

# Reflections

## Voices of English Learners

First Edition, 2018



**LITERACY COUNCIL**  
FREDERICK COUNTY, MD

EMPOWERING ADULTS THROUGH ENGLISH LANGUAGE SKILLS

## Our Mission

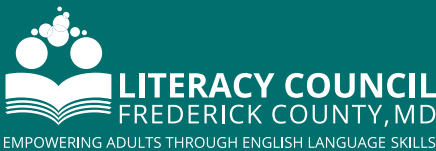
The Literacy Council of Frederick County teaches adults the reading and other English language skills they need to provide for their families and to contribute to the well-being and prosperity of our community.

## Our Values

- Sustaining our organization through responsible financial stewardship, sound management, and community engagement.
- Teaching a parent in order to educate a family. Educating our students in a learner-centered format with compassion, confidentiality, and respect.
- Producing a safer, healthier, economically stronger, and more vibrant community through adult literacy.
- Sustaining, empowering, and energizing a passionate, strong dedicated volunteer base.

## Our Vision

A community where literacy is attainable for everyone.



[frederickliteracy.org](http://frederickliteracy.org)

The Literacy Council of Frederick County is a registered 501(c)(3) charitable organization.

## Foreword

The Literacy Council of Frederick County is home to 280 students from 44 countries who live and work in Frederick County and 130 dedicated tutors who are their partners in learning. But those numbers tell us nothing about the individual lives, dreams, struggles and joys that pass through our door every day. Each student has a story to tell. Telling those stories with their newly learned English skills requires courage. In these pages of our first edition of the Literacy Council's *Reflections: Voices of English Learners*, readers can see beyond the statistics about our students' accomplishments, and benefit from the lessons they have to teach us through their experiences. No matter what the country of origin, the writers and artists of these collected stories, poems and art are more like us than they are different. The details of our experiences are unique and individual, but there is something universal about them because of the feelings that inspire them. We are grateful for the glimpses of these students we get through their stories, and to the tutors who helped give them voice.

—Julie Heifetz

## Dedication

We dedicate *Reflections* to our adult learners, their families, and their volunteer tutors.

## Editor's Note

*Reflections: Voices of English Learners* has been a collaborative effort inspired by the integrity and commitment that our students give to their studies of the English language. It is our hope that when you read these stories you will gain insight into the remarkable spirit, hopes and dreams of our students as they struggle and triumph on a daily basis in our community. We have made small changes to the texts for clarity's sake, but have valued the original voice of the author in all editing choices. We also plan to make the magazine an annual publication in the coming years.

## Acknowledgments

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## Grandmother's Traumatic Experience by Jacqueline Badro



The belief in spirits that survive death to live in another realm as ghosts is an ancient idea that still exists. Ghost hunters have failed to find good evidence for the existence of these entities. Thinking of ghosts brought back an old memory of a story told by my grandmother about her experience with ghosts.

It was during World War I, when the indigenous and Christian ethnic groups, such as the Armenians, the Assyrians, and the Ottoman Greeks were targeted for extermination by the government of the Ottoman Empire. She was 9 years old when her family and many of her relatives were killed. In a blink of an eye, she became an orphan. She lost everything, her beloved ones, her supporters and her safety. She felt lonely, painful, and hopeless. She was scared to death. She ran away across the district and the fields where she found herself in a gloomy abandoned cemetery.

It was dark and stormy. The bitter winds were howling and shrieking in the neglected graveyard. A number of wild, hungry dogs were growling around looking for food and shelter. My grandma was startled not knowing what to do. Out of the blue, her ears picked up a faint moan and a sound of fabric rustling coming out of the rubble. Then a figure appeared out of the darkness, covered in a wide, big sheet, dragging himself in her direction. For a moment she was petrified. Her voice was frozen in her throat. Her eyes turned around and up to heaven seeking help. The seconds seemed like hours for her, but she regained her strength and crouched down hiding behind a nearby tombstone. She heard the ghost's steps approaching, but his moaning had changed into shrieking which mingled with the howls of the dogs. Unexpectedly, she found herself running with all her might through the burial ground not heeding the ghost and the barking dogs. Escape was her only chance for survival. She kept running until she found a deserted shelter. She was exhausted and didn't have a choice, but to go inside where she fell into a deep sleep. When she woke up, she continued her escape challenging her fate, until she came to a village where she was recognized by distant relatives who embraced her and took good care of her.



My grandmother would always cry when telling us her story and we cried, too. She would also tell us “You know, darlings, sometimes I feel that the figure I met in the cemetery was the spirit of my father, who was moaning in pain when he first appeared, then when he shrieked it was to warn me to escape.”

However, whether it was her father’s spirit, an evil spirit, or just her imagination it didn’t matter. What mattered then was to remember the traumatic experience of a child who faced a ghost in a dark, abandoned graveyard and who lost her family which meant the whole world to her.

## **Poetry Translated by Jacqueline Badro**

We close our eyes when crying, when dreaming, when wishing and when hugging. Because the beautiful things in life aren’t seen with the eyes but felt with the heart.

—Gibran Khalil Gibran

## **Books by Jacqueline Badro**

Treasure Friends

Educating, building, entertaining

I enjoy reading in a beautiful calm nature

Books are faithful friends

## I Miss You by Jinjin Cai



When I think of my grandma, my eyes fill with tears. I also feel pain in my heart. In 2006, she passed away. I can only meet her in my dream. She left me with full memories.

She was so nice and treated me so well. She got up early in the morning, and cooked meals for me. She couldn't bear to wake me up. She watched and waited until I finally woke up. On weekends, she made big meals for me. She was so good at cooking that I thought the dumplings she made were the best food in the world.

When was a little girl, I slept over at her house every night. When it got dark, my grandma snuggled with me. She told me some fairy tales which she had heard from others. We sometimes read the Chinese characters in the newspaper. When I was very young, she taught me some characters. As I grew up, I knew more characters than she did. She was happy when I read a whole paragraph in the newspaper. She admired literate people. She said, "If I could change my life, I would want to be a person who can read." She hoped I could get educated. When I passed the entrance examination of college, the whole family was proud of me, especially my grandma. When I left for college after the holiday, my grandma cried like a child. She secretly put money in my backpack. I didn't find it until I got to the campus.

My grandma had a life of suffering. In her early life, she was poor. She had to move several times. She dreamed of owning her own big home. In her middle age, my grandpa was so seriously ill that he had to lie in bed all day. My grandma had to take care of him every day for eight years. In her later life, she was ill and had to stay in bed. To avoid problems, she chose to die in her own way. When I heard she was dead, I cried loudly. I had no chance to repay her. When I come home, I visit her grave with flowers in my hands.

When I think of her, I still remember her face. I miss her so much. I wish that she is well in heaven.



**Mrs. Ginger**  
**by Epifania Cristóbal**



The first time I met Mrs. Ginger was at Mountain Gate Restaurant in Thurmont, Maryland. I was working at the salad bar. A woman came in for breakfast. She approached me and asked me if I was Juan's mother. Juan is my youngest son. Mrs. Ginger was an aide for my son at Catoclin High School.

As the days passed, I got to know Mrs. Ginger better. When my son graduated from Catoclin High School, she said she would accompany him to the after-graduation party. My son uses a wheelchair. She picked him up in the evening. I wasn't worried about Juan because he was in good hands with Mrs. Ginger. I slept very well that night. The next morning, I asked Juan what time he had gotten home from the party. He said at 5 a.m. I was very surprised, and I asked him if Mrs. Ginger had been there the whole time. He said no, they wouldn't let her in because she wasn't a chaperone. Juan said she came to pick him up after he called her on his cellphone. She brought him home. I was very grateful.

I have known Mrs. Ginger for about eight years now. She still helps me by taking Juan to places he needs to go, such as job fairs, where he can show his work as a graphic artist. I appreciate her very much because she has been a big blessing for our family.

## **My Family** **by Bunkong Dasai**

My family had a farm. I remembered when I was 11 years old. My family moved to another province, a small town in Thailand. We had a big land to do the farming. The farm was beautiful and located at the base of a mountain. There was a small river near the farm also. We raised ducks and chickens and we planted corn, several kinds of beans, and papaya. My parents and siblings worked on the farm, and I helped them after school and on the weekend. I also helped them to prepare the food that we grew. One of my favorite things to make was a papaya salad. It was very delicious. When I look back, I miss those days. I was very proud and happy with my family.

## My First Time in New York by Eun Hee Seo



After only a few months in the U.S., I was living in Annandale, Virginia. I couldn't speak English, only "No," "Yes," and "Thank you." I wanted to get a watch band for my watch. The only store that sold the right one was in Manhattan. I used my cell phone and called my friend who lived in Flushing. I went to her apartment to stay overnight. The next morning, I went to Manhattan to buy the watch band.

I took a Korean taxi. The driver dropped me off and I walked to the store. My friend told me how to get there using my phone. At the store, the salesman used his hands to explain that the watch band wasn't there. If you order one, it will be here in 40 more days. I didn't order it, so I went window shopping instead. There are many luxury stores in Manhattan, but I didn't go inside any of them because I didn't speak any English.

When I wanted to go back to Flushing, I called the Korean taxi, but he said at that time there was too much traffic, and he didn't come. I saw a Yellow Cab and told the driver, "Phrushing." He said "I do not understand." Again, I said, "Phrushing." He said, "Get out. I don't understand your language."

I went to the subway. It was my first time at a subway station and I didn't know how to buy a ticket. I tried to call my friend's boyfriend because he speaks English well, but that didn't help because the subway was downstairs and my phone didn't get a signal. I looked for a kind person, someone who smiled and who could help me.

A man in a uniform asked me where I was going. I said "Phrushing." He didn't understand. He took me to a map on the wall and he pointed to Flushing. "Yes," I said. And then he said "Cash or credit card?" He showed me the machine for a ticket, but I didn't know how to use it and then the man in the uniform was gone.

A man behind me helped me, but then I didn't know which way to go to take the train to get to Flushing. The same uniformed man came back up to me and told me, "Take this train to 32nd Street, then change to Number 7. Get off at the last stop."

When I got off the first train, I saw Number 7 with an arrow pointing up. I thought it meant to go upstairs and started up the steps. The uniformed man saw me and yelled, "Hey!" He pointed straight, not up, and I saw the entrance to the right train.

When I finally got to Flushing, I was very happy, even though I didn't have my watch band. My friends said, "Eun Hee, you are amazing!"

## **Yasmin's Story**

### **by Lucrecia Espinoza**

Yasmin was a very intelligent baby. She liked colors very much. Her favorite doll was Minnie Mouse. She loved to eat carrots. She liked to splash in the water. She was a very calm baby. She liked watching Tom and Jerry, her favorite cartoon. She was a very special baby.

She is a very nice girl. She smiles all the time. It is fun for her to play with her friends. She likes to ride on roller skates and compete on bicycles.

Yasmin likes animals very much and she loves flowers. She wants to be a superstar and she likes watching superhero movies. She loves pizza and macaroni and cheese. She likes music very much and likes to dance. She really likes little cars. She goes on the swings with her friends. She loves her parents and her uncles a lot and her cousins, especially José and Nathaly. They like to play soccer together.

## The Naughty Rooster

by Amilcar Fernandez



In Peru, my Grandmother would sit down with me by her knee at 7 p.m. and we would pray for one hour. Then my Grandmother would tell me stories like this one. God first, then stories.

### "The Naughty Rooster"

Among the people of the Andes of Peru, a grandmother lived with a naughty rooster. She loved him very much, but one day she decided to visit her family and she left the rooster to take care of the corn. The rooster was watching over the corn when his rooster friends came over, but they were hungry and began to play and to eat the corn.

Then when Granny arrived back home and there was no corn, she was very bothered and ran out of the house crying. On a hill, the naughty rooster found rain water with whom he became friends, and he took the water into his belly. Beyond, he found a fox and a cougar with whom he became friends and he carried the two of them also in his belly.

The naughty rooster came to a faraway town and was singing through the streets when a peasant grabbed him and took him to the hen house so that the peasant's fighting roosters could practice with him and kill him!

But the rooster asked for help from his friend the fox and the fox killed all the fighting roosters. The desperate peasant, rabid about his roosters, took the naughty rooster to the corral of mules and horses so they could kick and kill him, but the naughty rooster asked for help from his friend the cougar and the cougar killed them all.

In the end, the rooster was locked in a dark house. He was a prisoner and called for help from his water friend. The water became a river and flowed out and took down the dark house. This freed the rooster to return to his village where he was greeted with a party and a band, and he was forgiven by Granny.

## **Black-bellied Whistling Duck**

### **By Kadir Gafur**

My name is Kadir and I am from Guyana. Guyana is in South America. My story is about a duck that lives in Guyana called the Black-bellied Whistling Duck.

The Black-bellied Whistling Duck is a pretty duck. It has a red beak, red feet, black belly and white on its wings. It makes a whistling sound when it is calling other ducks or if it is in danger.

The Black-bellied Whistling Duck lives in the rice fields of my country. It likes to eat the seeds from the rice plants. Sometimes the ducks will make their nest in the rice fields and they will lay their eggs there also. The mother and father duck take care of the eggs, they take turns sitting on the eggs until they hatch and they will take care of the baby chicks. The mother and father duck will take the baby chicks to the river or creek to swim and get food. The ducks move along and do not stay in one place very long. The ducks don't like people. They will holler at you if you get too close. They will fly away also.

When I lived in Guyana, I would catch the Black-bellied Whistling Duck. I would catch them when they were young chicks about ready to fly. My son and I would catch them by the river when they dove down to eat plants off the bottom. We used a fine fishing net that we set up. We would set up the net and then trick the duck from behind. When they came up for air they would see us and run into the net. We would put them in a bag and carry them home.

At home we made a pen. We would cover the pen so that the ducks would not see people. They were wild and they were not used to people. In the beginning they would not eat. Sometimes I would have to open their mouths and throw rice seeds in their mouths. After a while they got used to my family and we didn't have to cover up the ducks. I would have to clip their wings to keep them in the yard. After I clipped their wings so they could not fly, and the ducks did not have to stay in the pen anymore, I let them roam around outside the house and in the yard.

I had about 30 ducks. The ducks got very tame and would come over to you. They would peck at you with their beaks, looking for food. The ducks were also "good watch ducks." They would holler at anyone who came to the house. I enjoyed watching them.

People would pass by my house and ask me what I was doing with the ducks. They wanted to know if I would sell them. I did sell some of them and



some of them I ate. It got expensive to feed them so selling some gave me the money I needed for their food.

The Black-bellied Whistling Duck is very difficult to catch. You need to know what you are doing and watch the ducks closely. I became fascinated by the ducks because of their red color. It was an interesting project, which had a great ending. They were delicious to eat!



## Letter From Love

### By Silvia Godínez



We met on the road a few years ago, when we wanted to leave a torturous past by finding a new meaning to life. Quickly we began to share a dream life, as if a brush would fill our days with colors.

The road was not easy, but we were united and saved by everything around us. We bet on long-term happiness. In a beautiful summer, we arrived at a wonderful place, full of flowers and awesome landscapes, a hidden place that few had heard mention, "Frederick". A place that for many was strange, for us it became our home and the best experience of my life with you.

In the mornings, I could feel how your lips touched mine to welcome me to a new day. Every morning, you made me smile because I could look at you and thank you for waking up with me. After I knew that the breakfast would arrive at the bed as a detail of love that contained a perfect secret ingredient, it made my day begin shining.

Before we separated to go to fulfill our other responsibilities, we could always listen to plans for a nice day, see you to eat, say, I LOVE YOU. I would stop every afternoon next to the window to see how you were going to work, waiting for you to turn around to give me a smile and you will throw me a kiss. Then, I waited anxiously at night to greet you again and talk about our day, illuminating everything, knowing that without telling you and just looking at you, and you could know that I told you I love you.

We became to be a single best team, talking was our best distraction, sometimes while we were drinking coffee or a couple of beers. We shared our opinions and rambled on about the things of life, and although many times we did not agree, we always kept thinking about the other's opinion. We found new activities to share together that made our afternoons an adventure.

At night, before we were falling asleep, watching a little television, you extended your arm and I snuggled up in you, and together hoped that a beautiful butterfly would appear once. Saying sweet-dreams, I made that moment into the best of the world. I felt loved, protected and safe.

After when you slept, I enjoyed looking at your silhouette with the lights off. That little light that crossed the window and let me admire you and spent minutes just contemplating you. I was happy because I was with the man who loved me. Some nights, I woke up at dawn I could see and feel our hands linked and without letting go of you I could go back to sleep, feeling peace, because I knew we were together.

However, one day the unexpected happened and I saw in your eyes a look I had never seen. One look that seemed to describe that you were not here, and that you needed to say something that was not good. Later, I heard you, and my heart broke. I was listening attentively to every word.

Your look was sad, sober, and empty. I knew that could be the end of our relationship. You wanted to put me safe from you, your pain and your self-destruction and I loved you more. I understood that I had to open my heart to let you go. Your happiness was no longer by my side.

The days passed, and in my sadness, I asked myself: What happened? What made you hesitate? Now I think what happened was not one major problem. It was not that day you felt that special connection; it was not a wonderful day next to someone else; it was not your indecision, our fights, your distrust of me; it was not your lack of self-esteem, the death of your mother, the incomprehension of your father, the estrangement with your sister. It was all these things together; it was a world of grief, detachment and confusions that came with you and that reached you at the moment in which you thought you had avoided them, forgotten them or buried them.

Love, the life does not forget, life reaches us sooner or later, to tell us you remember this that has always been there and that you never closed, to remind us that we do not forget it and that we only avoid it so that it does not cause us pain.

But I have to let you go, not because I'm a coward and I'm afraid to face your worst fears and your monsters next to you, and let you go but I'm going because I want to help you heal your wounds. Those that have hurt you for a long time. I want that you find yourself, that you value the wonderful man that you are, that you find emotional maturity and love for you. Probably, my presence will only make you flee from that loneliness that you have been avoiding every time something upsets you. I would not only confuse you more; it could stop your emotional development and the opportunity to find your peace to be able to rediscover yourself and be happy.

I hope that this is not a goodbye, but a see you soon. I know that in our separation we will both grow as people, that distance accompanied by loneliness will give us the opportunity to find ourselves, to find strength and admit our weaknesses, to get rid of doubts and fears, to get rid of what we do not need, with holding onto the possibility of meeting again. After this process, we can possibly feel the certainty of having a love that gives us

peace and well-being—a love that becomes the best of our lives and that we strongly join ourselves to not let it go again.

For now, let's be patient, careful and take advantage of this opportunity to find the best way for both of us. Be brave and honest so that after this, we can sit down and talk, no matter what the ending is, and who knows? Maybe life will surprise us.

## Waiting For Someone by Fatemeh Honarbakht



It was early in the morning, and I was in my soft and comfortable bed. Outside, it was cold. I didn't want to wake up and go to school. I put on my school uniform, ate breakfast, and walked out to meet my friend. She was not where we agreed to meet.

I waited for my friend to come ... Their home was two streets away from us. Standing in the rain, I had one eye on the street and one eye on my watch that showed the passage of time. Why did she not come? Ten minutes passed and I was still waiting ... "She will come. I will wait one more minute," I thought. But, she didn't come.

Time passed and the rain continued and there was no sign of her. Half an hour passed, and now the school bell was ringing and everyone was in the classroom.

Frustrated, I went to school alone.

I knocked on the classroom door and entered. The teacher said, "You cannot get in the classroom because you are too late." I began to cry. But, through my tears, I saw my friend sitting in the classroom and looking at me. She had come to school in a car and did not tell me.

It's been a long time since then, and I've learned to just wait a little for someone. I will not waste my life waiting for something or someone. Sometimes you wait for someone and then you learn she's living her life and you're looking for someone who's not going to come.

## Scrapbooking by Jessica Jameson



I like to do scrapbooking because it is fun to do. I get to spend time with my aunt and make memories. There are a lot of different themes to choose from. When we get the photos together for scrapbooking, we talk about things in the past. When I made a scrapbook of my grandpa after he died it kept the memories of him alive in my heart.

## Avoid Noise and Find Happiness by Kezhong

The spring breeze carried a floral fragrance flowing throughout our city. Everyone wanted to fully enjoy nature and appreciate the beautiful scenery and to ease the pressures of everyday life. In only three days it would be spring break. The picturesque landscape was full of people, and there were many cars on the highway continuing to slowly crawl to some scenic areas.

I didn't want to be in a crowd with so many people. I preferred to find a quiet place to chat with my friends. So, I planned with a few friends to "explore" in the mountains in the northwest. We took the bus for an hour and arrived at the foot of the mountain. Few people had come here and there was no path to climb up the mountain. So, we climbed cautiously.

Suddenly we were pleased to hear the sound of a stream. Following the sound, we saw a pool of clear water. The pool's bottom and edges were made of stone. We saw the bottom clearly. There were about a hundred fish in the pool. These fish seemed to hang in the air. The sun shone and the shadows of the fish were clearly projected onto the bottom of the stone. All of a sudden, the fish went away. But soon, the fish were back again. We didn't know where they came from or where they had gone. Yet it seemed they swam to and fro as if sharing the happiness with us. We were surprised that the water was so clear, and we admired the happy life of the fish. Then we thought of something we always had to do. We reluctantly said goodbye to the lovely fish and made a mutual agreement to come here again next year.

## Frederick by Hanhan Liu



I have lived in five cities and two of them are my favorites. Frederick is one of my favorites.

I like the weather here. Four distinct seasons all have their own character. Spring is always shy to show up, but it is the most colorful. The flowers make the air sweet. Summer is not too hot. I like meandering around Culler Lake before sunset. Autumn is another colorful season because the leaves are turning. Snow and a day off from time to time in the winter are very suitable for a person living in an apartment like me.

I like the lifestyle here. Just a 10 minute-drive away, several hiking trails are waiting for me. It is a good place where I can relax and refresh myself. Although, once I was confronted by a baby bear and I broke my record of how fast I could come down the hill. Also, all the grocery and department stores are close to my apartment so I can get fresh vegetables and fruit easily. There are different types of restaurants for me to choose from.

Last but not least, I like the people who are living here. I think because they love this place and they love life that they make Frederick a lovely, small town. I found wonderful chocolate ice cream and steak in the farmer's market. I enjoy looking at the front yards while I am driving through the town. Every Halloween and Christmas the community has a different look. People are ingenious in coming up with new ideas for decorating their yards and houses. They are nice and friendly. I have gotten a lot of help. When I had to walk to the lab after a big snow, more than one person offered me a ride. When I was struggling with a machine or device in a new place, people who were just walking by were glad to stop and help me out. However, you may not agree with me, I have to say the drivers here are quite friendly, at least not as aggressive as in DC.

In summary, with good scenery, good food and good people, life here is not only pleasant, quiet and peaceful, but also high quality.

## My Special Family Member by Jing Lu



I first met my dog at my aunt's home in 2011. He was a mixed Yorkshire who was adopted by my aunt. I can't believe he was just a pocket runt as big as my foot. He was covered with dark brown hair. He moved his chubby body along the white tile floor with baby steps. His eyes were too dark to be seen so we named him Chocolate. He was as curious about me as a baby. He sniffed my toes, my palm, even my hip for a while and then licked me while wagging his tail. I knew I absolutely passed the test. I realize I have been an important part of his life from that time on.

Whenever I visited my aunt's house, walking through the hallway from the door, he had special ways to welcome me: hanging his tongue in the air by leaping up and down while sprinkling onto my foot, rocking his head as a dance around me with a stuffed toy in his mouth, and then rumbling in his throat like singing a song. Oh! What a genius dog! I didn't feel like saying anything but that I enjoyed being accustomed to his great enthusiasm.

Chocolate had the best time with me in the first half of the year. He liked galloping faster and faster over great sweeps of grass in my sight. He also stuck to me like glue from the dining room to the washroom as soon as I visited him. He stayed near the door where he curled his forelegs under his chest, only waiting for my coming back again. He preferred staying quietly beside me and lying his head on his paws if I was tired or busy. Sometimes, he felt so embarrassed to be found doing a bad thing that he had to obey my aunt's order, although he didn't agree with her. He looked nervous as if he had made trouble then searched for sight of me for help. I pretended to be serious too, but we all couldn't help bursting out laughing very soon. What a clumsy boy with a simple heart. He had such a sweet childhood until my aunt had to leave home for a long time. Then his life changed.

We were apart from then on. Chocolate had been boarded in another family for nearly five months. The environment was good, but he became lonely and unhappy. He didn't dance and run any more but only curled in the corner of the cage every day. I knew he was still waiting for us. I knew he was puzzled why I didn't appear any more in front of him, or why my aunt left him alone.



I asked myself why I wouldn't like to keep him. Only because of my poor living environment? Was it the wrong way for him? I felt something lost from my heart. I just realized he had already become my family member long, long ago. I decided to adopt him when I heard my aunt was worried that Chocolate might be adopted by others. I can't forget how excitedly he met me again, but also with sad eyes. He crazily licked my whole face with babbling and stuck to me, never moving away. I realized he will never mind who you are or where you live, but only hopes to be with you. He looked so gaunt and seemed a different shape and that made me feel really guilty. I took him home immediately. I promised to be his companion from then on wherever we would go and however my living environment would be. He just enjoyed staying with me as before. His bitter life was gone. Now he is sleeping beside me, dreaming in a wonderful world, acting as a bed dog.



## Peace Begins with a Smile by Maritza

My favorite famous person is Mother Teresa of Calcutta. She was the founder of the order of the Missionaries of Charity, a Roman Catholic Congregation of women dedicated to helping the poor. Mother Teresa was very special. She was a servant of God. Mother Teresa was a humanitarian. Her birthdate is August 26, 1910. Her death date is September 5, 1997. She was canonized a saint on September 4, 2016 by Pope Francis.

I love you forever Mother Teresa of Calcutta! We should all follow the example of Mother Teresa's fight against the injustices of man. She fought always for the poor. Here is Mother Teresa in her own words:

"If you can't feed a hundred people then feed just one."

"Peace begins with a smile."

Mother Teresa of Calcutta is my hero and my inspiration.

## Letter from a Daughter to a Friend by Gita Mehdizadeh



Today is the 21st of March. The weather is cold. I have written this letter to a person on a cold night. He is my closest friend. I've known him since 1975. For once, I close my eyes and write, and I would like to think that others would do the same as well. I've written this just for him. How are you doing, my dear? These days are certainly cold. I know, the soil is colder. Your body is also watered. Does cold penetrate your body more easily? Is that coffin still in good condition, or is it rotted? Two meters below the ground should be slightly warmer, isn't it?

Everyone is happy at the turn of the year. I put my cell phone next to me for you to call me, with your sweet accent, repeating the English words you have softly remembered. This is the second time "Nowruz" is just around the corner and you are not calling me. I've been silent for 24 months; I'm out of control. I cannot take anymore. I haven't deleted your number from my phone. I've moved it from one book to another, and I'm just thinking that one day, the phone will ring and I will see your number on the screen. I don't like this darn phone that connects everybody to me except you. Why aren't you asking me how I feel? I know that you are not doing something wrong. As you say, there is a reason behind everything that happens. Everything is going to be better. Calm down! I talk with you, but I want to write to you to tell you how badly I feel. I would like to tell you about all the days that you were not with me. I feel loneliness more than usual. Here everything is repetitive and complicated. I'm tired, tired and alone, but I stand firmly, so you will be calm.

The weather is cold. These day, for the very first time, I wish that there would be another world, so I could see you there and hug you again. No one but you can figure out how much I regret your loss, suffering through all the days I have missed you. I don't miss anybody as much as I miss you. You are my true friend. It doesn't matter to most of the world if I and you were alive or dead. What a strange world! It seems our existence is not important, but never mind. I would like to have a cup of coffee with you. As usual, you say again "there is not a good coffee in IRAN". So, you put your glasses on, look at your watch and say "It's too late". I haven't started this letter with Hi, but I'll finish without saying goodbye.

The weather is cold. Be careful Daddy. I hope your coffin is in good condition. Two meters below the ground where we are standing; it should be warmer.

## Before and After Learning English by Silvia Muñoz Moreyra



I came to live in this wonderful place called Frederick in May, 2012. I always was looking for an opportunity to learn English, to speak with friends and work in an area that I was passionate about: Law and the legal issues. But, at that point my English causes me a pain in the head. So, I started my process of learning. I heard many times when I first arrived to live here: You will dream in English one day. This is true, it happened.

Pronunciation is another big issue. The English sounds sometimes cause me trouble because of the emphasis on certain sounds or even my confusion with using the wrong words. I was confused between “beach or bitch” (hope you are not the same like me).

Sometimes I can’t figure out if I am talking in Spanish or in English, as a result when I am watching a movie at home in English, I make my comments in English then I realize that I spoke in English. Likewise, if I went to the cinema, I saw a movie and my comments after we finished were in English. (My thoughts: perhaps I was so focused or involved in the movie that my brain wants to still be in the same frequency.) Hahaha!

Conversation by phone was really a nightmare for me. I was even afraid to start to dial the numbers. But why? I don’t know yet. But, well as a parent sometimes I need to call the doctor, teacher or do appointments. Sometimes the answering machines just let us know the options and they are too fast and unclear. Consequently, I had to challenge myself, and so today phone conversation aren’t a problem anymore.

I learned how to do karaoke in English. That helped me a lot and as a result I still practice even last weekend singing songs. The main reason singing helps me is with my pronunciation and that is something that I need to work on.

I am still in the process of learning how to understand when I read in English. It’s difficult for me and I am still working on it.

Finally, if I need to say what I couldn’t say in English before is that I am a bilingual dreamer. I am doing better on my pronunciation and I am no longer afraid to talk on the phone. The greatest stress for me is still reading and writing in English. It continues to cause me a pain in my head.

## From My Bedroom by Y Rhee



Looking out the window from my bedroom, I can see tall oak, sycamore, and gum tree tops beyond my backyard. They dance for me and I with them when the wind blows. I walk to the window to look down on my orchard and garden that I cultivated for years in my backyard. I have many different kinds of fruits and vegetables to harvest each year, but I don't have an army to feed and I'm tired of trying to give them away. Besides, the workload has become burdensome lately. Therefore, I need to reduce the production, and so the workload.

My backyard is in the east of my house. I planted three peach, three apple, and three Asian pear trees in the back yard and many chestnut and persimmon trees around the house. There is an asparagus patch beyond the orchard just before the woods. I planted over one hundred boxwood, alone to border the southern side of my backyard. There are raspberry and blackberry patches next to the boxwood. Then there is the vegetable garden approximately 18 by 75 feet. The garden is divided into 12 rows. There are 5 garlic, two onion rows that lived through the harsh winter. I usually have kale and spinach also, but they died out this winter. I saw spinach sprouts start to grow already. Strawberries and chives are coming up also. Spinach, asparagus, and chives will soon be on the table. But I need to protect them from my chickens, for they love to fly over the garden fence to peck at them. I sometimes let them enjoy my vegetables when they are full grown. Otherwise the chickens scratch up and destroy everything.

I also have a blueberry patch in the south side of my front yard. It is my second try after failing with the first patch in the backyard. I also have plum and cherry trees in the front yard, but they don't do well. The soil here is the problem. It is very dense, wet clay with flat layers of rocks underneath—the worst type for gardening. Over the years, I have been putting down so much compost, mixed with tree leaves and chicken manure, but it still has not improved much. I like root vegetables, but I cannot grow them. I have tried to grow potatoes, sweet potatoes, turnips, and medicinal plant roots, but they don't do well here. Oh, I also have mulberry trees around the house for the birds. It brings back a memory for me of my mother's silk worms. To make

ends meet, she used to grow silkworms, that live on mulberry leaves.

I was lonely and depressed when we were relocated to Frederick from San Francisco. My son and his family moved with us, but they felt a strangeness here and left for Massachusetts instead. I spent every daylight alone here in the woods. Internet didn't work well here back then. I was jumping to the sounds of squirrels' rustlings. My mind kept listening to the gate as I almost could hear my son's voice calling out to me. I was missing my only not yet two-year-old grandchild terribly. After returning from trips overseas, I was feeling like a cow taken to the slaughterhouse. Each time I went away, I didn't want to come back home to Frederick, but my mortal obligation brought me back each time.

Then I decided to cut down the trees and dig into the earth around the house to keep me away from my loneliness and depression. I worked from dawn to dusk and tore my rotator cuff on my right shoulder and then the left one two years later. Recently, a friend asked me if I could move away and leave all of this. Yes, I can move away without looking back, I said. I had done what I could instead of getting sick. After all, isn't it the process what matters most? I believe so.

I try to do less these days as my physical condition slows me down, but I think if someone would enjoy the fruits of my labor it would make me happy. From my bedroom window, I see and feel the last 13 years of my life here in the woods. I am glad that I have done what I could, while I could, around my house.





## Learning English by Young Sil Ryu

When I moved to the U.S.A. I didn't study English. I couldn't do anything here. I couldn't drive; I couldn't even go to the doctor's office by myself. I couldn't go out without my husband.

Two years ago, I started to study English at the Literacy Council, and I met my mom-tutor. The first time I couldn't speak, I couldn't understand, and I couldn't write. My pronunciation was very bad. I worried about talking. I was scared. But my mom-tutor talked slowly and I felt comfortable with her. I said only a few words, but my mom-tutor understood. I felt very bad when I made mistakes, but now I can try to fix my mistakes.

Now it pleases me to go to the Literacy Council. I feel now "I can do it." Last week I went to get a breast exam by myself. When I go to the store, if I see some different vegetables, I ask what they are and how to cook them, and I understand how. Now I feel more confident and I am happier.



This is Dalbong and he is our pet and brings a lot of happiness to our family.

## Difficulty Learning English by Christophe Sanny

Coming in to a country where the language is different from your own is difficult; this is my case in the United States. My name is Christophe, I'm 20 years old and I came from a French speaking country, Senegal, in West Africa. When I came here I really had a problem with integration due to the barrier of language, and so far this is my biggest problem.

First, I already see no similarities between the English language and the French language. It was mostly the problem of understanding. It's difficult for me to understand because the American people speak quickly and they speak without opening their mouth normally. Sometimes the way of speaking is really strange when they employ the less common words.

And second, I am shy and don't often speak, but especially when speaking another language. It's most difficult to find the right words and when you are a shy person as I am than it's ridiculous, because I am afraid to make mistakes and my shell is difficult to remove.

In conclusion, certainly coming here English wasn't my language but it's a good language when you can speak it and I think that I will try to be better at both listening and speaking.



## The Village Where I Was Born by Rohini Sripanjalingam



The Village Where I Was Born and my motherland are most precious for everybody. Sri Lanka (called Ceylon when it was a British colony) is a beautiful island in the Indian Ocean, famous for its tea. In northern Sri Lanka there are seven small islands. I was born on one of the islands named Pungudutivu. It is 6 miles long and 4 miles wide, 18.5 miles in circumference and it contains 8,000 acres. During the Dutch colonial period it was called Middleburg because it is in the middle of the other islands. It is in a fairly dry zone and it gets yearly temperatures between 800 and 900 degrees Fahrenheit, with only 25 to 50 inches of rainfall per year.

The people who lived here were hard workers. Business, education, fishing and livestock gave wealth to the natives. A lot of learned people (Pandits) lived in this village and taught their society about good manners, religion and language. In addition, a lot of entrepreneurs established their businesses all over Sri Lanka but their families remained in this village; therefore, this dry land had some wealthy people. This small island had 14 schools, including 5 middle schools and 1 high school. And it also had many Hindu temples, one Christian church and one Catholic Church. The people who live here speak Tamil and most of them are Hindus. After the British colonization some converted into Catholics and other Christians.

After the Sri Lankan civil war (1983-2009), the island was almost ruined. Most of the people left this land and moved all over the world. Houses and schools were abandoned. Population dropped down from 30,000 to 3,000. People who live there now are living under poverty and have a challenging time just to get clean drinking water. But the people who moved from my village live with their old memories and are providing contributions to develop the land back. I am also one of the babies from Pungudutivu living with old, golden and happy memories.

## A Husband and Wife Who are Best Friends by Sungheui



If I had the chance to go to an expensive restaurant, I would want to go to a restaurant called “Volt” with my husband.

First of all, one of my friends told me that I was invited to the restaurant because she had a gift card to “Volt” that was worth one hundred dollars. My friend was a busy person, so she scheduled her time on that day she invited me. She told me when we’d meet and when we’d eat. She also told me what to wear: I had to wear fancy clothes. In the end, a couple of months went by and we never went. She never talked about the restaurant again.

I later found out that she wasn’t able to afford the dinner for the day, including both our meals. She needed more money for the dinner since the gift card wasn’t enough to pay for the whole bill, so she couldn’t go there.

On the other hand, my husband and I both met each other on a blind date. We got married just after 22 days. Everybody I knew thought I was crazy, and asked me how could I possibly get married with my husband after only dating a few times. We are so different from each other in many ways like the North Pole and the South Pole, both having opposite directions. We just have a few commonalities.

We both love God as Christians: His word and his church. I think that God made it so that my husband and I were meant for each other. Therefore, we needed to have talks together in order for us to form a better relationship. However, an immigrant’s life is tight sometimes.

I felt like I didn’t have a headspace, even though I had so many things I should’ve done a long time ago. In this case, my husband and I decided to enjoy what time we have and do these things together.

As a result, I think that a husband and wife should have a good friendship throughout their lives. I believe that my husband would be my best friend. Thus, if I have a chance to go to an expensive restaurant, I would like to be there with my husband.

## A Journey to the Holy Land by Jamila Toro



I was five years old when my grandfather decided to take his two sons, my father, my uncle, and me to Jerusalem. Every senior in our community dreams of a visit to Jerusalem over Easter time. This journey is called a pilgrimage which means visiting the holy city, the holy churches and sites.

We traveled by bus. I remember all the time sleeping in my grandfather's lap. I also remember the narrow streets with small shops on both sides. Most of them sell souvenirs, icons, and crosses. We bought some gifts for our relatives.

On Palm Sunday we wore white gowns, held palms, and olive leaves and shared in the parade. On Saturday night, we were among the crowds at the Sepulcher Cathedral, waiting for the holy light. Suddenly the light came from the holy tomb. The people so were excited, and they all lit their candles from that one light. It was a joyful moment, and Jesus is resurrected all over again.

I also recall when I followed a little girl; she was dressed all in white—her dress, shoes and she wore big white wings. I thought she was heading straight to heaven. I believed if I followed her that I would go to heaven, too. So, I took off after her, but the road was too long. At last I realized that I was lost, then I met my parents and the other people who had been looking for me. Of course, I was very glad to meet up with them again.

As a tradition, we had a tattoo marked on our arms as a sign of the pilgrimage. It really hurt which made me draw by hand up from the pain and I spoiled the shape. I am very proud of having gone there. I am deeply grateful to my grandfather who took me to that place, and I am always proud of the tattoo on my arm.

## Cherry Blossoms by Jamila Toro

Blooms flowers

Dancing, fluttering, falling

The ground beneath the trees is covered with a pink carpet

Spring

## When I Lost My Way by Yanjin Wang



More than one year ago, I just came from China to U.S. One day, my wife and I went out for a walk. We walked a long time far from home. I never saw that flower before. I then took a photo. Suddenly we found the street views beside the pavement didn't look familiar any more. We walked in a circle and couldn't find our way.

Why? We thought we might have lost our way home. What would we do then?

At that time, I saw a strong American by a car on the front of his home.

I got up the courage and went forward. I said to him: Excuse me sir, I've lost my way, can you help me? I took out a paper and showed him. There was my home address on it.

He looked at it and took out his cellphone to find the route to my home and told me how to get home. But I couldn't understand what he said completely.

We thanked him very much and said good bye. We continued to go back home.

After a while, the American driving his car caught up with us. He warmly invited us into his car and took us to our home.

We thanked him very much again and again not knowing what more to say. We invited him to come to our house. He politely declined. Unfortunately, I forgot to ask his name.

Through one ordinary American, I see the people of America are warm and friendly.

## Missing Cleveland by Tae Sook Woo



I came to the United States of America with my husband in June, 2004. Before I came to America, I was very excited. I thought America would be very big, free in speech, and dress, and filled with highly advanced technology.

On the second day of our arrival, we contracted for an apartment, bought a car, opened a bank account, and bought groceries.

Soon my husband started university classes for his Ph.D. I stayed at home and was very bored because I couldn't go anywhere because we only had one car. I began to use my computer and found out that the internet was much slower than in South Korea. Also, the walls in our apartment were so thin that we could hear sounds from our neighbors. Another thing that surprised me was the fact that women wore casual clothes.

After a year, we moved closer to my husband's school. Our new apartment was cleaner, quieter, and larger. I felt more at home because I met some Korean neighbors. Now, I was able to drive a car because my husband walked to school.

My first American friend was a security guard at my apartment building. He helped me with my English homework in the evening. He, Jerry, told me he'd been a D.J. at a radio station when he was younger. As time went on our communication became better. About eight years ago, Jerry won the lottery and moved to Las Vegas. I still talk to him by phone.

The winters in Cleveland were cold and snowy. Sometimes it would snow for 3 or 4 days. It was like a snow kingdom. I loved the snow!

After 5 years, we left Cleveland and moved to Frederick, Maryland where my husband got a new job. I still miss my friends in Cleveland, the snow, and the slower life style.

## A Smell of Home by Vlad Yamkovenko



The name of my mother was Galina. She was 82 when she died. She was a Ukrainian. The last 30 years of her life she was a housewife. Before this time, she worked in a restaurant. My mother loved children very much. She cooked cake all the time. I remember this delicious smell in our apartment when I returned home from school. I think it was the main hobby of my mother. When I sense this smell, I remember my mom.



## Steamed Bread by Rui Zhang



There are many traditions in my family, such as Spring Festival gathering, worshiping ancestors, and giving kids lucky money. The family tradition which gives me a lot of wonderful memories is to make steamed bread for Spring Festival.

Steamed bread is a traditional food in North China. Dough for steamed bread is made from fermented wheat flour, and the product is cooked in a steamer above boiling water to get roll-sized bread with a white smooth skin and no crust. We make special shapes of steamed bread for Spring Festival—the most important holiday in China. As part of Spring Festival celebrations, there is a custom every day from the 23rd to the 29th of the 12th lunar month. In my hometown, making steamed bread is traditionally made on December 28th based on the Lunar Calendar.

In my eyes, my maternal Grandma is the best chef in the world and is an expert in making many different shapes of steamed bread, including cat, dog, fish, flowers, and peaches etc. When I was young, my Mom and aunts helped my Grandma prepare ingredients and materials every December 28th of the Lunar Calendar. At the same time, my cousins and I tried to stay in the kitchen, instead of playing outside as we usually did. We treated dough as Play-Doh and put it into shapes we liked. Then we stared at the steamer to wait for the moment when my Grandma opened the lid. The steamed breads fresh from the steamer were nice and warm. Kids took the ones made by ourselves eagerly. But I never ate my product. I showed it to my friends, and I felt proud when they envied me.

Making cute steamed breads was my most exciting experience when I was a little girl. Now, my cousins and I have grown up and left our city. We have few chances to visit my Grandma. It means we can't keep up this family tradition any longer. It's very depressing for us. When I see the steamed bread in the supermarket, I always remember my Grandma and her love for me.

Making steamed bread is not only a family tradition, more importantly, it is also a symbol of my happy childhood. It lets me recall my youth and realize the importance of family.





*Junjie Wang playing the hulusi.*



110 E. Patrick St.

Frederick, MD 21701

301-600-2066

[www.frederickliteracy.org](http://www.frederickliteracy.org)

[info@frederickliteracy.org](mailto:info@frederickliteracy.org)