

Reflections

Voices of English Learners

Second Edition, 2019

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

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

FOREWORD

If you were born in the U.S., imagine that you moved to China or Argentina. How lost would you be there, in the language and in the culture?

The Literacy Council teaches English to adult speakers of other languages. Our 280+ students vary in many ways. A glance through *Reflections: Voices of English Learners* will show you that they come from all over the world. Some never learned to read in their languages of birth; others are well-educated but struggling with English. And some are actually English-speaking U.S. adults who want to improve their reading and writing skills.

Our students' lives are full and often stressful. Some have two or three jobs, many are raising children in a country they don't understand very well. Yet, still they spend precious hours, week after week, with their tutors. It's a heroic effort – but these are hours that change their lives forever.

In the pieces that follow, a number of our 250+ students demonstrate their growing mastery of written English. At the same time, they let you see into their lives a little bit. Our volunteer tutors often talk about how much they learn from their students. Here's your chance to learn from them too. I'm sure you'll admire these writers and their work as much as I do.

Catherine Cox

Past President,
Board of the Literacy Council of Frederick County

DEDICATION

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

EDITOR'S NOTE

Reflections: Voices of English Learners continues to amaze and delight. In this second edition, students, tutors, staff, and sponsors have united to produce a picture window into the hopes and dreams and indefatigable spirit of these new members of our community. Hopefully, the keen honesty and clarity that these students possess will shed a brilliant light on the common story we all share. Join in reading these stories and you will cry and laugh along with us. They live hidden lives like most of us do, but their struggles and triumphs are our own. We have made small changes to the texts for clarity's sake, yet have valued the original voice of the author in all editing choices. We look forward to the third edition of *Reflections* in 2020.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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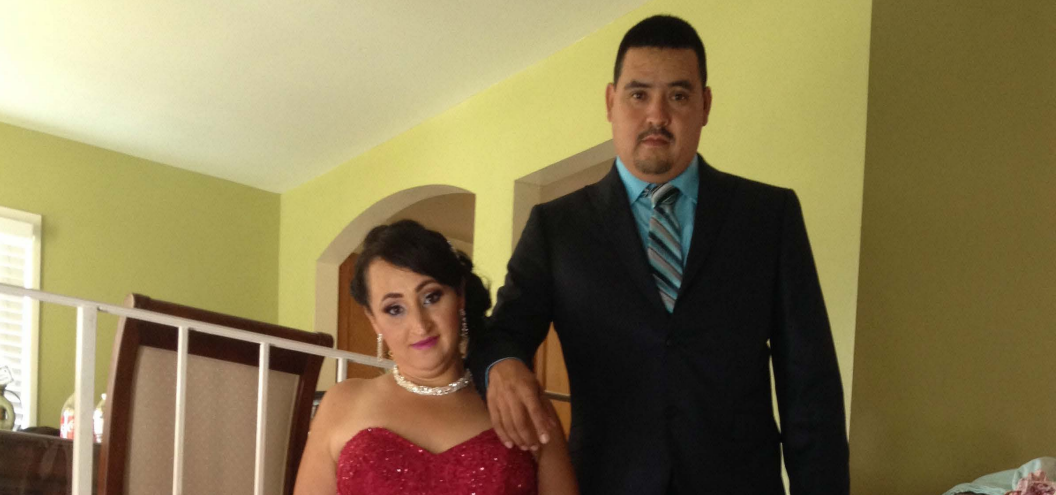
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HOW I COOK MY FAVORITE FOOD

by Jesús Aguilar

I am Jesús Aguilar. I am from Mexico and grew up on a farm there. I had seven brothers and sisters. We were very poor, and that is why I decided to come to the United States. I am glad I did because this country has many good people and they gave me the opportunity to grow personally. I have four children, all born in the U.S. and all are American citizens who speak perfect English. I have a good life here and I am very happy to have had the opportunity to live and work here.

I came to the U.S.A. 15 years ago. I love this country because here I found many good people. Now I am living in Frederick County, where I found the Literacy Council that helps me to improve my English vocabulary.

I am from Mexico. One thing I miss is real Mexican food. Americans think that all Mexican food is Tex-Mex. But there is not much in common between Tex-Mex and real Mexican food. In Mexico there are a lot of

different kinds of food. One of my favorite foods is a lamb barbacoa called birria. In Mexico, birria is very popular. People like to make birria when they have big parties, and also when they get married.

How do I cook it? Birria is marinated with a mix of garlic, black pepper, laurel, cinnamon, juajillo peppers, and cloves, but not until the meat is cooked the first time. After the meat is cooked, you cover the meat with all the ingredients and put it in the oven for two or three hours. When it is ready, it is very soft, and you can serve it with rice and fried beans. Put some chopped onions on top, hot sauce, lime juice, and then eat with corn tortillas. It is delicious and that is why many times my wife and I make birria at home. My four sons love it. If you have time to visit Jalisco, Mexico, I recommend you try birria. You will be happy.



EVERLASTING NIGHTMARE

by Jacqueline Badro

My name is Jacqueline. I'm from Syria where I worked as a physician internist, for about 35 years. My husband and I moved to the U.S.A. because of the war, 5 years ago. I learned the English language in school. I could read, write, but I could not speak the language, nor understand many essential daily concepts, so I was frustrated. Now after attending different classes at the Literacy Council I first attained my driver's license and also gained so much more so that I can immerse myself in my new community. I am certified as a Community Health Worker, facilitator for "Chronic Disease Self-Management," and "Diabetes, Hypertension, Pain Self-Management" as well as a graduate

of the Bridge Program that helps health educators give outreach to the community. Besides I volunteer in Community Care Ministries with the Salvation Army. Eventually my life has regained its vitality and its humanitarian meaning through my community services, and I still aspire to give more.

War is always a tragedy; whatever its causes or motives are. It brings death, disabilities, deformities, and destruction. It forces people to seek asylum or to immigrate to peaceful countries, leaving behind their loved ones their wealth, and their roots with all its precious memories. World War I and World War II are obvious

examples. Last year the Greek city of Thessaloniki got a shock. A bomb was found under a gas station. The police and the army forces responded immediately. They took all the security measures necessary to protect the people and their enterprises. People were evacuated, many drove out of town in their cars, and others were taken to safe places. The roads to the city and the main bus station were closed and trains were stopped. A great effort was made to remove the bomb safely. The bomb was made in the U.S. It was big, heavy, and armed. That means it could have exploded and caused tremendous destruction. Experts successfully disarmed the bomb and saved the city from possible disaster. Other old bombs have turned up before near the Macedonia Airport, which is east of Thessaloniki, but they were all found in open fields and people didn't have to leave their homes.

The event of the bomb discovery brought about a painful memory to an old man who had witnessed a day of bombing when he was a child. It was September 17, 1944, during WWII. Nazi Germany had already taken over Greece in 1941. The bombing was done by English and American airplanes, which aimed at the German railways in Greece. That day was unforgettable for this old man, "because my 10-year-old friend was killed in the bombing."

WWII was the largest and the most

destructive conflict in the world. It started in 1939 when Nazi Germany, led by Adolf Hitler, invaded Poland. It ended in 1945 after the U. S. dropped two nuclear bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, two cities in Japan. These horrible, dreadful bombs did much more than simply end the war. Their physical, mental, and cultural effects lingered far beyond 1945 and had tremendous impact on Japanese society up until the present day.

WWII resulted in an estimated 55-60 million deaths world-wide. It caused the decline of the old great powers and the rise of the super powers, the Soviet Union and the United States, creating a bipolar world. War negatively affects people, society, environment, economy, national heritage, and basic installations and infrastructures of the beleaguered, war-torn nations. Of which the most important are people and the national heritage which cannot be replaced. War is absolutely devastating. It is a crime against humanity that cannot be justified. It is a conflict of power and interests that will continue in different shapes and regions, and for different fabricated excuses, regardless of its brutal destruction and catastrophic consequences.

I hate war, not only because everything is ruined and turned upside down, but because only in war parents bury their sons and daughters and many children grow up missing their father's and mother's love.

Inspired by a *News for You* article in February of 2017 about Thessaloniki.

SHORT BUT EXCITING VISIT

by Jacqueline Badro

I'm so excited today. My friend Maha is coming to Frederick to meet me. I haven't seen her for more than thirty years, when she got married in Syria and moved to Jordan. Now we are going to have the opportunity to meet again here in Frederick and spend a whole afternoon together. The time waiting for her seemed to move slowly, but at last she is here! What a wonderful moment we have; hugs, smiles, and tears of joy all are blending together. After having a coffee break and cherishing the memories of our youth, our school days, and university graduation, we decided to continue our chat while we are visiting Frederick's historical downtown.

Now we are strolling along Carrol Creek, watching the beautiful lily pads and the pretty ducks swimming peacefully in the creek. Everything here attracts us: The Community Bridge, the fountains, the murals, the landscaping, the row of old style buildings, and the selection of nice restaurants, which are standing along the side of the creek. Many neat benches are also placed on both sides of the creek for people to rest, meditate, and enjoy the view.

Now that we have relished the lovely Carrol Creek park, we are moving to North Market street, which

is featured for its beautiful architecture and the large numbers of restaurants and dining rooms that meet different tastes and economical levels. There are a variety of shops along the street: women and men boutiques, table top displays and book stores, gift shops, jewelry and handcrafted accessories, antiques shops, art galleries, banks, and many other specialty businesses.

Downtown Frederick is amazing. There is a lot to see, especially museums and historic churches with their spires that dominate the city's skyline. Unfortunately, my friend's visit is too short to cover all the marvelous places that are located downtown. Besides our empty stomachs are calling for food, so the best thing for us now is to go into the closest restaurant, and satisfy our hunger as well as longing for each other's company before we say goodbye.

Happy times pass quickly, but they leave long standing memories and gratification. We had an exciting time and visit together, and the highlight of this visit was the stunning art work and the murals under the bridge which looked three dimensional, though they are actually just paintings. I am blessed to live in this area.



MY FABULOUS MEMORY WITH MY FAMILY

by Sungheui Bae-Park

I am from South Korea and I came to the U.S. 17 years ago. I have been studying English at the Literacy Council with Irene Romersa and also at Frederick Community College. I stopped learning English for several years, but I came back to the Literacy Council two years ago, and I took a couple classes, including the Writing Class and Conversation Class. They have motivated me to keep learning English. I will never give up learning English, despite a hard situation, because learning English is a great desire for me and an important goal in my life .

I have fabulous memories of my childhood with my family.

My first memory was with my grandmother. I was born in a small island in the southern section of my country, South Korea. If I journeyed to a big city, it would take three hours from my hometown which had a harbor and a wharf side there. Often my grandmom and I went to buy some fresh fish in the mornings. There were many fishermen selling their fresh caught fish which they kept in big basins. This time with my grandmom was so light and wonderful for me. I tried to touch the fish's skin,

but it was hard for me because they were fluttering so much. After many failed attempts, when I touched their skin, I felt so happy and full of delight. My grandmother was able to make a great bargain for the fish, too.

My second memory is with my parents. When my mom took care of my toddler siblings, especially at night getting them ready for bed, my father would give me a piggy back ride. I was so tall then that I felt like an adult! I thought I wanted to be an adult quickly at that time. I was in high places when he gave me piggy back rides. It was a fabulous memory for me because we looked at the leaves in the trees and the sky. He taught me about the Big Dipper, and the children's song which was in fashion a long time ago. The lyrics of the song were so poetic and lyrical, for example in the beginning:

"Blue sky Milky Way on the white side

There was a Katsura Tree and a rabbit.

We sang together until I fell asleep.

In addition, my mom was a wonderful tailor. Not only in our hometown, but also in the other small cities nearby. She made several school uniforms. When she was not busy, she made my clothes as well. I would try on the clothes and sing a song about thankfulness for my parents in front of mom. It was my first performance. She was my first and quite special audience.

As a result, being the oldest child in my family, I received a lot of affection from my parents. They made me feel very loved and helped me to pursue the dream of becoming a great musician. Therefore, I miss them very much and I love to think of my fabulous childhood memories with my family.



HOMELESSNESS

by Crystal Beggs

I wanted to come to the Literacy Council in Frederick to brush up on my reading, grammar, and math. I have my diploma but I wanted to better my life. In my spare time I read and write poetry. I go to the gym, and I also go to church and work with children at the gym.

When I pass by people who are homeless, on a cloudy, rainy, snowy day, walking not knowing where their life will take them. I say to myself what goes through their mind, spiritually and mentally? This person I study has a name and a mother. It brings tears to my heart, and eyes, all these people: adults, teenagers, running away from hidden abuse, little children with no clothes. Poverty is searching for love, anyway you can get it through addictions in needles and bottles. A crafted sign says, "I'm hungry. Need money. Please help. I will do anything for money."

I say to myself this problem is all around the world. Why is this person homeless? I think where do they live? Where are they going to lay their head tonight? They search for an answer, but come across a dead-end street.

All types of people of all races pass

them by, ignore them, or take their money they earned in a paper cup, treating them with no respect and no dignity, seeing them as a problem not the result of an uncontrollable situation that put them on the streets in the first place, forcing them to give up the lifestyle they had.

The world outside is the root of a homeless person's domain. The streets, garbage cans, alley ways, and a dark corner behind a building, a tent, with flowers all around, their home. They once had family, loved ones. Now it has become a distant memory, but still is heartfelt.

Homelessness affects the homeless in many different ways: each individual and the people that cross their paths each day. How people react to the truth by ignoring, pushing away the problem as a simple and easy solution. No one understands until they walk in a person's shoes with the same footprint. I do. I understand. I survived the streets. I'm thankful to live to tell about it because of Jesus. He saved me. My answer: If the world only had Jesus there would be no homeless people on the streets and so much more bounty.



MY TUTOR, MY FRIEND, MY MOM

by Jinjin Cai

Jinjin is from China. She works for a patent firm. According to her tutor she is making huge ground in gaining English communication skills. She has two small children and enjoys cooking and hiking and being with her family.

I have so many good teachers, but my tutor is the best one. Her nickname is Liz. She has been teaching me for almost two years. During this time, she has been my teacher, but has been more like a friend. She is even like my mom.

As a teacher, I think she is successful.

She is so good at teaching. In her class, she uses many ways to teach. Sometimes, she draws pictures. Sometimes, she stands up to tell me how to pitch a baseball. Sometimes, she sings a song. Sometimes, she looks new words up on her phone. It is unbelievable that she even knows sign language. All in all, she always tries different ways to keep the

conversation going and make class lovely. There were several times when my face muscles were so sore because of so much laughing.

She is punctual for every class. As a snow bird, she dodges the cold by going to Florida every winter. Maybe you can't believe this, but she still taught me by using Facetime. Although she thinks it is not as good as teaching me in person, I think it is better than nothing. I value her every class.

She is responsible. When we encountered some difficulties in classes, she summarized them, then sent me an email. I was so surprised when I got the first email. I was moved by her work ethic. She did give me strength to continue learning English.

If you have such a good teacher, you will make great progress in learning English.

We have many things in common,

so we are more like friends.

We both have open minds and don't like to judge others on the basis of our own experiences and knowledge. We know there is no absolute right or wrong. Everyone has their own way to live their life, as long as they don't hurt others and themselves. If my closest friend disagrees with me, I respect him. We agree to disagree.

We are inclined to enjoy the simple life and place more emphasis on the function of a home. We are more likely to stay outside instead of inside the house.

Her optimism affects me a lot. Although she is over 60 years old, she maintains her youth and looks young. If you saw her playing pickle ball, you would think she is actually a young

athlete. She stays up-to-date on high tech, and she uses different Apps and new functions on her iPhone. Just as Youth says: "Youth is not a time of life; it is a state of mind." Time may wrinkle her skin, but she is still a young girl in her heart and action.

When I came here, I had almost lost all my English-speaking skills. She taught me like a mom teaches a baby, with patience. I am so grateful that I have such a good teacher. I imagine her editing my works, just like my mom cooking in the kitchen. I have never had an American mom like her. When I think of her, my brain sees her smiles and the light in her eyes. Where there is the light, there is a will. Where there is a will, there is a way.

A MEMORABLE EXPERIENCE

by Jinjin Cai

In childhood, I was happy all the time. I'll tell one of the memorable experiences which still exist in my mind. I picked up chestnuts with my peers.

In the fall, the leaves turned to yellow. The trees were hanging with chestnuts. Some of them fell down on the ground. Most of the chestnuts cracked, as if they were smiling. As the wind blew, we could hear loud banging sounds as the chestnuts hit the ground.

My friends and I went up the hill where there were many chestnut trees. The trees were so high that we could not reach the fruits. We had to find some on the ground. It was not an easy job, because there were grasses under the trees. Some chestnuts were

buried under the grasses. We bent down and looked for them. After a while, my forehead got sweaty. It took a long time to collect a little basket of chestnuts. My friend, Mei was good at doing that. She always was the first person who had a full basket. I admired her and wanted to be like her next time.

After I got home, I couldn't wait for my mom to boil it. Mom laughed at me and called me "greedy cat". While boiling, the smell came out of the nut, which made my mouth water. After they were cooked, I took a bite of it. The sweet taste filled my mouth.

As an old saying says, "no pain, no gain." I enjoyed the pleasure of my labor in my childhood.



HOW TO MAKE CANNELLÉ

by Szu Yun “Joanne” Chen

A girl from a subtropical island in Asia, Taiwan, I like reading, baking and playing badminton. I always like to enjoy and experience different foreign cultures and make friends. That's the reason I attended the Literacy Council.

French pastry is popular in Taiwan. One of my favorites is cannellé. Cannelé is a French pastry which is originally from the Bordeaux area. It has a dark, crispy outer layer, and a soft inside with a little bit of a chewy texture. The shape of cannellé looks like a bell. In Taiwan, you can easily find cannellé in a coffee shop such as Starbucks, though it would not be the best one. I never found a bakery or café with this dark sweet angel in Frederick. I have to make it myself at home when I miss them. Here are the following steps to make a cannellé:

At first, milk and butter have to be mixed well and heated up to 80 degrees Celsius. If you prefer, you can

add vanilla. In the meanwhile, prepare another mixture of two eggs and one yolk. Then put the heated milk and butter into the egg mixture and blend evenly. Next, sift flour and sugar into the eggs, and stir the batter until there is no dry flour. Cool down the batter in a refrigerator overnight.

On the second day, let the batter bake to at least 14 degrees Celsius before baking them in 180 degree oven. The last thing is to brush batter on the inside of the cannellé molds and to pour the batter in the molds. Then bake them for about one hour. The most important trick to make a beautiful, dark cannellé is that you have to prevent the batter from swelling too much during the baking time by tapping the molds from time to time and keeping the batter in the bottom of the cannellé molds. Following these details, you definitely will make a perfect cannellé.



SALSA, ONE OF THE JOYS OF MY LIFE

by Rocío Chereguino

I am a Salvadoran, designer, wife, mother and daughter and I spent 6 months on this adventure of living in my new country. I study at the Literacy Council because I want to improve my English, to be able to adapt better to the United States and get a good job situation. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to be in this wonderful program.

I have eclectic taste in music because I like almost every kind of music, but today I'm going to talk about Salsa!

I like Salsa music because I love its rhythm and the way you can dance, by the way I love dancing and I met my husband in Salsa classes 8 years ago. When I hear Salsa, I feel very happy, positive, and energetic, too. You can choose the style that you prefer because there are a lot of Salsa singers, like the famous Hector lavoe with his best song "El Cantante", the unforgettable Celia Cruz, a Cuban singer with her famous "Guantanamera" song and of course the talented Marc Anthony, who was born in New York City but his parents

are from Puerto Rico and for that he has Latin blood in his veins.

One of my favorite songs from Marc Antony is "Viva mi Vida" or Live My Life because it reminds me of the night that my beautiful daughter, Giuliana was born. We went with my husband that night to a place where a very famous orchestra "Salsalvador All Starts" played Salsa, the place was "The Palace of Santa Tecla."

I was 9 months pregnant and I was bored at home, so we decided to go dancing for a while, well at least one song, Suddenly the orchestra started to play my song: "Viva mi Vida" and my husband took me for a dance. I felt very happy, but tired. After that we came back home, and I remember there was a full moon that night, and I started to feel a little strange, in that moment I realized that Guiliana had decided to be born.

Salsa music for me is happiness, friendship, love and of course family. I recommend listening and dancing Salsa, because it's a pleasure for me and brings a lot of joy to my life.



THE IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION

by Cristian Cortés

My name is Cristian Cortés, I'm from Chile in South America. I'm in public relations and one of my goals is to learn English because that way I can have more skills to communicate with the community. Studying at the Literacy Council is fantastic because I know wonderful people and I really think that I improved my learning. Thank you to everyone at the Literacy Council. You have the best teachers and staff, who are patient, friendly and have a passion to help the community.

I studied Public Relations which is a career that is related to communication such as in journalism and an endless number of other related careers. As a public speaker you can represent businesses, work in human resources, work as an event producer, as well as many other positions which include communication as their major skill set.

While I was studying, perhaps two

or three years ago, one of my favorite teachers said, "Communication is more important than anything because all is communication."

I was thinking about that and I understood that my teacher is right. Now I know that everything is communication both verbal communication and non-verbal communication.

What is non-verbal communication? It is when people move, people act, people use their tone of voice, their facial expressions, and everything that can't be spoken. They use body language to communicate.

The difference between non-verbal communication and verbal communication can be understood through using an example. One person says they like mushrooms, but he uses facial expressions that say it is disgusting to him then you know the truth. It doesn't matter what he

says at this point because his facial expressions say it all. We know for him that mushrooms are not a good choice.

Yet another aspect of communication can be examined in the branding of merchandise. Brand names are very important such as MacDonald's, KFC, and Roy Rogers. All of the following choices in making brand names is part of the study

of Communication: the color of the brands, the way they are written, some brands want to express seriousness, other brands want to express fun.

When you study all aspects of communication, it is in many forms in all careers. You will find that all is communication. It is not what you say, but how you say it.



MY FIRST FLIGHT TO THE UNITED STATES

by Lily Dai

I'm Lily, and I like gardening and shopping. You can always find me in my rose garden every early summer. I have been studying with the Literacy Council for 4 months. With the help of my tutor, I have made great progress in English, especially in reading and writing. I want to speak more fluently very soon.

In 1990, my husband got a job from an American research institute and he left for the U.S. very quickly. After a year, my daughter and I were able to see him. We were so excited because we hadn't seen each other since he left.

It was a nice day when we got to the airport. We had two big suitcases and another two carry-on bags. My

daughter was only 9, but she was very happy. I was a little bit nervous, because I could not speak English.

We needed to take the connecting flight to Japan. When we got off the plane, I managed my daughter and the two carry-on bags. It was difficult to move, we needed a cart, so I told my daughter to stay there and don't move, I would get a cart soon.

It took me a few minutes to get the cart and come back, but I didn't see my daughter there! I turned around, but I could not find her! I turned around again, and still couldn't find her! Where was she? What happened to her? What should I do? I was so scared and almost cried.

I knew I needed to get some help,

maybe the clerk over the counter might help, but I could not speak English or Japanese. Maybe I should find a person who could speak English and Mandarin first, so she could translate for me. I was walking towards the counter while thinking all of this through. Just then, I saw my daughter! She was just in the corner. My God! I couldn't believe how happy I was when I saw her! She told me that it was the police who moved her over there.

Still suffering from my-daughter-is-missing shock, I got another bad news: our plane could not fly on time due to bad weather. Everyone had to stay one night in Japan!

I wanted to call my husband, so I went to the airport public telephone

booth, put in some coins to call my husband, but it just didn't work. Luckily a lady saw this and helped me. We talked with our hands and I made that call.

We were so hungry after checking into the hotel, so we went for dinner in the airport restaurant. I could not read the menu, so I pointed to the steak picture to the waitress. When our food came, we couldn't eat because the beef was bleeding! It was too raw for us!

We arrived in Maryland the next day. All I remember after the flight was that I slept for two days! This was my first flight to the United States. I was so scared, so tired and so hungry, I never forgot it.



HOMETOWN

by Bunkong Dasai

Bunkong has been studying at the Literacy Council for 5 years. She enjoys cooking and gardening and spending time with her family. She wants to learn to read and speak English well and attain her GED.

Ubon is my hometown. It is a small town in Thailand. I remember it very well because I had a good time there. When I lived there, my family had a big piece of farm land. Most people in the town did farming for a living. Everyone knew each other, and it was very safe. We could go out without locking the door. I could go out alone anytime and not be afraid. People were kind and friendly. For example, if you went to someone's house for whatever reason, if they knew you

did not have lunch or dinner yet, they would have some food to offer you. Even if there was not a lot, they would always share what they had. Also, people always smiled at each other when they met outside. I still have some friends in my hometown, some of them were my classmates. Ubon is peaceful and located at the base of a beautiful mountain. I could see that mountain from my window and I loved to sit and look at it. There is also a small river near the village where I could swim and catch fish for dinner. The water is clean and clear. In conclusion, I hope I've helped you to see what a wonderful place Ubon is! I miss my hometown very much.



THE THEATER IS A MIRROR OF OUR LIVES

By Ivan Díaz

I'm Ivan Díaz, actor and Venezuelan journalist. Always very grateful to the Literary Council, I started studying English with you and thanks to all the staff I have been able to make great progress in the U.S.

On every March 27 since 1961 we celebrate International Theater Day. The day is sponsored by the International Theater Institute (ITI) and the World Theater Community. During this celebration, a theatrical representative is honored and chosen to develop a message or reflection for the theater arts community. This individual composes a brief reflection that addresses the impact of modern-day theater on and its relationship to contemporary society.

In 2016 that honor was bestowed upon the acclaimed Russian theater director, Anatoly Vassilev. In simple words, Mr. Vassilev reflected a profound truth about the theater. He said, "In life there is one art that represents history, comedy, and tragedy; theater represents everything".

Vassilev's message expressed the

thought: "In theater we can say [and do] everything." Here I refer to the expressive complexity of theater as a means of releasing emotions and the entire spectrum of human feelings. Hence, the theater is a beautiful and traditional way of communicating with the whole of society and across societies. Starting with the choice of words and the multitude of their synchronized forms, a unique experience is created between actors and their audiences. A truly human encounter occurs through the ensembles collective work. Theater projects reflect peace, immortal spirits, and stimulate the emotional depths and thoughts of audiences, much like the iconic emotions experienced by Romeo and Juliet.

The reflective piece is a guide to the theater community to assist audiences in understanding, valuing, and enjoying the art and magic inherent in productions. Theater represents the human condition. It helps to remind us of what we have in common with our human family and where we are in our history as well as where we are going.



A GREAT OPPORTUNITY

by Ala Dvorkina

I am so happy that I found the Literacy Council program - I have learned so much. My English is getting better every day. Every week I am looking forward to meeting with my teacher and my friend with whom I study together. I am very grateful for programs like this that help immigrants to learn English and feel more at home. Thank you, all the volunteers and organizers! Your work means a lot!

My name is Ala. I came to America from Belarus. At first, I missed home very much and wanted to go back to my country. But having lived here three years, I realized that I had fallen in love with this amazing country. I adore her fabulous nature, which fascinates me with its beauty. I have already visited the ocean, the mountains and even a volcano. These were the most vivid impressions of what I saw. Here you can see wild animals: deer, hares, squirrels, and even ferrets. And what a variety of birds! Every morning I wake up under the singing of birds and thank my

destiny for giving me such a great place to live as in America. People here are the kindest and most friendly! America is made up of a large variety of nationalities. People are always ready to help, and most importantly—smiling. There is a lot done for the benefit of others: in the library you can always not only choose and read a book, but also play educational games with your children. In bookstores, you can read books without buying them. For older people, senior centers are created, where they spend their leisure time together. Volunteers help visitors learn English. The stores always listen, help and wish you: Have a nice day! Museums and galleries amaze me with their greatness and beauty. You can visit them for free, and how many positive emotions you can get from visiting! It is impossible to convey in words. I want to say that I enjoy life in America. This is a country of great opportunities. I am very happy here. Thank you fate for the opportunity to be in a fairy tale.



This dedication letter to my mother is written about my true story—the day I lost my mother. I wrote this poem many years after losing my beloved mom. Every time I remember the final moments of her life, I end up in tears and do not have the courage to write. Today, at a great distance from her grave, I finally have the courage to write this poem.

In addition, in these lines I want to remember how she taught me farming activities, as well as how, in her kitchen, she taught me to prepare delicious dishes that I'm still preparing to this today. I love to do it because her teaching is alive in me.

This poem is dedicated to children who have their mothers alive—to reflect upon, and to love, respect, and value, since mothers are wonderful and unique beings.

I am very grateful to the Frederick Literacy Council for the opportunity and help it offers to all immigrants from around the world, so that we can flourish here in the United States. As a student, I feel blessed with my tutor, who, with dedication, teaches me and motivates me to go beyond that imaginary barrier that separates us, which is language. Today, and every day, I feel more confidence and improved ability to communicate with my colleagues and friends.

LETTER TO MY MOTHER

by Amilcar Fernandez

Dedication

For all mothers of the world,
a reflection for children to consider
that their mother is as beautiful as a rose in the spring,
to love her and to take care of her, because when her departure to infinity
comes,
you will not be able to fill the void that is left with anything,
because her love is unique.

I

Dear Mommy, I'm writing this letter in silence,
remembering the tenderness of your love, your hugs, and kisses,
your unmistakable voice whispered to me with your beautiful words all my days.
You said, "Son, I love you."

II

Today, in the remoteness from our mother soil,
I dare to write the saddest story for a child,
Remembering the day of Tuesday, July 20, a fatal day,
that during the sunset of the afternoon,
was your heart going out,
was the final heartbeat of your heart...

III

The black cloud shattered our sky
as a sign of the sad news that you were no longer with me,
and my eyes cried,
spilling tears like the rain of January 13...

IV

Mother, when I saw your departure to infinity,
the unbearable pain I felt, penetrating the throes of death,
like opening a mortal wound.
that for a moment, I fall apart in your cold arms,
and your angel who looks after me gave me back the Holy Mother's life...

V

This is when I remember your words that you told me.
On the starry nights of our sky, that when you would travel to the infinite blue,
every night you would be staring at me.
Why, you would be one of those stars!

VI

Today, after looking so many times, unto the thousands of stars of my mother,
I was able to prepare myself for that fatal day of your journey
that was actually death...

VII

I want to confess to you, my mother, I miss you so much when I remember you.
The palpitations of my heart accelerate.
It is because you never left me until today.
You take care of my steps, light my way,
because it was your life that gave me life.
I love you, Mother.
Love,
Your dear son forever.



ANOTHER HOME

by HsinYing “Singing” Lin

A stay at home mom, facing toddler gibberish all day long, I attended the Literacy Council's class in 2018, in order to have a chance of English conversation and also to improve my writing skills.

I have been in the USA about 3 years, and it feels like my second home, even though my first hometown is Taiwan. It's a strange feeling when we went back to Taiwan, the place I dreamed about every night, but my husband and I suddenly missed something about the apartment we lived in Frederick, we also called our home.

My husband and I came to America right after we got married, thus our marriage and new life began in this unfamiliar country. Everything was a brand-new experience: he had his first job, and I experienced unemployment for the first time after ten years of working. We built our home from scratch: the lay-out of our living room, the furniture we picked, the used

car we bought from downtown, and the garden we planted. We went on countless grocery shopping weekend trips.

When we finally figured out how to arrange our home to fulfill our daily living needs, we met our first child. The pace of life in Frederick is slow and easy: however, our life here was tight and we always faced new challenges. We graduated from newlyweds to new parents in 6 months!

To be a parent, that's another story! At present, we're waiting for our second child. Our life seems more leisurely than the first two years when we arrived, although most of the time has been occupied by our daughter. Frederick will always be the special place for me, the place where I began my busy married life and my wonderful family life.

APPLE PICKING

by HsinYing “Singing” Lin

It was my first experience of apple picking. We went last Saturday. Although the weather was cloudy with sudden rain, we had determined to visit the farm since my husband is an apple lover and we still got extra time after the museum tour. “Let’s go!” he cried very excited about biting a fresh apple. Recently he often complained about the quality of apples from supermarkets. We wondered about the taste of fresh apples which we picked by ourselves. Compared to supermarket apples which may have been stored for a long time.

For Americans, our excitement of fresh apples might seem strange; however, in Taiwan most of the apples are imported, for Taiwanese the fresh apple means something valuable and special. We even have a bread named “apple bread” because the baker wants people to think the bread is good for health and full of nutrients, like real apples. The bread is famous and is usually for kids’ snack, though there is no apple in the recipe.

The actual apple picking time was short, and the apple tree was also shorter than I expected; however, it was nice to see the variety of different apples and lots of families also enjoying the moment like us. Besides apple picking we had a stroll around the farm and saw goats and chickens. My daughter kept holding her half-eaten apple on the whole journey, and she was sad that the apple core needed to be discarded on the way back.

The crunchiness and juiciness of fresh apples is incomparable. We took a dozen of Fuji and Jonagold apples back home, and we were satisfied with the flavorful taste. No wonder on the farm most families filled apples in the bucket, some carried more than one bucket of apples back. I made a real apple bread with apples in the ingredient as our breakfast, to extend the sweetness of our apple picking memory.



MY TOUR OF GEORGE WASHINGTON'S MOUNT VERNON HOME

by Hanhan Liu

My friend told me about the Literacy Council of Frederick County. I was so glad when I heard the information from her. I was trying to find a way to learn the American English, especially the expressions used in daily life. The Literacy Council of Frederick County and my tutor have been helping me to reach that goal. After 2 years of study, I am more confident and fluent when I speak English with my coworkers and the people with whom I need to communicate.

This year Feb 18th was President's Day and it also happened to be the 5th anniversary day of my arrival in the U.S., so I went to George Washington's Mount Vernon to honor the great first president and my arrival in this country.

I had a wonderful time at George Washington's Mount Vernon home. In the morning, there were a lot of people waiting outside. I was lucky to get in when it opened at 9 am. Although I had read the description of Mount Vernon, I was still surprised by the gardens and the large farm, especially compared with the mansion. The mansion was much smaller than I imagined. In addition to the garden, the docents

were demonstrating blacksmithing, fishing, smocking, wine making and other occupations and techniques of that time period. The whole estate gave me the impression that George Washington was more interested in farming than politics. One thing that may reveal the interests of the first president was the stunning view from the east side of the mansion. People can sit there and watch the wide Potomac River running down to the ocean.

Many of George Washington's personal belongings have been preserved and the whole place is well maintained. There was also a reenactment of a battle that took place during the American Revolutionary War, but the only thing that really made me feel a connection to that time was the study desk which George Washington actually used. Passing down physical things and their stories is one way that history is remembered and studied. This is the importance of George Washington's Mount Vernon. It gives us a snapshot of how all the people, including the rich, the middle class and the enslaved people lived. Everyone is a part of history.



THE GIFT TO MY DAUGHTER

by Jing Lu

I'm Jing Lu from China. I came to Frederick with my husband and two little dogs in January, 2017. I hope to fit in the community and learn more about local people and culture by improving my English. The Literacy Council, especially my mentor Jayne gave me the best chance to pursue what I want.

There's no more fantastic thing than becoming parents. We're so curious.

What can we give to our baby? I have been thinking about that question since I felt her movements growing stronger and stronger. I have been making a simple, normal baby-care plan with an appropriate budget and dreaming of dressing my little one.

Then something stirred inside my heart one day when a friend, who is also going to become a mother, showed me a luxurious list for a newborn baby. It's definitely a long,

complicated list from the expensive electric swing to the star baby-stroller. She immersed herself in thick baby (0 mo. To 6 yrs.) guide book. While she believes it's the best way to raise her baby, I was shocked. Such expensive equipment! I do not doubt the genuine love she will show her baby. But we might have something more valuable to give to our children than that kind of a list. I wonder what else can we give to our baby?

Changes always go faster than plans. My mom couldn't get here in time to help us. "But the silver lining is you will be a strong mother when you reunite again," (from my good friend Jayne). The thing that can't be ignored is that we will be parents. I would ask what does she prefer rather than what can we give to her. I will tell you the truth, my dear upcoming daughter:

You might not have such a luxurious bed, stroller, or swing, or be taught by a stiff book but you will definitely be safe, healthy and cuddled by mom, dad, Chocolate, and Xiaomi. The first priority is that you will feel warmth from the family.

You might detect an inexperienced dad and an exhausted mom running back and forth around you, meanwhile two little dogs dancing hysterically, but you will be having fun and be unperturbed with giggles.

You might not be surrounded by much electric equipment, but you will hear the song from mom, the story from dad. You will care for your dog friends. You will love touching sunshine and smelling the fragrance from green fields. You will love to embrace the life of the world.

You will not be dressed up like a princess, but you might be more interested in noticing activities around you like saying please and thank you, making a cake, cleaning a room, painting a picture, riding a bike or helping people. When you have an experience, you will enjoy being self-sufficient and responsible.

We don't think any gift is more valuable than the heartwarming family we can give you. When you grow up, you might not remember a swing or a stroller, but you will prefer remembering the moments you have with us. The feelings of companionship, happiness, being loved and loving, self-sufficiency, and responsibility will always raise your emotional well-being and guide you into being a really rich girl.



BECOMING AMERICAN WITH PERUVIAN ROOTS

by Silvia Muñoz Moreyra

I'm Silvia Munoz, originally from Lima, Perú. In Perú, I am an attorney and when I came, I barely spoke a few words. I would define myself as a kind and persistent person with compassion for others, eager learner with a mischievous sense of humor as well as an infectious personality. About my hobbies, I enjoy practicing sports, reading books, as well as singing karaoke at my house. Currently I am enrolled in the Paralegal Program B.A. at Frederick Community College. In addition, I attend the writing classes, book club and conversation classes at Literacy Council of Frederick County and I love it!

Acquiring a second language involves learning rules that govern grammar and thanks to the Literacy Council of Frederick County it was

part of my plan of studies last year. For my academic goals, it's crucial to be able to have a high comprehension level and use my skills to summarize assignments. For example, I am in pre-Law classes and have knowledge of the existence of a descriptive paragraph, comparing and contrasting paragraph and opinion paragraph, just to mention a few grammar skills that I learned. The way that I improved my skills was reading books for example "Tuck Everlasting" by Natalie Babbitt or "The Circuit", by Francisco Jimenéz. Then, we analyzed them with the study guide in classes and started expanding my skills practicing and practicing, yet I am not mastering yet, but I feel that this class can transform students like me and drive

us toward success. In addition, I write for the magazine using my critical thinking, practice the knowledge that I acquired in comparing and contrasting ideas so that I can create a history of Perú and the United States. I will compare the two locations based on language, food, and historical places and point out from my perspective how similar or different the two are.

Perú and the United States are both in my heart, but there exists several differences between them. In 2011, I was on a serious journey, living in a country where I cannot speak the language. The first difference between Perú and the U.S. is that in Perú people speak Spanish and in the U.S. people speak English. Because of the language difference, I didn't answer any phone calls if I wasn't sure whether or not it was a family member who was calling me. On the other hand, if I want to do shopping it was not a problem because in the English language, I feel that all that is necessary is a credit card. All I need is the pin number of the card and to say thank you. However, shopping in Perú you need only cash and can find great quality fabric of 100% wool and original leather shoes.

In the last eight years, my experience with food became more diverse than at any time in my life. In Perú, I lived in the Capital Lima and the concept of fresh fish means that any person could go to a restaurant where the fish was caught minutes before it is prepared for you. The variety of dishes is unbelievable with an Incan influence as well, like Italian, Chinese, Japanese style. Spices are from another world for me. I have

never ever found a comparison to the delicious octopus with Peruvian spices that my mom cooks for me. Likewise, in Perú, you don't need to wait for the special season. All is fresh and is available all year round. In contrast, in America, I found restaurants that represent food around the world, but I learned to eat the cheese steak sandwich, the Maryland crab cakes, brisket, buffalo wings, and jerky. In the same way, American food maybe is not as fresh as Peruvian. It is not as healthy either, yet I need to wait a season to eat it. Similarly, if spice is needed, in America I learned to use siracha, ranch dressing, blue cheese, and Jack Daniel's BBQs sauce. Overall, it seems like my palate is in the process of assimilating and becoming American too.

Cultural aspects and civic duties matter to me and both in Perú and in the U.S. there are marvelous historic places to visit. Both offers museums, ruins, and national parks to explore. In general, I am proud to learn about this aspect when I was in Perú and likewise, also learning about civics when I'm living in the US. While I was in Perú, I visited Machu Picchu, the ancient ruins in Cuzco. The stones that made a wall in the high mountain is astonishing. Using my list of adjectives, I could say that Machu Picchu is a fantastic, high, large and splendid place where the Incas lived. Actually, there is more than one peak to climb and you can walk there. In contrast, living in America I do not have the opportunity to visit all the places that are on my bucket list, but I have visited museums where I learn about Civil War here in Frederick at

Monocacy Battlefield. In the same way, both countries have traditions to follow, books to read in each different language, amazing songwriters to enjoy and holiday celebrations to observe. Despite the differences, I might say that Perú and the U.S. have in common a great variety of culture that enriches me.

My assimilation process has Perú and the U.S. as protagonists in my changes in the language that I speak now, the food that I like and how I evolved in my cultural aspects.

Although, the language was a barrier, after a few years I concluded that in both places now I have best friends, great mentors and I enjoy going to the theater in English or Spanish and singing Karaoke with songs of

Johnny Cash as well others. As a result, I must admit that after looking at the differences between living in Perú or the U.S. I got a surprise conclusion. I miss my original country, but I LOVE to live in the U.S. As I said in the beginning, I write in the magazine using my critical thinking, and practicing the knowledge that I acquired. In addition, I write using the descriptive paragraph skills that I need to improve. On reflection, my academic goals involve continuing to work hard, be persistent and thankful to have Peruvian roots and also proud to be an American; therefore, I am the enthusiastic learner that is eager, friendly and determined to pursue my dream of becoming a successful attorney.



DOLPA

by Samjhana Nepal

I am Samjhana, a 70-year-old girl, and come from Nepal. I like knitting, cooking and traveling. Cel Roti is my favorite Nepali food, I can make it for you if you visit me. I have been studying with the Literacy Council for a long time. I want to learn more English.

My husband and I visited Dolpa 53 years ago. It was 1966, and my husband was appointed as the Land Reform Officer of Dolpa, so I got the chance to visit Dolpa.

Dolpa is a snowy mountain, also the largest district of Nepal, located in Karnali province. We started our trip from Pokhara by foot. At that time, there was no transportation available in Dolpa, and there're was even no people or houses in some parts of the mountain. We reached Dunai (the headquarter of Dolpa) after 14 days, and we had to spent 4 nights in outdoor places such as open ground, open grass shed, under the tree or even a den.

We visited Shey Phoksundo national park during our trip. The park is high

above the sea, it's a wild region with lots of snow peaks. There were snow leopards, blue sheep, yaks and some dangerous animals. Phoksundo Lake is a very famous attraction. Its shape was like a lung, and the color of the water is clear blue because there is no aquatic life. There were also wide and tall waterfalls all around. The scenes were breathtakingly beautiful, natural and wild. I felt really lucky and challenged to go there by foot.

After arriving in Dunai, we lived 8 or 9 months there, and we got chances to see some other places in Dolpa. Once when we were near a river of Tripura Sundari Temple, we saw a big golden fish jumping out of the water at midnight. People believe that's very lucky. We heard some other people telling the same thing later, the only difference was they saw the fish jumping 3 times. But most people didn't get that chance.

Dolpa is always in my memory, I will always carry these beautiful feelings and experience in my heart.



DRIVING ACROSS THE COUNTRY

by Y Rhee

Words, I am always fascinated by words for one can express her feelings and state of mind to communicate with others. By learning to write, I hope to be able to write my memoir one day.

Some years ago, my husband, Gleb was offered to move and work at a jobsite for a year by his company. I quit my work in a bank and we drove for about one month across the country to Delaware. My two younger brothers and my son were with us for the journey. Camping in many national parks, staying in family motels were eventful and fun, but visiting his sister in Colorado, and stopping at his parents in Indiana along the way was difficult at times, for we were too many. Other than that, I vaguely remember the details.

It was in mid-July and the weather

was roaring hot. We first went to Yosemite National Park from San Francisco and camped overnight. Then, we drove to the desert city of Barstow in southern California where it was way over 100 degrees outside. The drive from Barstow to Needles was all desert. We stopped to look at sand dunes, somewhere along the way, and we continued our journey. From Needles, we made our way to the Hoover Dam that makes up the largest reservoir in the United States. The Hoover Dam is located on the Colorado River, between Nevada and Arizona. Franklin Roosevelt ordered it be built during the Great Depression. I still can see so many small and large fish, we saw while peering down at the clear water in the reservoir, as if I am looking down on them today. We spent a night in Las Vegas and

then we headed to the Grand Canyon National Park. We camped there for a few days, hiking and fishing. Gleb made tea from sassafras roots he found in a bush. He has many survival skills he learned as a youth in the Boy Scouts. We also visited the Meteor Crater Natural Landmark, the Petrified Forest National Park, and Sedona all near Flagstaff in Arizona. Then, we came to the Four Corners of Navajo National Park. The culture at the Four Corners was very similar to that of Mexico. There were large hot chili peppers, hand carved figures of objects, and handwoven colorful clothes were hanging in the gift shops. The boys were excited to touch the Four Corners with their two feet and hands. Then, we headed for Mesa Verde in Colorado.

Colorado is a beautiful state with many mountains that are over 14 thousand feet high and it is known for snow ski resorts, while Arizona offers desert monuments and ancient native histories. In Mesa Verde National Park, we had a walking tour. This tour took us back to ancestral pueblo cliff dwellings. We climbed up ladders to see the remains of the actual dwellings from the past, but for the most part, we could only look up at a distance from the ground. Pikes Peak in Colorado Springs was another place we had to stop. When I got out from the cable car at the peak, which is over 14 thousand feet high, I had difficulty breathing due to the thin air at the high altitude. We arrived in Denver in the mid-morning and had difficulty finding a restaurant that was open. After walking around for a while, we spotted a Chinese restaurant. We then, realized we were having cravings for Chinese food. We hadn't eaten Chinese food since we left San Francisco. There weren't any customers in the restaurant when

we walked in. I thought it was still too early for lunch. When our orders came out, however, we looked at each other's faces instead of rushing into eating the dishes. It was obvious that the food didn't look very tempting and tasted like it came out of cans. It was the worst Chinese food we ever had. What a great disappointing experience that was! We learned it was best to stay with chain restaurants when we were on the road.

After that we headed to Megan's, Gleb's sister, who lived on the outskirts of the city with her husband and their two young sons. Her house was small and there was only one bathroom in the house, but her back yard was large enough for us to camp out for the two-night weekend. The only problem we had was that the hot water ran out for the shower. They grilled hamburgers for dinner in the yard that night. The next day, we took them out with her in-laws to a Chinese restaurant they knew of. Eleven people in all and we enjoyed a good Chinese dinner for a change.

We then, drove through Kansas to Missouri. The only thing I remember there was that the steamy hot air rushed in like fire, forcing me to stop breathing, when I opened the car door in St. Louis, Missouri. I don't even remember going up inside The Gateway Arch, but others said that we did. We drove through Illinois and headed for Indianapolis, Indiana. We stayed with Gleb's parents in Indianapolis. While visiting his grandparents and other relatives, his mother took us to Indy 500 racetrack even though there was no race at the time. She also took me to buy fresh ears of corn directly from the farm. I remember peeking in the garage that was filled full with antique collections. To me, Indianapolis is a very boring place, very flat and bare without

any foothills and mountains. I don't have any memory of the rest of the journey, at this point, but I remember something about Delaware.

I was busy trying to settle down in a totally strange and unknown place like Delaware. People were staring at me everywhere I went, but I was doing okay until the winter came. Gleb took us sightseeing on weekends and showed me where everything was. I remember going to Rehoboth Bay to watch people collecting clams with a rake. The water was shallow and clear enough so that I could see the clams people left behind after

they were gone. The boys tried to pick blue crabs with their bare hands from the streams without success. I didn't like the blue crabs because they don't have much meat to eat, only a lot of effort trying to pick them. Dungeness crabs in San Francisco are much better. Gleb got hold of a couple of Dungeness crabs to cook when my mother was visiting. Then, winter came. I started to have trouble with driving on the icy road. I got my car spinning like a peg-top toy. I was terrified to drive after that and I decided to fly back to San Francisco. Gleb drove back the next year.

SAN FRANCISCO

by Y Rhee

San Francisco is made up of many beautiful hills that go up and slopes and valleys that go down. Fortunately, the moderate weather conditions allow these hills to flourish with many different cultures and businesses. Today, it is one of the best cities to live in and to visit in the world.

The California poppies first come to my mind as I think about the city of San Francisco today. These delicate bright orange poppies along the Diamond Heights Boulevard show up early in the spring. California poppies were different there, just 2-3 inches above the ground carpeting along the sunny side of the roads. I used to stare at these wobbling flowers in the chill wind early in the mornings as I was waiting for the bus to go to work. Then, I saw them again late in the afternoon when getting off from the bus coming home. They didn't look so wobbly and fragile at this time of day. In fact, they seemed happy, looking

up to the sun with their pride and their dignity. I tried to grow them here in Frederick, but they became different type altogether, for some reason.

Diamond Height village in San Francisco, where I used to live, is located on top of Diamond Heights Boulevard, next to Twin Peaks. Interestingly, the streets around this neighborhood are named after precious stones like Red Rock, Gold Mine, Amber, Topaz, Amethyst, Turquoise, Jade Place to name just a few. The location was very beautiful and most convenient. I could look down on the city, to the bay, and to the ocean in the far distance. I used to walk up to the Twin Peaks and walked down to Glen Canyon Park on weekends. I have walked to Noe Valley and downtown also. But the weather wasn't always pleasant on that hill. There was too much fog to see through sometimes and it was too windy to go for walks other times.

A friend told me stories about this area a long time ago that there used to be many caves and tunnels on these hills. People were curious about those caves and excavated them only to discover American Indian skulls, however. Not long after I moved into the area, many other apartment buildings, condos, and city housing projects took over the rest of the spaces, leaving only the south side for its high sloping cliffs. During the summer, boy scouts came to build campfires and screamed as they slid down the slopes in this canyon. There were many tall eucalyptus trees in the valley that gave shade and with pleasant aroma to the air.

I used to take my visitors to show them San Francisco, by walking down to this canyon to take BART at the Glen Park Station to downtown. Stopping by the farmer's market near the Civic Center, we continued to Chinatown for lunch. From the BART Station downtown, we took the cable car all the way to Fisherman's Wharf and walked over to North beach another time. We then rode BART to U.C. Berkley's events. We've seen many visitors from all over the world in this ride that goes through the bay, under the Bay Bridge.

The food in San Francisco makes my dry taste buds start to water as I

think about it. With its aroma, tastes, and variety from all over the world, it is truly like no other place I know of. Pho, Vietnam's signature dish, Thai seafood dish, Korean marinated meat dish, and many authentic Chinese dishes can be found only in San Francisco as the city's own creation. We used to go to Taqueria for delicious burritos unlike ones you could find anywhere else. We had to stand in a long line for a table on the weekends, but it was well worth the effort every time we went.

However, the best also has some down sides. I had come to see walls around the city after living there for so many years. Everything was the same year after year; there was not even a seasonal change. I started longing for some changes in my life with new adventures and new experiences. Fortunately, my husband got an overseas assignment.

San Francisco is the city where I was reborn, come to think of it. I had to restart everything from the beginning, like a child learning to walk and talk. I had to learn a new language, new laws, and new survival skills. All that has been a long time ago. I can only see the city in a picture window that has become a memory in my mind. Again, nothing is forever, I remind myself.



A PERSON I CANNOT FORGET

by Jamila Toro

My name is Jamila Toro. I came from Syria. My family and I moved to Frederick in 2012. I live with my husband and I am a mother of four children, and grandmother for six grandchildren. I studied and practiced civil engineering in Syria.

I started studying at the Literacy Council in 2016. I am very grateful to the Literacy Council for the help I had to improve my English language and to have wonderful teachers and friends from all over the world.

I believe eternity is to remember a person and never forget him even after he passes away.

I like to talk about a man whom I consider a hero. He is Reverend Father Frans Van Der Lugt (1938-2014). He was born in the Netherlands from a very rich family. His father owned a bank, but Frans preferred to be a Jesuit priest. After he finished his theological schooling, he studied the Arabic language and was settled in Syria. He bought with his own money a big farm, and called it (Alard) the earth. He established on the farm a vineyard, a garden, and a winery

which produced the best kind of wine in the region, and exported it locally to the surrounding countries. In the same farm he built a home and a school for people with disabilities and some of them worked at the winery.

He believed in the humanity of people, so he tried to make harmony between the two religions: Christianity and Islam. He organized yearly hiking trips for people of all ages and different faiths. My children joined these trips several times. The hikers kept walking through the villages, enjoying the wonderful landscapes as well as enjoying the friendships with new people and furthermore, enjoying the lectures and the daily mass services. He was known as a person who loves and listens more than he talks. He was always providing food for poor families. But the war in Syria started and the city he lived in was besieged. Poor people took refuge in his farm, and he provided them with food. At the end when there was no food, he appealed to the U.N. to send food for his people.

In spite of the hunger and the daily

bombing he didn't leave his people, and he was the only European who stayed in that part of Syria. In the fourth year of the war while he was sitting with some friends in the farm after the morning mass, a masked man shot him in his head and he died immediately, and was buried in the farm according to his will. Pope Francis remembered him in his speech and talked about his achievement.

All people who knew him were very sad. Frans was killed because of his religion. He was a living icon.

I keep in mind what Jesus said, be perfect as your father is perfect, and that is what Father Frans tried to do all his life on earth. Let his memory be eternal, and it will be for the people who loved him including me and my children. We will never forget him.

MY ONLY MASQUERADE PARTY

by Jamila Toro

I was fifteen years old, in the ninth grade, when our school decided to have a masquerade party for the first time. I told my mother about the party, so she and my aunt (her sister) started to prepare for the event, and I would be like a medieval princess. My aunt's wedding gown would be best solution for the occasion. It was an off-white satin dress with ruffles on the skirt. My aunt decorated the dress with colorful ribbons on the sleeves and the collar, whereas my mother made me a hat and a hand bag from white-colored fabric and decorated them with colored flowers and lace, but the thing I liked most was the make-up I wore for the first time, the eye liner and lip stick.

At the time of the party, the school hall was crowded with students

wearing various costumes. You could see clowns, witches, astronauts, cats, dinosaurs, and more. We were all happy making fun of our costumes, talking, laughing, enjoying the music, but we were all eager to know who the best masquerade girl would be. It was me. I heard my name. I couldn't believe it. I walked to the front table and had some pictures taken while receiving the award which was a bottle of perfume.

Now after all these years passed on that day, I still remember even the very small details and if some students shared ancient pictures of the school on Facebook the pictures of my friends and me on that day would be there.

I wonder how they are looking after all these years and where they are?



MY VACATION TO PERÚ

by Rodrigo Vergara

My name is Rodrigo Vergara Carrasco, I am from Chile, I am a lover of traveling and getting to know new customs and cultures. My dream was always to learn English and with the help of teachers that I found here, it has been possible. Thanks to everyone at the Literacy Council, for this beautiful opportunity and I encourage you to continue with the same passion, supporting the entire community.

Two years ago, I went on vacation to Perú, flying from Santiago to Lima where I spent three days. I stayed in Miraflores, a very touristy area with a lot of night life. I also visited the historic center on a walking tour, and the guide turned out to have quite an interesting persona; he was friendly and with a lot of information to share. We arrived in the afternoon and took advantage of the group to go to eat something typical of the zone. My choice was ceviche, mango juice,

and pisco sour, by far one of the best meals that I have tried.

Continuing with the trip, I went to Cusco, in search of my final destination that was Machu Picchu. I went by train from Lima to Cusco, enjoying the landscapes, until arriving at the town of Aguas Calientes, where I started the hike to the mountain of Huayna Picchu. It was a very hard climb of approximately three hours of walking to the top, behind Machu Picchu, from there you can see the whole hidden city and you have the best view of the valley.

From the highest point of the mountain you can see the perfect construction of the ancient world, Machu Picchu, and appreciate that it's still a mystery to this day and a great achievement of the ancient Incans.

For all the incredible landscapes, beautiful magic and ancient history this is absolutely a place to visit at least once in your life.



“LAS LAJAS” A SPECIAL SPIRITUAL PLACE OF MY CHILDHOOD

by Maria Vodniza

I came from Colombia. My native language is Spanish. When I came to live in Frederick, Maryland, I found an office called the Literacy Council Office, which helps adults and immigrants like me to read, speak, and improve our new English language. Thanks to special people such as tutors who donate their time to teach English language to immigrants like me in order to help us learn and thus be able to improve our lives with better jobs. I am very grateful for all the help that I have received and I encourage other immigrants to register at the Literacy Council of Frederick County to learn to improve their English language. In this office we find the human warmth of all the volunteers. It does not matter if we

come from an upper class or lower class of our countries, we are all equal in these classrooms. We come from many different countries and all are welcome to take English classes at the Literacy Council. I only have words of thanks to all the staff of the Literacy Council for their excellent work. I hope they continue forever with the same goal of helping immigrants. A million thanks. You will always be in my heart.

“Las Lajas” is the name of the sanctuary that is considered the most beautiful church in my city where I was born, Pasto, Colombia. I remember with homesickness this spiritual and special place. My family and I always went to this sanctuary

every Sunday at Mass. I remember when we entered into the church a perfect silence with only the sound of our footsteps that we made with our shoes. We felt that communal peace and the spirituality of all of us who were praying there. All parishioners were in total silence.

“Las Lajas Sanctuary” is a Gothic style church, built inside a canyon on the Guaitara River, between two mountains. The name Laja comes from the name of a type of flat rock or slabs, similar to floor tiles found in the Andes Mountains. We have a series of legends involving the appearance of the Holy Virgin and a mysterious mural with the “Lady of Las Lajas” of which nobody knows the origin. It just appeared one day in 1754 after an apparition of the Blessed Mother. The

color is unlike paint and goes right into the rock and scientists cannot explain it. In 1802 a large shrine was built. Today the current Las Lajas sanctuary was built since 1916 from donations of parishioners.

Although now I live in Maryland and I am far from my city and my spiritual special place the sanctuary of the “Lady of Las Lajas”, I feel the same spirituality and peace as when I was a child when I go to pray in any church.

If someone asks me about a tourist spot, a wonderful place to visit in Columbia, I don’t hesitate to talk about a pilgrimage to the site of “Our Lady of Las Lajas”. A place of peace and wonderful architecture and lovely landscapes.

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LIVING IN THE COUNTRYSIDE

by Tae Sook Woo

My goal is to be able to talk to people in English without hesitation. I am interested in the English Writing Class. Right now, I cannot attend class because I am busy, but later I will try to attend the Writing Class. I am thankful for the wonderful English tutoring provided by the Literacy Council.

I like living in the countryside. It's probably because I grew up in the countryside when I was a child. When you wake up in the morning, you can open the window and breathe in fresh air. You can also walk on many quiet roads where there are no cars.

I like to garden. Every spring, I buy soil, manure, plants and I plant them in my garden. This year I planted peppers, squash, lettuce, and tomatoes. When I was a child, every family in my neighborhood had a farm or garden where they grew fruits and vegetables because the mart was far away, and we had no source of

transportation. Nowadays, children's snacks include sweets, chips, juices, and other stuff. When I was a child, I ate cherry tomatoes, cucumbers, and raspberries as snacks. During the winter, I would eat sweet potatoes and dried persimmons that we kept in a storage area.

When I wake up in the morning, I go out into my garden and check on my plants. I think about how much the plants will grow while I sleep. There are no sudden changes, but after a few weeks and months, the tall trees bloom and small vegetables begin to appear. These vegetables make my home table rich. My son who likes vegetables from a young age, eats all the vegetables that are on the table. My son is very similar to me when I was his age.

My parents still live where I spent my childhood, and I think it is because of my childhood that I like gardening and the countryside.



JOBS IN FIFTY YEARS

By Vlad Yamkovenko

When I arrived in the USA, I absolutely met a new world. Two years of my life I have spent in U.S. and I could see how delightful things can be while understanding the language. I wanted to make my life easier and more interesting. I'm an aging man and my purpose is to manage my time. The sphere of my interests are different kind of art and culture of life in the U.S. I went to a different big city of U.S. and visited museums and was stunned by the architecture. It was striking. I want to know much more about it. I'm attending a conversation class of Ms. Catherine Coundjeris together with co-students from others countries and I find out about English and news about U.S. The classes of Ms. Catherine are interesting and satiating and I have been dipping in studying the language and American life. I love it.

What jobs will be most important in fifty years? I'm not a young man, and I can compare how professions are changing as the years go by. Thirty-five years ago, we didn't know about computers, mobile phones, iPhones, and other devices. During this time period we have seen huge changes in many areas of our lives.

I want to begin my discussion with a look at medicine. Struggle with cancer and other severe illnesses requires very great resources. Some government money goes into the research as well as the help of private companies that promote new drugs and methods of recovering. There are many famous people who give to charity. In these fields very high paid people are working diligently.

Life and health require special attention. There are such spheres in

microbiology and agricultural studies for the manufacture of food. People in these jobs will make valuable contributions into the development of widely available food and water for nations around the world. They certainly will be well paying jobs and important in the years ahead.

We can see humans who are interested in the Universe twenty years ago, but we could not imagine that individual citizens like Elon Musk would construct and launch private space ships. His experiences are very successful. Many engineers who create particular robots and other highly technological developments for many industries are engaged in this work. Engineering jobs will be in a premium in the years to come.

Many people's lives are complicated and they often have dealings with the law. We hear about trials very often.

Lawyers and judges are constantly involved in public relations. Lawyers and those involved in government and law enforcement will still be important jobs in fifty years.

There are white-collar professions including many people who are working with computers, iPhones, and different software programs. The names Steve Jobs, Google, Facebook, and Amazon and many others are in our ears every day. I think that these names are known to millions of people all over the world. They are high paying jobs and will continue to create important jobs in fifty years.

To sum up, medicine, microbiology, engineering, law, and developers of computer programs will hold high paying jobs in fifty years-time, so we can count on them. They will make the world better.



REASONS FOR LEARNING ENGLISH

by Rui Zhang

I come from China, which has a totally different language and culture than the U.S. Now, I live in Frederick as a housewife with my little son and my husband. In these two years, The Literacy Council has helped me to improve my English and immerse myself into the local community.

English is the most popular language in the world. There are lots of people learning English for many different reasons, such as making friends, doing science research, and traveling to name just a few. I began to learn English when I was only six years old, and I continue to learn it for many years. The reasons that I try to learn English have changed several times.

When I was in my kindergarten class, my mom pushed me to learn to speak English. The reason that I spoke English that time was to please my mom and make other kids think I was fashionable, but unfortunately, I learned British English in my

childhood. American English became the mainstream several years later.

Then as I grew up, English played more and more an important role in my life. In the Chinese educational system, English is as important as mathematics. But Chinese school only emphasizes reading and writing English in order to get high scores on exams. I paid most of my attention to reading and writing. Finally, I was admitted to an elite high school and famous university due to my good performances on exams, but I could not do well in listening and speaking.

After I got my Masters degree, I worked for the Chinese Academy of Sciences as a research assistant. This time English was my work tool. Almost all of the important scientific magazines are written in English. English is the basic tool to do research. Luckily, my job didn't require me to speak and listen to English. I did my work well using my reading and writing skills.

Finally, English became one of the most important factors in my life when I followed my husband to live in America. At the same time, I realized my reading and writing skills couldn't make sure I would have the ability to survive here. I was reluctant to speak with others, especially by phone. I had no other choice, but to practice speaking English. Many kind-hearted people continue to teach and to help me. I really appreciate what they do for me. Now, although there is still a

long way to go to improve my English, I have mastered the basic English to live here.

English's place in my life has become more and more important. It gave me Childhood memories, helped me to go to good schools, made me succeed in my job, and let me live in other countries. Besides during the learning process, I made many friends. In the future, no matter if I stay here or go back to my country, I hope I can keep up my English learning.

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