've heard about it. I hate it so much that I am going to become a lawyer to help those who are being discriminated against. I feel hatred towards those who act differently with immigrants, especially those who think they are better than undocumented immigrants. I will work hard to help others. This is my PROMISE.....

My Life's Journey

Written by Pablo Rojas, edited by Oona Wagner

Pablo Roja's quiet intelligence and compassion struck me most when I spent the day with him at Newcomers High School. Even though he has only been in the United States for a few years, he has already developed great English speaking and writing skills. Pablo is a kind person who very proud of his Ecuadorian heritage. He has a very close family and it shows through his friendly, warm demeanor. ~

Oona Wagner



My name is Pablo Rojas. I am from Ecuador, I am seventeen years old, and I have been here for two years. I am in eleventh grade, I live in Queens with my family, and we are very happy.



When I was a little boy I was very happy living in Ecuador in a city called Azogues. My childhood was nice; on a typical day I used to go to the market to eat special foods that my grandma cooked, these were happy moments. In the mornings I had to get up early to go to school, come back in

the evening and play on my bicycle for thirty minutes. I was very happy and I had a lot of fun.

I think in my country there are some human rights abuses like domestic violence, child abuse, and limits on freedom. Some people like to do things that are not right.



My native culture is nice. We eat cuy each time we have an important event, we dance all types of music, and sometimes we finish a party in the morning, having started the night before. It is so beautiful.





Now I feel good and I have been here for two years and I like to live here. I like English, I like my school, and I have new friends. I would like to go Ecuador but I have to stay here to finish with my education. I like to watch Family Guy and I like music in English. On a regular day in Queens, I wake up early to go to school. When I come back home I eat some food, start doing my homework and sometimes watch TV.

Sometimes I have to stay late doing community service, like when I help Mr. Duarte to prepare the auditorium for the parents' meeting. On the weekends I finish my homework and then I go to the park with my brother or with my mom. Sometimes I see my friends and we have a lot of fun.

In the future I will be a doctor. I think that I will be working in Elmhurst Hospital and maybe I will be living in the same place I live now because I like it. I think I will have my own family and I will be happy. I don't think I will change my personality I will be the same person that always I have been since I was born. I hope someday I can go back to Ecuador because I would like to visit my family.

My Story

Written by Valeria Ruiz, edited by Coco Hailey

I first met Luna in December 2010, but we had been writing letters to each other since September. Valerie Ruiz, or Luna, is from Cali, Colombia. She is very proud of her heritage, and loves to talk about her family, friends, and traditions from Colombia. Valerie is funny, smart and determined; she is determined to make a difference and stand up for human rights. ~ Coco Hailey



My name is Valeria Ruiz, I'm 18 years old and I am from Colombia. I moved to the United States about three years ago. My childhood was sad because my parents were not with me; my mom lived in Spain and my father lived in America. I lived with my grandmother and my brother. I lived there in that humble home for six years, with my grandmother and my brother.

When I lived in Colombia, the economy was not very good and the war progressed. There was more

violence, more families dying from the war and more poverty in my country.

However, not everything in Colombia is war and poverty. Colombia is a beautiful country, adorned with beautiful mountains and beautiful skies with a unique tropical climate.

My family is from Colombia. My family is big, and though we're not together in the same city, we are all Colombian. My parents are from Cali, Colombia, my grandparents are from Neiva, Colombia, and I'm from Cali, Colombia.

I arrived to the United States in 2007. When I came to this country, I did not know anything about it; I did not know anything I just knew that it was the beginning of a new life. I came to this country because my father thought it was best for me. He told me that I would have a better future because it would be with him. When I came here, I

began a new life, a new school, and met new friends. It was something new in my life. I learned about what life was like outside of Colombia. I realized how valuable it was to be with family and I learned to appreciate everything I have. I now understood that life is not easy and every choice we make has costs. For me all this change was not easy, it was hard and sad to realize what was happening around me. I was leaving my family to find many things for my new life and a better future.



Now my life has changed. I'm a volunteer at an organization called Make the Road New York. There are many things I've learned: how to speak more English, how to help people, how to contribute to the community, and how to be a better leader in the fight against injustice. I have learned to live in this country, I've learned to speak the language more, and I've learned about American culture. I feel I have come to understand its value and I respect it.

I've also learned that New York is a diverse city, because here there are many people from around the world, speaking different languages,



of different cultures, races, religions and personalities. In the United States there is much discrimination and injustice against undocumented immigrant. Now I teach people about human rights and immigration reform every day, because I want to make a difference in the world. I believe that all human beings can make a difference for our future and our world.



Now my mission is to help all people, share information and educate the community about our values. Together we can change this world. Education should be equally available to all, no matter where you come from, what your culture or religion, or your immigration status. As young people, we need to fight for our rights because we are the future. We can change

humanity and we can make a difference for the better. Together we are able to achieve more rights for our education and gain more opportunities to study, work, and make changes in our community.



We need to end discrimination, fight for immigration reform, and ensure that all human rights are respected. We are the future and we can make a change. If we all unite we can create a world without boundaries. We can become one whole country under one economic system. We can have better education for the youth and adults, but most importantly we can have more respect for each other and raise our goals to fight for one cause, our rights.

My Story

Written by Syrone Salvador, edited by Alessandra Lampietti

Syrone is 17 years old and goes to New Comer's High School in Queens. He is currently a senior. He used to live in the Philippines and is originally from there. Syrone and I have been exchanging letters since January of 2011. Although I have not met him yet, Syrone seems like a kind, energetic, and caring person.

~ Alessandra Lampietti



My name is Syrone Joseph Salvador, I'm 17 years old and currently a senior at Newcomers High School, a school for immigrants who are English as a second language learners. I've been living in the United States for about two years now. My native country is the Philippines; I'm a pure Filipino which is a mix of Spanish blood.



In the Philippines, I lived a very middle class lifestyle. I got whatever I wanted, but not at the moment I wanted it. I was born and raised mostly as a Roman

Catholic beside my grandmother. She needed to take care of me and my sister because my parents had to work out of the country due to very bad unemployment in the Philippines and better salary offerings in other places such as Europe and the US. The Philippine government is probably pretty much the same as other third world countries. Although very corrupt, crazy and disorganized, I think that the Philippines is very democratic. We hold elections and the people's voices are still heard. We are very American influenced about almost everything. We even speak English as a second language. As a matter of fact, I think my first language was English. We also have a type of education like that of America, but actually much better.

American music is what I've also grown up to, which is probably one reason why I know English so well compared to people in other Asian countries. In the Philippines, there are some human rights that are violated. One is child labor, even in the capital, Manila. Also, religion is another issue in which people's rights are taken away. Muslims live in the southern part of the country, somehow separated from Roman Catholic people up north.

The climate is tropical where it feels like it's almost summer everyday throughout the year. So if you were actually born there, you would love winter so much, like me.

I grew up with my extended relatives on my mother's side of the family. We are a family of more than fifty members and we know each other so well. As a child, I never really had playmates around my neighborhood. I usually played with my cousins. We all grew up together as if we were brothers and sisters.



We are also a family of good cooks, starting from my grandmother all the way to my cousins. They cook all different kinds of delicious family dishes such as Mongo beans, Sinigang na bangus, and adobo, which is a chicken marinated with soy sauce.

Like any other family, we have problems and conflicts that are very hard to resolve. Eventually, my

parents had to separate due to irreconcilable differences and my mother had to support us alone, as a single parent. After that happened, I have never heard anything about my real biological father. My mother decided to move to New York City by the year 2001, right after September 11th. She had to leave us behind so we could continue our education and so that she could give us a better life. We didn't see each other for seven years, although we talked by phone and sent pictures to keep the relationship between my sister and her strong.



Eventually, she met my step-father and was able to give us sponsorship so we could all live together in New York. I still remember that day, November 18th, 2008, the very same day my favorite singer Beyonce released her third album *I am Sasha Fierce*, and the day when we had to leave the Philippines permanently. It was just my sister and I, all alone, traveling halfway around the world, knowing nothing about traveling and just anticipating what our new country would look and feel like. It was a bitter-sweet moment, a new life where I could start all over again, yet leave everything I grew up and used to live with, especially my grandmother whom I love so much. While we were on the plane, I kept thinking and asking myself, "What will I become when I get there? Will I be the same person? Or will I be successful? Will I ever see my family back home?" I thought about how just 5 hours earlier, I was talking to my cousins, laughing and making jokes with each them, and just five days earlier I was home, sleeping, and waking up with my 20 cousins in one huge room.

The minute we landed, all I could think of was the famous statue of liberty. I wanted to see if it was close to the place where we landed. Unfortunately, I didn't see it at that time. We met my mother and my step-father for the first time. It was really awkward not seeing your mother for a very long time and having a new father figure whom you only knew by talking over the phone or through E-mail. It was really tough adjusting. For the first few months my sister and I tried to remember all the memories we had when we were in the Philippines almost every night. For me personally, I



was even weirdly scared to say a word in English in front of other people. Even though I knew the language, I was afraid they would make fun of my accent.

The first day of school was also tough; I had the feeling I didn't know anybody and I was so embarrassed to talk to anyone. After a few months, I adjusted and adopted a lot of

American culture. Not just because I grew up with some



American influences, but because I was able to make friends who influenced me so much. I was able to go to parties and socialize and I became a lot more responsible than I was before. I now have best friends like Melissa, Leila, Abbas, Angie, and Erblina, who always have my back whenever I need them.

A typical day in the Philippines was to go to school for twelve hours a day and go home, eat and sleep. On the weekends I would hang out with friends and cousins. Now, I have more free time from school and I spend a typical day working, studying, or hanging out with friends. It is somewhat similar, but the difference is that I get more experience and I learn more here than there. Watching very Americanized shows, such as The Jersey Shore or eating a burger on a normal day, makes me feel how my life has changed a lot.

I've been very productive, and every day, I have a new set of goals for who I want to be. I'm very excited about how my life will turn out to be. An immigrant living in the city is like any other student around the country. The only difference is that we probably have more to offer to society and we have our own unique special abilities. I believe that with these special abilities and help from American culture, I will be a successful person living in Manhattan, independent and happy. Although I've never had any specific career in mind, I imagine myself to be the person who I want to be. I want to keep this to myself for now. I guess that at the time when I think I've become what I imagined myself to be, that's the time I'll tell you who I am...

My Story as an Immigrant

Written by Silvia Saquipulla, edited by Nicole Teckchandani

What is there to say about Silvia Saquipulla? She is smart, brave, beautiful, and unbelievably strong. Silvia has such a passion for her country but she managed to stay strong and moved on with life. Silvia's compassion for helping people is indescribable. She has dealt with hardships but still manages to not feel sorry for herself. Ever since Silvia has come to America she has done well in school and has made several friends. Silvia= Compassionate, friendly, and brave.

~ Nicole Teckchandani



My name is Silvia. I am 18 years old and I am from Ecuador. Ecuador is a small and a beautiful country. Ecuador is where I was born and raised. My life in my native country was hard. Sometimes it was happy, sometimes it was sad. I grew up in a small town full of amazing people. I lived with my parents, my brothers and my sister. My family had problems to face like every other family. My brothers and I started to work when we were young I started helping my father at 10 years old. I had to help him with his job which was hard and dangerous. In the morning my brothers and I went to school and in the afternoon we had to go to help my father and my mom cook and sometimes stay at home.

Thank God I had the opportunity to go school. I finished elementary school at 11 years old and then I went to high school for 9th grade.

My parents' decided to travel to the United States, which was hard for my brothers and I. We didn't want them to leave, but the economy in Ecuador was not good. They came here to find a better life and we were left all alone. My younger brother was only six years old and I was 13 years old. It was hard during that time because I had to leave school for one year to take care of my little brother. The worst thing that happened during that time was my parents' divorce. I cried. It hurt my brothers and I to accept that, but we had no other choice. My brothers and I lived alone in my own house for one year. Later we went to live with my grandmother and my cousins. I started to study again; I went to a new high school where I met all kinds of amazing people and teachers. I felt that all of us were friends.

I felt happy in my new school and I was happy living with my grandmother because she took good care of me. One year passed and my mom gave me the news that we would now move to the United States. When I heard this I felt sad and I asked myself why. I couldn't understand it, because my family was in Ecuador, my friends, my school, and a part of my life. I didn't want to come to the US. But I decided to do it because my mom was all that I had and at that time the only thing that I wanted was to see her again. I wanted to find a better life and help my mom who was alone in this country.

I came to the US on April 16, 2007. My trip was good and nice. It was also scary though because my brothers and I traveled alone and we didn't know anything. We felt like we were lost; I felt strange and scared, and we lost the first ticket because we were trying to find our packages. I felt like crying but later we changed the ticket and took the next airplane. We arrived at night around 12PM and all my family was waiting to pick us up.

When I arrived in this country the first thing that came to my mind was that I couldn't go back to my country. Those thoughts made me feel sad although I knew that I wanted to see my mom and my other family again. When I first arrived in the United States it was good. I didn't have to work or study. I just had to stay at home. I went shopping and went out to the city with my cousins. I felt happy because I thought that life was always going to be like this.

After months passed my life started to change; the difficulties came and I had to start working and studying again. I went to high school, a very different school. This new school was complicated because I had to face a new language that was difficult to understand. I didn't want to go to school because I felt strange around other people but I had to get used to living in this country, because there

was no other choice. I had to face many problems with my family and the challenges that came to our lives.

Now my life is different. I have lived in this country for three years. I am not the girl who came to this country thinking that it was full of beautiful things. As I grew up I learned about life, how to fight, how to keep climbing, and how to keep fighting for what I want in my life. After time passed I was studying and working. Now I can't say that everything is good because I am a human. I have things that hurt me and other things that make me happy sometimes. Sometimes I say that I can't do more because there are moments when I feel like I want to give up and let everything go. In those times, there are people like my family, friends and my parents who support me. They say that I should never give up and that I have to keep climbing and fighting for my dreams.

I like my life here now, but not much. I like this country because it has many different places to go for trips, and because I can meet other people, learn from others cultures, and make friends. This country also scares me though because there are people who just want to hurt others. There is also discrimination and I can't understand why. I just know that we are all humans. We should be treated with respect, we should have the same rights, we should be treated equally. I hope one day discrimination will end. That is one of my biggest dreams for this country.

I hope that God blesses me with more life so that my dreams and goals come true. I hope I never give up in life no matter what happens or what difficulties come into my life. I want keep fighting and dreaming for what I want in my life. I want be a professional and have a good job. My dream is to help poor people. I want to create a place where poor people can live.

An Optimistic Yet Misinterpreted Endeavor

Written by Sangjukta Sen Roy, edited by Lily Seibert

Sangjukta Sen Roy was still growing up when she moved to America with her family. Her story that follows is a descriptive account of her early life in Bangladesh, her diminished human rights, adjusting to her new life in America, and her plans for the future. I first met Sangjukta when I visited her school in December 2010, and I still remember her thoughtful approach to the activities and projects we worked on. It is an honor for me to present her story to the readers.

~ Lily

Seibert



I am Sangjukta Sen Roy. I am from Bangladesh. I have been living in the USA for two years. I am 16 years old and I am in 11th grade at Newcomers High School.

Do you think immigrants are getting enough reward for their hardships in another country? Are their hardships completely recognized by non-immigrants? Have we ever put ourselves in their position and thought for a minute about why they came to this country? Why non-immigrants often judge them negatively? As an immigrant the first thing I can say is: **“Don’t cure us, accept us.”** In the sixties and seventies, migration used to depend on economic factors and colonial histories or forces. Today, in the 21st Century people from different countries are coming to the USA due to their low economic position or political conflicts in their country and a totally insecure life back in their native country. But are they getting enough of a secure life in the USA? Are they receiving enough respect or opportunities comparing to non-immigrants?

Immigrants add value to America, and are contributing to the development of the American economy. According to James Smith, a senior economist at Santa Monica-based RAND Corporation and lead author of the United States National Research Council's study "The New Americans: Economic, Demographic, and Fiscal Effects of Immigration", immigrants contribute as much as \$10 billion to the U.S. economy each year. It would be difficult for the US to stay in the same developed position in the world if all immigrants were removed. Basically, immigrants come to the US not only for a better life, but also to give their best effort; they take part in holding up American pride to the rest of the world. Immigrants are involved in many different businesses, industries, companies, and other government and non-government organizations. Through engaging in different important parts of economy, they are contributing in making the economy even more strong by giving their best performance in different areas. Immigrants are equally important to non-immigrants. Furthermore, there are a lot of immigrants from different countries, and these multicultural people are making America different from every other country in the world. We can't find the variety of cultures in one place anywhere else, like we find in the USA. These different thoughts and the ideas of different people lead the USA to the path of more success.

Whatever we face in our childhood marks the rest of our lives. Sometimes we call it trauma. Most of the time, immigrants' native countries are in dangerous situations, and this lack of security leads us to move to other countries to have a better life. The motivation behind coming to this country is always a hope of beginning a new life. Immigrants must survive struggling against the dissatisfaction or conflict-ridden situations back in their country.

My childhood was as good as I remember. I used to live with my parents. I used to go to school. I was allowed to play with my friends no matter whether they

were boys or girls. I got support from my family. My life was perfect. However, as I grew up, I started to experience the discrimination against girls from boys. You aren't that grown up when you are in 5th or 6th grade. From that moment Bangladeshi society discriminates against girls. For instance, I wasn't allowed to go outside alone or play boys' sports such as cricket, soccer, or other games. I had to stay home and do house work. If I had to go outside to buy something necessary for my school I had to go with my male cousins. Not only that, but also sometimes it would happen that when one boy and one girl made the same mistake, only the girl was punished and the boy was immune. To give another example, as I grew up I wasn't allowed to continue my dance studies, for which I was well known. People started to call me with dirty words. According to them, dancing was shameful and you shouldn't do it. This prejudice made me feel really bad. Nobody wanted me to continue my dance, not even my family members, except my mother. However, I wanted to keep my dream alive and started to tolerate their dirty words. Sadly, as usual, women have no right to give their opinion in the case of making any final decisions. So even though my mother supported me she couldn't do that much to help me. For girls it is much more difficult to become successful; they must pass through those horrible experiences, including a conflict between them and the society because they are so limited.

There are many girls who don't go to school because they don't have enough money to pay for it. If in a family there is one boy and one girl, they will send the boy to school. According to them, boys are more valuable than girls. They can support their family unlike girls, who after an early and arranged marriage, go to their husband's family so they can't support their family. In addition, boys can keep their inheritance. So they spend more money on boys than girls. This is how discrimination continues in Bangladesh.

Politics and government are the source of country's development and maintain

its people's basic needs. The Bengali government is democratic. However, democracy means nothing if people are not able to work with the democracy for the common good. Even though there is democracy in Bangladesh, there is often conflict between the government party and

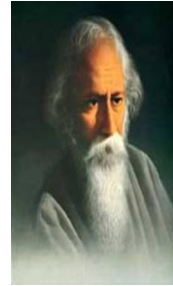
the opposition party. It's embarrassing but true that they even curse each other in public. Sometimes I feel that all the government is doing is fighting against the opposition party. People in Bangladesh are still dying for food, still not getting education, still using child labor, and still not paying day laborers enough. In addition, there is a traffic problem, a low supply of electricity, gas and water. Not only that, but in the newspaper every day we read about crimes and injustices and most of the time there are no



fair judgments. There are courts and laws, but instead of fair judgments, there is only injustice toward poor people. Torture of women, murders, and rapes often happen. There is no security of life. On the whole, people are still suffering the way they suffered before (from the War of Independence until now).



Culture is part of our identity. Culture includes food, festivals, dresses, language, famous movies, famous writers etc. The main language in Bangladesh is Bengali which is commonly spoken by most of the people in Bangladesh. However, there are 11 dialects. So people speak in their own dialect and also use proper Bengali when communicating with people outside of their community. Bengali's are known as "The Bengali's of fish and rice" which means the main food of the Bengali



people is rice and fish. We also eat Paratha, vegetables and other foods. Females usually wear saris, salwar kamis, and shirts. Jeans, t-shirts, lungi, trousers, and pajamas are usual clothes for men. There are some festivals when we all gather together no matter what our social, religious or professional status is such as New

Years, Nobanno (making cakes when they first cut the rice paddy), Puza (a Hindu religious festival), and Eid (a Muslim religious festival). Some famous writers in Bangladesh are Rabindranath Tagor (a world poet who received the Nobel Prize on literature), Kazi Nazrul Islam (a National Poet), Muhammad Jafor Iqbal, and many others. Famous movies are Monpura, Daruchini Dip, Ora 11 Jon (about the War of



Independence).



On the world map, Bangladesh became remarkable in 1971. Before 1971, the land was called Pakistan. There were two parts of Pakistan such as East Pakistan and West Pakistan. In East Pakistan, Bengali people lived differently from the west side, which was home to the Pakistani people. All the offices, meetings, secret conversations, planning, and government work, used to occur in West Pakistan because they wanted to keep themselves in power. They used to take materials and workers from East Pakistan, then sell the materials back to them for double the price. On the 25th of March, 1971, the Pakistani army suddenly attacked the Bengali people. They killed the men, and took women and enjoyed their bodies for entertainment. They even made them naked. If there was a woman with a child they would hit the child against a wall or just throw them; then they'd pull the mother and take them some place to enjoy them. In addition to attacking all of these ordinary people, they also attacked scholars, professors, scientists, and politicians, because the Pakistani army thought the murder of scholars meant killing a country. On the 26th of March, 1971, Sekh Mujibor Rahman declared the beginning of the War of Liberation, and people of East Pakistan started fighting for their rights and land.

During this time, my family moved to India. India contributed a lot to Bangladesh's independence. After 9 months of war East Pakistan became independent Bangladesh, on the 16th of December, 1971. Right after the war, only my grandfather came back to Bangladesh and all other members stayed in India for making sure about their security. He came and settled a place to live. It took him long time because it is not easy to buy land and build a permanent home for family members. After war he came back to Bangladesh but then everything was destroyed and devastated but he found the solution anyway. So they had to start their life in new way in an independent country. That time living in a free country was their reason for happiness, feeling free and start a new life with full of hopes.

When I first came in USA I felt so excited getting opportunity to visit a new country. Everything seemed too good for me. I liked the people with different accents, their clothing, people's entertainments, subway systems etc. However, within some days I experienced culture shock. I started to hate everything such as the transportation system, foods, dresses, festivals, people, and everything else. In the school some students used to laugh at me and made fun of me. Even when I would go to any party, I felt like I am outsider/outcast because I wasn't able to communicate with them. It hurt so much. I felt stressed to fit in this culture. After more days I adjusted myself with the culture. Once I captured the language, I felt like I can fit in their society. I feel like I can communicate with others normally. I have done so many community services, worked with others, and got experienced about it. Now I normally can understand English movies. I may not understand some of the dialects of English language but still I know proper English and some other dialects.

"Aim for the stars and at least you'll reach the sky."
"Success is not a destination but a journey".

How are goals important for us? Goal is the successful destination that we want to reach. We should keep walking through the path for achieving our desired goal. We discover another challenging journey at the same time we reach to our goal to keep our great work continuous. So goal is the root of creation of new journey in a successful and developed path.

Long-term goals are necessary to succeed in life. In my personal life I want to be a NASA scientist. Ambition for being a NASA scientist is the north star of my life which I have to follow. I choose to become a scientist because the subject, astronomy is always interesting for me. From my childhood I am curious about the creation of our earths, planets, stars, universe, galaxy, milky way etc. I like to know the root and process of formation about where we live, why things are measured, and what will happen after several next years to the planets. The enthusiasm of enhancing my knowledge about astronomy led me to choose my career. I will do what I love not from where I will earn most money. I want to let people know that if we desire to do something, then we can make any



impossible be possible. New ideas and truth will be invented and there will be an end of certain mystery about the space and our lives. In this way I want to give people more advanced life.

We all need to pass some steps to reach to our long-term destination. These skills or process is called short-time goal. Firstly, in high school I have aim for doing well in all the subjects, but especially in science (physics) and math. In this way I can get more knowledge about astronomy. Moreover, I planned to read books about the outer space and doing some labs in school with the teacher if possible. Furthermore, if I can get into the college which is highly related to the space work then I will try to show what's best in me and create something new which will be the stair of my success. Not only that but also I prefer to help other where we can work together for progress. I hope one day my dream will come true.



I believe the world is in our hands. It's possible to limit the world through our possibility and perseverance. Every one of our dream, endless effort and unity can lead us to make the world peaceful. For that first we need acceptance of difference. USA will become known as the strongest country in the world only if non-immigrants step up to work with immigrants with no prejudice, discrimination, and hatred.

My Story

Written by Shao Meifang, edited by Briyana Martin

I met Mei in December of 2009 at Newcomers High School. We had been in communication since September, exchanging letters. Mei's fun-loving but hard-working personality showed through her letters. Mei is an immigrant from China, and her understanding and acceptance of both cultures is evident. It has been a pleasure to know Mei and read her story.

Martin

~ Briyana



My name is Shao, Meifang and I'm from China. I have been in the United States for three years. I love America and there are a lot of reasons why I love to live here. Now let me tell you about my childhood first.

In my memory, my childhood was very wonderful. I remember every day was another happy time with my family when I was a child. In my country everyone is equal and we live in a safe place every day, because there less fighting and people are nicer. There are many different genres of music in China, but the one that I love most

is R&B music in America. When I listen to R&B music it changes my mood, and it can help me to relax my body and my mind.

My parents are from Fujian, China. And my grandparents also are from Fujian, China. My parents met in a small town. My mom said that when they first met each other, they had the same feelings for each other. That's so sweet. I hope in my future I will meet a man who, when I meet him for the first time, we have the same feelings for each other.

I needed to come here because my father lived here and he wanted to change our lives for the better. When I first came here I felt sad, because I didn't understand what my teachers said and I felt nervous. But now I can speak English and say what I want to say. I also have a lot of friends.

Here I learned a lot of things. I learned how to become a strong person and I learned how to solve a problem when I was in trouble. Also I learned this country's culture. Before, I was scared of black people, because I had heard a lot of bad things about them in China. When I came to school here and started to talk with black people, I changed my mind. I realized that all black people are friendly.

I remember in my history class. One day the teacher asked me question and I didn't know how to answer. On my left side was a black girl. She helped me when I needed help, and she helped me answer some question after school. So I change my mind. I know there are kind black people in our lives. Now I am not scared of black people anymore.

Another thing that has changed about me is the food. When I came here, my weight increased lot. This made me feel sad. I know it was because in school I always ate American food like pizza, beef, and a lot of fat food. So I changed my lunch in school. Sometimes I bring some Chinese food and sushi. I love to eat sushi. I think my school and my home are safe places. People are very friendly with each other. And sometime we hang out together. We have made good relationships with others.

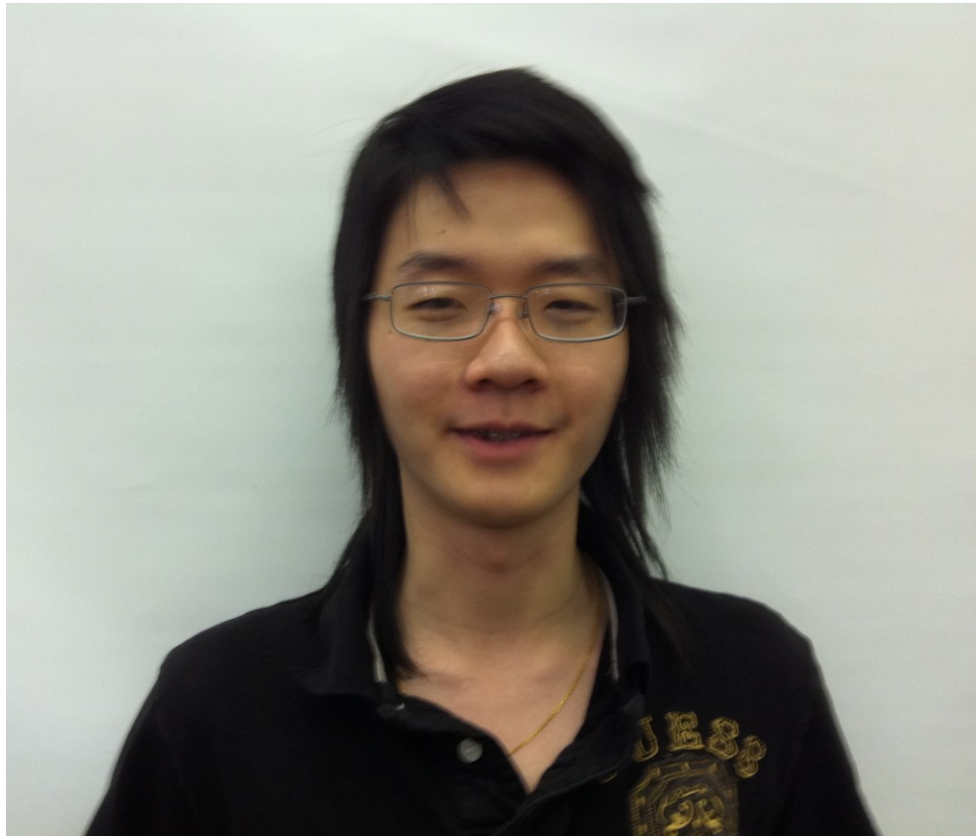
I think my future will be very powerful. In 20 years I will have a very nice family and I will have a nice job. And I will be rich women. I will go to travel with my family. We will still live in New York, and I will make a good future for my child.

My Story

Written by Christian Sugiarto, edited by Michael Ryder Sammons

Although I have not met Christian, from what I have read in his letter, he sounds like a cool guy. He has had a hard time in life. From where he is from, in Indonesia, he did not have many friends because he is a Chinese Indonesian. In Indonesia, he had human rights, but he was discriminated against because he was a Chinese Indonesian. On the other hand, when Christian had left for the U.S.A., the two cultures were beginning to combine. The Chinese began to eat with forks and knife rather than chopsticks. When Christian came to the U.S.A., he started learning at Newcomers High School.

~Michael Ryder Sammons



Hi, my name is Christian Sugiarto and I'm 18 years old. I was born on February 18th, 1992 in Surabaya, Indonesia. I go to Newcomers High School and now I'm in 11th grade. I have lived in this country for one and a half years.

It's nice here and I love it, because of the technology, buildings, and I feel the people are more advanced than in my country. When I was a child, I remember how daily activity works.

The first activity that goes on in the morning is the marketplace, which starts at 3am.

When it comes to 5am in the morning, the rooster usually crows. My neighbor had a few roosters, so I knew exactly when the rooster crowed. After I woke up, I usually took a bath, ate my breakfast, and went to school. People in the neighborhood usually did the same thing, but most of them were not going to school, they were most likely go to work. When I got home, I usually spent my time playing with the native Indonesian kids, but since I'm a Chinese Indonesian, they didn't really like me that much.

Since I was a kid, my mom has lived in the United States. I spent most of my time playing alone, either virtual games or real ones. I wasn't home most of the time, because I was always trying to be with some friends by going to their houses or just hanging out alone, somehow and somewhere.

In my country, the human rights are protected by the government, but not like in the United States. Several decades ago, we had segregation between native Indonesians and Chinese Indonesians. Everything else works fine without any doubt. We are united because of our music, food and culture. The native Indonesian got used to Chinese Indonesian culture and we got used to their culture. Even though we are Chinese Indonesian, we are still Chinese and we are supposed to eat with chopsticks. But, because of the Indonesians' culture, we eat with spoons and forks. They love Chinese food too!



Music, film and any other entertainment, we usually get or copy from the United States. By copy, I don't mean illegal things. I mean we make our own versions, such as "Indonesian Idol" compared to "American Idol" (now you know why I said "copy").



My mom was born in the same city as me, but Indonesia was not safe (the economy and life) when I was born. My mom worked really hard to get me into school. She even had to release me to live alone with my grandmother in Indonesia. Since she was a little girl, she spent all day working and helping my grandmother to work in the marketplace. They sold some kind of native Indonesian food or cookies which we already forgot. The situation at that time was just a mess. Every person was poor, living in a huge warehouse, and eating whatever they could to survive.

Since I was a kid, my mom always told me that she would bring me to the United States. I never actually thought that would happen, but it did. My mom was missing me for years, and she told me that I had to come no matter what. When that time came, I didn't really want to go to United States, but what could I do since my mom wanted me to go? Then I did it in July of 2009 and I found out that my journey was really nice. I never went somewhere far away, especially on an international

plane. I just spend most of my time sleeping on the plane, because I didn't really speak English at that time. Luckily, I made one friend on the plane, from my country, with whom I spent the rest of the time talking to. Sadly, I never talk to her anymore because I forgot to ask her name.

When I got to the airport, I found out that United States is not the same as it was on TV. However, I believe the United States is still better than my country. People's rights are accepted and respected without regard to ethnic differences or anything.



Today nothing has changed my mind. I still think the same thing as when I first got here. I want to know where the people that I saw on TV are?

American culture hasn't really affected me so much, since I really love America and its culture, I'm willing to embrace

both cultures at the same time; both Indonesian and American. Here, my favorite TV shows are King of Queens, Everybody Loves Raymond and some other funny TV shows. I don't spend most of my time at home; I want to work towards my future, so I spend time inside the school, afterschool and some other programs outside the school that I learned about from my counselor. For new Americans like me, I think that we are super polite since we only know some English words. After a while, we grow, develop and start to work on trying to be a real American, which we should become later on.

I hope that the hard work I do now will bring me to a better life as an American. When I finish my college, I will start to work as an Electronics Engineer. In 20 years, I will be in a big house, with my wife, two kids and a nice dog. If I have lots of money, I wish to spend the rest of my life in Florida or California. I just can't stand the cold here. It's too cold compared to my country: 30 degrees C differences. I know that it's really hard to accomplish this, but I believe that I will be successful in the future through my hard work and desire.

The Changing of My Life

Written by Wang JiaJun, edited by Luke Oldham

Jia Jun has been a great buddy this year. He is very honest and well spoken; although sometimes reluctant to speak he has great ideas and a great sense of who he is and what he wants to be. When I went to visit him at Newcomers he was the first person to greet me and I had a great time with him touring his school. He has written a terrific essay and I am sure that you will enjoy it as much as I have.

~ Luke Oldham



My name is JiaJun Wang and I am from China. I came to the United States three years ago. Now I am in 12th grade at in Newcomers High School, and I am going to college next year. Coming to the United States was a challenge for me, and it was a turning point in my life.

I grew up in a big family. My parents are traditional Chinese people. They never went out of China before they came to the United States. My mother was a teacher and my father was a chef. Their life was simple and easy. Also, I have two sisters. I always played with them when I was little. I was very



naughty at that time. I made fun of them but they still loved to play with me. However, I was a good student in school. I liked to go to school when I was a child, because there were many friends that I could play with, and there was a store outside of school. I was very happy during that time. My life at that time was just playing, I didn't have to worry about anything, and my parents would take care of it.

But one day, my parents told me that they were moving to another place. I was 11 years old at that time, and I didn't know where the place was, and I didn't ask why they wanted go there. Then they left my two sisters and me. Later on, my parents told me that it was a difficulty choice for them, and they were leaving because they wanted to create a better future for us. After they left, I moved to my uncle's house and lived with him. I was not feeling comfortable over there, even though my uncle treated me very well. I think it was because it wasn't my real home. Fortunately, my two sisters were still with me. However, my sisters went to America the next year. I was the only one in my family who was still in China. My life was the same as before except my parents and sisters didn't live in the same house as me, I only talked to them on the phone. Some years later, my parents told me that I was going to go to the United States. I didn't feel excited about it, because my friends were all in China. Here is the place I knew, I knew the people, I knew the culture, and I loved it there. However I had to leave China just because my parents were living in America. Then I had to gone through some formalities, and came to the United States.

My plane arrived at the airport, I was very nervous in my seat. People around me were different colors, and spoke different languages. While I was walking out of the airport I was thinking of what I was going to say when I saw my parents again. A few minutes later I saw my parents, and I didn't say anything. I didn't know how I felt during that time. My parents talked to me a lot when we drove home. After we got home, my parents cooked food for me and still wanted talk to me and ask me questions. The first week, I didn't go out of the house, because I didn't know where I should go. My sister wanted me go out to play with them and their friends, but I refused. My school started some days later. I went the same school as my sister, she told me what the school was like, and I went to the school with her. After we arrived at school, I saw many different faces, some of them were Asian, and many of them were not. Because my school is for new immigrants, there were lot of students like me and I made many friends. They were all Chinese, because I couldn't speak English at that time. When someone spoke English to me, the only thing I could do was smile. Language was the biggest problem for me. The language made it more difficult to learn other subjects. I was sitting in class and listening to my teacher, but I could not understand. So I had to spend much more time at home to study every lesson. Moreover, I couldn't go out by myself. Every time, I had to ask my sister go out with me, so I rarely went out. The beginning of my new life was difficult, I was facing many challenges, but I didn't have a choice because I was already here, and my family was all here. The only thing I can do was work hard.

Now, I have already lived here for four years. In the past few years I've changed a lot. First, I made many new friends during these years. Those friends are not only Chinese, but also Hispanic, American, and other countries. I remember that when I first came to the United States, I was afraid of talking to them, I always stayed away from them, and the people I stayed with were Chinese. I also began to like to watch some American TV shows. I never watched those TV shows before, because I didn't understand them. But now I love them, and I watch those shows every day. My life now is simple but interesting. I go to school every day, and after I finish school I go home to watch TV or hang out with my friends. I chat with my friends every night. I also search for new movies or songs. I love to watch movies and listen to songs. This year, I began to do community service, and I began to go to church every weekend. At these places I met many people, and made friends with them. I am still adapting to my new life, but I like my new life.

Next year, I am going to go to college. I want to become a teacher after I finish college, and have a job here. I think I would like to travel to China, but I won't live there because my friends and family are all here now. I don't want to move to another country again. I like my new life, my life in the United States.

My Story

Written by Weifeng Wu, edited by Michael Ryder Sammons

I have known Wei- Feng for a couple months. During these months, I have learned more about him than friends I have known for years. He is passionate about what he loves. He sets goals for himself and achieves them. He can accomplish almost anything if he sets his mind to it. This guy, even though he has gone through a lot, perseveres and does his best. He also does not only think of himself; he volunteers at Model U.N. and loves it because he not only learns from it, but has fun doing it.

~ Michael Ryder Sammons



My name is Weifeng Wu. I am 18 years old. I am a senior in high school. I am from China and I have been in the US for two and a half years. In my country, China, I was an active boy and I had a lot of fun in my childhood. I was just like a squirrel that liked to climb trees and was shy to meet people. I had a best friend, Jianhui, who played with me during my childhood. In my school, our teachers were very strict. We had to study very hard ever year. Students were very smart. I could imagine their potential in the future. Also, our teacher's grades were based on the final test. In my school, I liked to work on math

questions for fun (it was almost like the math team of our AP calculus class).

In my country, I am positive that almost 80% of the people do not know the meaning of human rights. Also, there are no human rights and there is just one party in my country with one person or one group of the same people making decisions. I think it is because China has never had a chance to have human rights for 5000 years. China needs time to adapt to the meaning of human rights.

We have had some improvements in human rights. China provided suffrage for everyone last year. Right now, China is testing the Judicial System, making more like the one in the US. I am proud that China is changing and becoming more and more open to the whole world. I can see that human rights are building.

Our culture is very complex. Even for me, there are many traditions and a lot of traditional foods that I don't know and I didn't know how to make, such as the most famous one--Zongzi and Niangao. Zongzi is a traditional Chinese food, made of glutinous rice stuffed with different fillings and wrapped in bamboo or reed leaves. Niangao is a food prepared from glutinous rice and consumed in Chinese cuisine. It is available in Asian supermarkets and from health food stores. While it can be eaten all year round, traditionally it is most popular during the Chinese New Year. Also, China has a lot of different kind of instruments.



Zongzi



Niangao

The oldest has been around for 2000 years. My favorite instrument is the bamboo flute which looks like a recorder. I like it because I know how to play it.

The history of my family is like a ship which meets a storm. In my generation, the sun is coming out. My whole family was born in China. My parents were born in a dark age when



China was poor and had no food. The time when my grandparents were born was even worse. At that time, they had to work 12 hours a day. They were forced to eat the bark of a tree when they had no food. They lived with this lack of food and fought against the enemy in the Japanese-Chinese War. My grandfather has seven children. My father is the youngest. He fished for a living when he was my age. However, my father's generation was still very poor.

Finally, I was born. I remembered my grandmother told me about my birth. When I was born, my family needed to borrowed money from my relatives. We couldn't even afford a pound of meat. The only thing that we had was grain. At the time, the price of rice was very low. So, my sister and I were born into a poor family. Our life is changing as we are growing. When my father came to America, it changed everything. Our life keeps getting better and better. The wage of my father in a month in the U.S. is equal to the budget of our family for a whole year in China. Therefore, my mom doesn't need to work anymore.

It was funny when I came to US. Why? At the time, I was in the middle of high school. My mom went to my school and told the principal that I would change schools. Afterward, she took me home and said" Quick, we are going to buy some new clothes and prepare to leave." I was thinking, "Is she losing her mind?" She dragged me from school and told me that we were leaving? Where would we go? Finally, my mom said, "We are going to the U.S. Quick! We will be on an airplane in next two days."



My journey was very bad because I didn't know where we would go. I was dragged by my mom to come to a strange place. I felt that my world was turning from colorful to black and white. But as time passed, my world is repainted again with even more colorful paint. I have become smarter, more confident, and happier. I have learned a lot about American culture during these 2 ½ years. I learned that we shouldn't judge something superficial.

Some Americans have prejudices against many things, such as hating immigrants. However, I have many American friends who are very friendly. If I get in trouble they are the first ones to get me out. For example, they know my English is bad, so they teach me a lot of vocabulary for my SAT and taught me how to write an SAT and college essay. In these two years, I changed my favorite Chinese channel to an English channel. I became a high-tech fan. I love to go to school and I love my math

team and AP calculus class. My life has also changed in a dramatic way. I participate in the Model UN, and I became the leader of my volunteer team. I like my volunteer job because as I work, I obtain a lot of experience in team work, confidence, and leadership.

My Volunteer Job



In the future, 20 years from now, my goal will be achieved. My goal is to open a cell phone company in California (the cell phone may replace computers or computers will become smaller like a cell phone). I will earn enough money to travel all over the world with my family. I will fly my plane to visit every single city and eat different foods from different cultures.

My Story

Written by Yanyan Xia, edited by Coco Hailey

Yanyan Xia is from China. Yanyan is full of culture from her ancestral Chinese roots and from her new American life. She aspires to go to college and become a teacher. Living in China for most of her life, America is a new place full of many opportunities. Yanyan is brave enough to go forward and live the American dream.

~ Coco Hailey



My name is Yanyan Xia. I am 16 years old and I am from China. It is a beautiful and old country. I am studying at Newcomers High School in the 11th grade. I am a funny, cautious and reliable person. I live in Woodside with my father. I have lived in the USA for 16 months.

My childhood was happy. I lived with my grandparents. My mother came to the USA when I was three years old. My father had to work and live in the city. So they left me to my grandparents to babysit me. I got a lot of love from them because I was the youngest in the family. The typical days at home with my family were relaxed. I didn't need to do any housework. I could do anything that I wanted, such as

watching TV, playing computer games or reading books. At school, I could play with my classmates. I could sing and draw. It was more interesting than at home. If I had a long vacation, I always wanted to go back to school to study with my classmates.

In China, I often went to outside to play jump rope with my classmates in the evening. I liked to play jump rope. It was so interesting. When I played it, I always felt so tired, but I was happy. If I could, I also liked to cook dessert with my grandmother because she was a good cook. In my country, our main food was rice. Families cooked food at noon. We liked to cook a bowl of soup, a dish of fish or meat and two dishes of vegetables. We listened to pop music or native music. Everyone had rights to choose what they liked and wanted. So they were equal. The younger people had to respect to older people, basic morality. Everyone learned this from their family or their school. All students could graduate middle school, which was free and went to 9th grade.

My father's childhood was hard and busy. He was born in China. He only graduated from middle school. It was so hard for him to get an education. Every day, when he finished school, he had to go to help his family. He needed to cut grass to feed the pigs, ducks and chickens. He didn't have a lot of time to play. If he had free time, he would be very happy. He went to find his friends, and they would go to jump squares. He said it was a very popular game.

At that time there were landlords; they forced the farmers to work hard. But they were only allotted a little food. My father's family was poor. They could only eat potato porridge. They couldn't buy new clothes. The only chance that they had to get new clothes was for Chinese New Year. All people went to visit their relatives and celebrate the festival. Families would give the children delicious food that they could not eat on regular days. Also the farmers had to give rice to the landlords because they needed to use the rice to pay the rent. The landlords had very big powers. If the farmers didn't give them enough food, they would do abuse them. But no one could do anything to punish the landlords.

I had known I would come here since I entered middle school. My father told me we would go to the USA soon. But I waited for three years. I was looking forward to coming here because many people said that it would be easy to study. I was having this thinking when I followed my father here.

I came here on September 29th, 2009. My journey was so hard. I went to Guangzhou to register and got four shots. I was so scared of the needles that I almost cried when I got them. I spent 18 hours on the airplane. It was so boring and tiring. When I first arrived in my new room here, I cried out. I thought it was so terrible. No one could help or take care of me. This was a strange place. That night, I missed my grandmother. I was worried about that my father would hear me, so I quietly cried. I remembered I cried a lot for so many days, I can't count them. I knew I disliked it here.

Now I have changed and have become outgoing and brave. I can go everywhere alone. When I have a question, I can go to ask other people. I have changed my breakfast time. In China, I always ate breakfast at 7AM, but now, I eat at 8:30AM. In China I liked to take a shower at 6pm, which was so early. Now, I go to take a shower before I go to bed so my feet can keep warm when I go to sleep. Also, I have changed the foods I eat for lunch. I started to try to eat chicken and hamburgers. There is a kind of popular dessert that I like called donuts. They taste sweet and make me feel happy for a while. My favorite food is bread. I want to learn how to bake it, but I can't because my family doesn't have an oven. I don't know why I like it so much. I guess because it is a popular foreign food for me.

I am an immigrant, my English skills aren't very strong. So I started to learn in an English as a Second Language class (ESL). Our classes are not so hard for us because we have bilingual classes. The school is so relaxed compared to China; I just have 6 classes in one day. Students have a lot of time for vacation. When I am at home, I feel bored like before when I was in China. I think that is something like my life in China.

When I am 20 years old I will attend college. I will find a part-time job to rent a room for myself. In school, I want to study to become a teacher. I hope that I can live with my mother. Maybe I will leave New York to go to a strange place to start my new life. I am going to have more freedom. I will be able to feed myself. I won't depend on my family. I will be a super woman.

The Journey to America

Written by Yanqing Xue, edited by Juliana Orelana

Yanqing is a fun and interesting person who loves human rights. When I first met her in person, we enjoyed our day together. We were both shy at first, but we talked for a long time and did get to know each other well. I hope I get to see her again soon and will see her more often.

~Juliana Orelana



I am Yanqing Xue. I came from China. I am 19 and I am a senior in high school. I have been living in America for two years. I arrived in NY on Dec.28th, 2008. My childhood has good memories for me. Sometimes I was happy and sometimes I felt disappointed. I was quiet when I was outside, but I was like a crazy crow in my home. Maybe I was shy. I am not sure. I don't remember many things from my childhood, but I remember some fragments. They made me think and find myself.



**My grandmother & I
December 2008**

Before I was 7 years old I lived with my grandparents. They influenced me so much. My life was simple and traditional. I had fun talking with my grandma or listening to her talking with her friends. They also liked me to stay with them.

I don't know how to describe my life in China. It was so uneventful, but this is what I missed. I did almost the same things every day in China. People always miss something which they lose. My life in China is a dream to me now.

I want to go back to live with my grandparents. They gave me freedom and peace. I felt joyful when I stayed with them. But I can't go back. I need to achieve my goals and become great. This is one of the reasons I left. There is a mountain on my shoulders that is so heavy. But I have to carry it because this is my duty.

My parents are from China. When I was eleven, my father lost his job. And it was hard to find another job in my hometown. One of my father's friends was in the USA and he told my father to go there. My father wanted to give us a good life, so he left for the states in 2001. My mother went to America with my brother and me in December of 2008. My father had already been here for 10 years. He never went back to China after he came here.

My parents work five days a week. They are hard, industrious worker. They don't know English. They work hard and they are laborious. But they have dreams. They live simply and they are happy. They think they can give a good life to my brother and I, and one day own their own house in America.

But my parents also have some struggles in their hearts. Their parents and sisters and brothers are in China. They want them to live near them, but this is a difficult wish to make true. They don't have many demands. They just want to live happily and bring our family together.

When I was little, I never thought I would move to a new country. But I came to America two years ago. I came here because I wanted my family reunited, I wanted to get a good education, and then find a good job. I want my family to live better. There are many people in China, but fewer chances to succeed. I know it would be hard for me to enter a good college in China. And also, even if I graduate from a good college there, it's not easy to find a good job.

It was a cold night when I arrived

My class in China, 2008



here. I saw snow through windows of car. I was tired after 22 hours of flight. But I was excited when I saw my father. When I sat in the car and saw the snow, I felt a little bit afraid. It was a new place for me. And I didn't know so much English. I remember a funny story: when I got out of the car, I stepped in the snow, but I could not keep my balance and I almost fell down. On my first night in America I slept so deeply. This was the beginning of my American journey.

I began at Newcomers H.S. in January 2009. A senior asked me to go to church with him. My aunt is a Christian and before I went to the airport in China, my aunt prayed for us. So I was not afraid of God. Also, I had been to a Chinese Church on Christmas. When the senior asked me, I agreed. I went to a church in which the members were young. I was new in America, but I was not afraid. There were so many friends to help me to adapt to the new situation. I attended ESL classes at the Church. And other friends talked with me. When I had some trouble, they prayed for me and my troubles were solved. I felt so warm in that cold winter.

In the past I rode to school, but now I take the subway. I needed to wear a school uniform at school in China, but not here. I never ate cheese in my hometown. But I eat it now at school. The first time I ate cheese, I felt it was unsavory. But I knew it was a part of American culture. I tried my best to eat it. Now I can eat cheese. I

don't watch TV, because we only have one television. I like to watch movies. I like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. I watched this movie in China. I go to school with my friends. We talk and laugh in subways.

I have a lot of friends in America. We like each other, and we have similar backgrounds. We are learning how to get by in this society. I think most Chinese immigrant students have had a similar experience, because our parents left us for America before we came here. Most children come and have some conflicts with their parents. All of us need to figure out how we fit in our new relationships with our parents. It is a painful experience. Our parents work for us and they are tired. But we have to face and learn to resolve those conflicts.



The picture is of my baptism. July 18th 2009

For example, once my father asked me help him to deal with something in which he needed English translation. I tried my best but I still couldn't do it perfectly. My father said," You are such a fool. Why do you not know how to do it?" I didn't know how to answer him. In my father's opinion, we learned English at school and we should know how to use it very well. But this is not true.

To join in the new community as quickly as possible, I became a volunteer. I tried to fit into America culture as quickly as possible. I didn't have much time to play however, because I had to cook dinner for my parents, I needed to wash clothes. I also used my free time to do some housework. I played with my friends only on holidays or vacations. We have a B.B.Q. and a hotpot; sometimes we go to cook at someone's home.

I hope I can go back to my country after ten years. I miss my grandparents. I want to finish my college and then get a job. After ten years, I want to go back to take care of my grandparents. I think 20 years from now, I might live in China, because I want to live with my family and evangelize the Chinese. I think I will be

a mild person with a kind-heart. I will treat others in a fair and warm way. Living in America has helped me to feel warm because people are friendly. They have influenced me to become a person like them.



My friends and me April, 2010

American Dream

Written by Jie Yu, edited by Blythe Calderley

This is a story about Jie Yu. It is about his struggles to adjust to American customs after immigrating here after leaving his hometown in China. He mentions why he left China and came here to New York. He is a very kind, outgoing, and funny person. I am his buddy, and we write letters to each other. When I met him on Human Rights day, he was very nice to me, and I really enjoyed meeting him.

Calderley

~ Blythe



My name is Jie Yu. I'm 19 years old, and I have been in the United States of America for two years and eight months. I emigrated here from China. My parents came to America because they felt this country was a perfect place, a place where they could have the right to have another baby and make our family better. For over ten years, China has used family planning laws to control the population. The actions of the government have been very grim and bloody. Once, the police went to the home of one of my neighbors who was eight months pregnant and made her abort the baby she was carrying. Cases like this happen very often. The government allows couples to



have only one child and punishes them if they break this law. It forces women to have abortions and tie their tubes so they can't have more children.

China doesn't have human rights laws like many Western countries. The most important reason is that China's population is too big. Many years ago, Chinese president Ze Dong Mao said, "More people, more power." However, fifty years later, the government changed its mind because the population was growing too large. The great number of people was a problem, and laws were passed that forced many mothers and fathers to give up their precious children.

When this happened, my parents left. I stayed in China, and for 17 years I lived with my grandparents. They took care of me and gave me many happy memories. Every morning, my grandmother would wake up very early to feed breakfast to her grandson. I owe my grandparents much love. But my childhood was spent without my parents. I missed them and still loved them. I knew they were always thinking of me and sent money back to China to pay for their son's expenses.

Three years ago, I joined my parents in America. I came by airplane. The flight took eleven hours because the U.S. and China are on opposite sides of the Earth. When I was on the airplane, I was afraid and confused. I understood my life would have a big change. Today, three years later, I feel totally different than my friends who still live in China. In New York, I have learned to respect everyone and to respect myself. I have begun to perceive that humans have the right to do what we want and to protect ourselves. In my U.S. history class, we speak in English and talk about the concerns of this country. I know that America is my country now, and not only mine. My parents, my relatives, and all my friends -- they, too, know that America is our country.

For many people, the United States of America is a dream place. I have met new friends on a network station. When I tell them I live in New York, they are always



very interested and envious. They think America is the best place in the world. But sometimes I feel it's still not good enough. I know that many people in the U.S. live without security and respect.

My parents have been in America for eleven years, first as undocumented immigrants and now as green card holders. They often tell me that they feel very lucky and grateful today, because their life has been very hard and dangerous. They have told me about some experiences they had here. One event makes me very sad and confused. Many years ago my father used to be a small businessman. He

sold decorations. One night, he had just finished his business dealings. Suddenly, three people surrounded my father and struck him down. My father didn't resist. Let them take the decorations and money, he thought. He and his friends had faced this kind thing many times before. If they tried to resist, they would get hurt even more. What could they do? This was not their country. They did not have any power. They were not in charge. My father and his friends thought nobody would listen to them. But ten years later, things have changed for my father, and he has not been in that situation again. Having rights and an education changes everything. Other people have not been so lucky. They were not able to get their green card, and the U.S. government shipped them back to their country where they had high debt from the time they were stowaways. Stowaways have to pay a lot of money to come to America.

Some people attack immigrants and say they are destroying America. One day, while I was sitting on the bus, I suddenly felt a spot on my face. At that moment, I saw three teenagers with an infrared illuminator pointing a light at me. I looked at them. They turned their faces away. When I was in their line of sight again, they pointed the spotlight at me one more time. As I got off the bus, I heard them laughing. At that moment, I felt very helpless. I couldn't understand why they did this to me. I just wanted to be one of the guys. In school I feel relaxed and equal. All the students -- Chinese, Spanish, Indian and Haitian -- we work together and respect and help each other. I also do community service. Almost every Saturday, I go to the Herald Mission center with my friend and volunteer to help people, to do the best for them. When I finish work I feel content and full of energy, even if I have had to stand the whole day.



Now that I live in America I appreciate and enjoy freedom, diversity, competition and peace. These factors have helped me to take root along with all the other people who have come to this country since it was established 234 years ago as a land of immigrants. Over these years, America has shown the world that people can live freely in a perfect place. I hope our country will always be a land where people's dreams come true and not a land that destroys people's dreams. When I am an independent adult, I want to help people. I want strive to make our beautiful country a place where everyone's dreams can come true.

