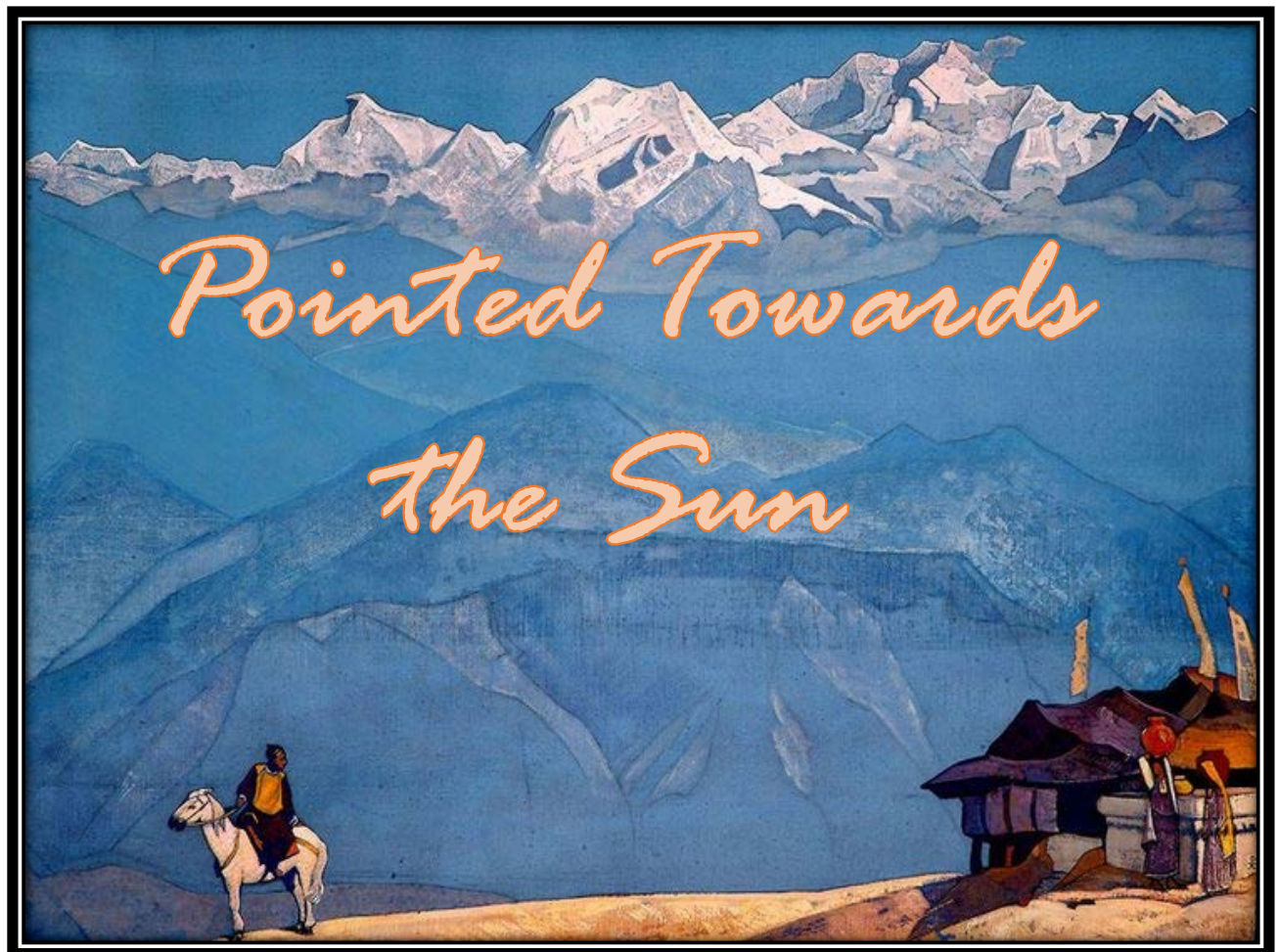




A Collection of Work about the Immigrant Experience
By the students and faculty of
Brookdale Community College



Pointed Towards the Sun

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Brookdale Community College*

2018

Pointed Towards the Sun:**A Collection of Work about the Immigrant Experience**

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“I am fundamentally an optimist. Whether that comes from nature or nurture, I cannot say. Part of being optimistic is keeping one's head **pointed toward the sun**, one's feet moving forward. There were many dark moments when my faith in humanity was sorely tested, but I would not and could not give myself up to despair. That way lays defeat and death.”

— Nelson Mandela

Long Walk to Freedom: Autobiography of Nelson Mandela

Introduction

Donna Pope

Some of us get to live our whole lives in a world in which the dominant language and culture are our own, never really knowing how things could possibly be any other way. Our own story is the only one we ever hear. “Stories matter. Many stories matter,” says Nigerian writer Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie. “Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign, but stories can also be used to empower and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people, but stories can also repair that broken dignity . . .” As the national conversation turns time and again to immigration, let us remember that behind the headlines, behind the statistics and the politics, are the stories of individual human beings.

Writer and academic Eva Hoffman escaped the Nazis in Poland and immigrated to British Columbia when she was just 13. She discusses the deep, psychological “upheaval” that occurs when one leaves home for another culture: “It is because these things go so deep, because they are not only passed on to us but are us, that one’s original home is a potent structure and force and that being uprooted from it is so painful” (50). When I left the United States to work as a new teacher in Honduras, I gained a small window into what life is like as a new immigrant, feeling uprooted and lost in a way that forced

me to redefine my identity and place in the world. No matter what drives one to leave home, it is never easy.

In this collection, you will meet immigrants driven by a singular purpose, to achieve their own kind of “American Dream” despite emotional, financial, legal, linguistic, and cultural barriers. Some writers share about great and terrible times in their home country, while others recollect fond memories of people and places they miss dearly. Some share about mistreatment and misunderstanding faced once they arrived, while others recount great achievements. Some writers are not immigrants at all, but share the immigration stories of *their* ancestors and ways in which their own lives were shaped by immigration.

Immigrants don’t always arrive here willingly. Some you will meet did not want to leave their home at all, but left only because circumstances left them no better choice—escaping poverty, persecution, war, natural disaster. Some flee as parents with a desperate dream for a better way of life for their families. Some are the children of such desperate parents.

Teaching non-native English writers for over twenty years, I have gotten to know and be inspired by countless people who have, despite all odds, remained “pointed toward

the sun.” Writers have shared trauma, fear, courage, and sacrifice. I have always felt that these writers deserved a larger audience.

Last year, the members of the Global Citizens Project were searching for a “Global Read” text, a shared reading experience for the entire Brookdale community, to support their theme of Immigrants and Refugees. Why not share *our own* writers? All the writers in this collection are employees and students of Brookdale.

These stories of wonder and loss, of inspiration and sacrifice are Brookdale’s stories. Your story belongs here, too. There is no single defining story for any one place. Says Adichie, “. . .when we realize that there is

never a single story about any place, we regain a kind of paradise.”

I am so excited to share this collection with you. A special thank you to Kelsey Maki, to the GCP committee, to the International Education Center, and especially to all the writers who contributed work and shared a piece of themselves. Thank you for all your hard work and support.

Donna Pope
Associate Professor,
English Department
Brookdale Community College

Your story belongs here, too.

The Brookdale International Education Center

The Immigrant and Refugee Experience

Every two years, the Global Citizenship Project (GCP) at Brookdale promotes an interdisciplinary theme addressing a global issue. In Fall 2017, we began examining the complex topic of immigration. Since then, many organizations at the College have hosted events related to this topic. As a capstone for our selected theme, English Professor Donna Pope has compiled this text, authored by Brookdale students and faculty.

The International Education Center (IEC) at Brookdale would like to thank all the employees who've contributed to this project. We're especially grateful for the support of Student Life and Activities, led by Lauren Brutsman; The Dr. Carl Calendar Visiting Writers Series, led by Suzanne Parker; The Center for WWII Studies and Conflict Resolution, led by Marc Bonagura; The Dreamers+ student club, advised by Ashely Zampogna-Krug, and the entire staff at the Center for Holocaust, Human Rights & Genocide Education (Chhange), all of whom have been our consistent co-sponsors throughout the years. We, at the IEC, would also like to thank the Reading Department for adopting global issues in all classes, The EOF Program for their instrumental engagement in co-curricular events, Debbie Mura and Ashley Zampogna-Krug for their unwavering commitment to GCP, Ed Johnson for his support of all things international, Jim Cody and Elana Maloney for hosting Spring 2019 events, Nathalie Darden for creating the Thanksgiving Host Program for international students, Terry Konn for her tireless devotion to the Global Citizenship Distinction Program, and all of the faculty who have globally enhanced their classes or nominated their students for GCP Awards—without you, none of this would be possible. But most of all, we'd like to thank the students—those who've shared their stories and those who are choosing to read them—your engagement continues to inspire us all.

To retain the original voice of each piece, these submissions—which range from research papers, to narratives, to essays—have not been heavily edited. We hope you'll find this text to be a moving and informative window into our contributors' diverse experiences and perspectives. The works contained within these pages, although written by Brookdaliens, do not represent an official stance or viewpoint on the part of Brookdale Community College. In bringing you these works, we—at GCP—seek only to represent the richness of individual experience and academic inquiry contained at our institution. Thank you for reading!

Sincerely,

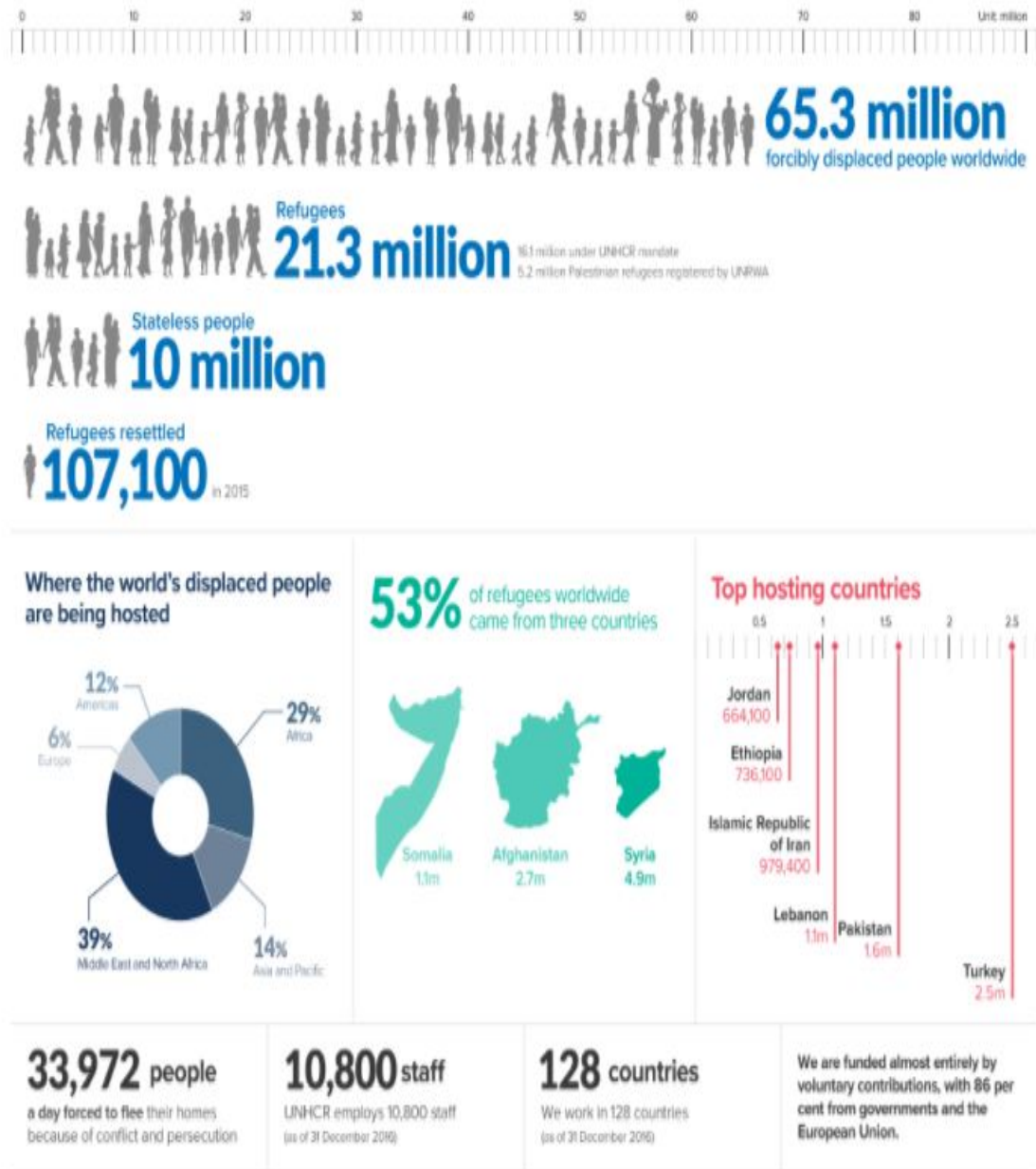
Kelsey Maki & Janice Thomas

The International Education Center

Research Guide: Immigrant and Refugee Data

Compiled by Valerie Bonilla, Associate Professor, Library

United Nation's Human Rights Council's 2015 Figures at a Glance



Finding Background Information

Key Terms to Use	Library Resources	Web Resources
- Asylum, Right of - Child Detention - Compulsory resettlement - Defectors - Deportation - Displaced persons - Ethnic cleansing - Exile - Expulsion - Forcible displacement - Forced migration - Genocide - Human trafficking - Human rights - Internal displacement - Internal migrants - Internally displaced persons - International human rights - Involuntary resettlement - Mass migration - Migration, forced - Migration, internal - Persecution - Political migrants - Population resettlement - Population transfers - Refugee children - Refugee policy - Refugees - Relocation, forced - Resettlement, involuntary - Sanctuary (law) - Social Justice - War crimes - Women refugees	Use the following sources to learn more about refugees and refugee crises and related legal, political, health, and social issues. CQ Researcher Gives overviews of major topic areas (including refugee crises and immigration). Includes articles, lists of other resources, and Pro and Con arguments for most topics. Issues and Controversies Provides essays exploring issues associated with immigration, including: Illegal Aliens, Illegal Immigrants, Immigrant Detention, Immigrant Rights, Immigrants in the Military, Immigration, Immigration and Executive Action, Immigration Law and Terrorism, and the Refugee Crisis Encyclopedia of Genocide and Crimes Against Humanity Provides background information about genocide and human rights from countries and populations around the world, and includes essays on refugees and refugee camps.	Foreign Affairs Magazine: Refugees and Migration topic page
Organizations		
United States Organizations/Agencies	World Organizations/Agencies	Special Topics
U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (Department of Homeland Security) U.S. Department of State: Refugee Admissions Office of Refugee Resettlement (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services)	International Organization on Migration (IOM) IOM works to help ensure the orderly and humane management of migration, to promote international cooperation on migration issues, to assist in the search for practical solutions to migration problems and to provide humanitarian assistance to migrants in need, including refugees and internally displaced people. UN High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR)	<u>HEALTH</u> World Health Organization: Refugee and Migrant Health International Committee of the Red Cross: Refugees and Displaced Persons U.S. Center for Disease Control: Immigrant and Refugee Health

The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants The U.S. Committee for Refugees and Immigrants advocates for refugee rights and protections and provides resources to refugee populations worldwide and in the United States. Migration Policy Institute The Migration Policy Institute is an independent, nonpartisan, nonprofit think tank in Washington D.C. dedicated to analysis of the movement of people worldwide.	The UNHCR is mandated to lead and coordinate international action to protect refugees and resolve refugee problems worldwide. Its primary purpose is to safeguard the rights and well-being of refugees. Refugees International Refugees International (RI) is a global, independent advocacy organization that advocates for and provides resources to displaced people around the world. Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) IDMC monitors conflict-induced internal displacement worldwide and runs an online database of information and analysis on internal displacement in 50+ countries. Amnesty International Human Rights Watch: Refugee Rights European Council on Refugees and Exiles (ECRE) The ECRA is a pan-European Alliance of refugee-assisting non-governmental organizations. ECRE is concerned with the needs of all individuals who seek refuge and protection within Europe.	CHILDREN UNICEF: Children on the Move Human Rights Watch: Children's Rights
Reports		
Special Topic Reports	Reports	Other Reports
HEALTH Strategy and Action Plan for Refugee and Migrant Health in the WHO European Region(World Health Organization, 2016): Other WHO publications: http://www.euro.who.int/en/health-topics/health-determinants/migration-and-health/publications CHILDREN Uprooted: The growing crisis for refugee and migrant children (UNICEF, 2016) Executive summary found here.	UNHCR's Global Report (2015) Presents a global overview of the work carried out by The United Nation Refugee Agency, which aims to protect and improve the lives of tens of millions of refugees, internally displaced people, returnees, stateless people, and others of concern. UNHCR's Global Appeal (2017) Presents the financial resources that UNHCR will need in 2017 to protect and improve the lives of forcibly displaced people. It highlights the challenges faced by UNHCR and its partners in attempting to respond to multiple life-threatening crises and ever-growing humanitarian needs, and what actions will be taken or needed that will lead to improvements in their lives. iDMC's Global Report on Internal Displacement (GRID) (2016) This report contains the iDMC's estimates and analysis of people internally displaced by conflict, generalized violence and disasters in a single report. IOM's World Migration Report: Migrants and Cities: New Partnerships to Manage	Refugees International Field Reports Reports about refugees and migrants from all areas of the world, including recent reports about Libyan, Haitian, Syrian, Sudanese, Colombian, Iraqi, and Malaysian refugees. U.S. Department of Homeland Security's Annual Flow Report 2015 Previous years of this report can be found here.

	Mobility (2015) This International Organization for Migration (IOM) report focuses on how migration and migrants are shaping cities, and how the life of migrants is shaped by cities, their people, organizations, and rules. Amnesty International Report 2016/2017: The State of the World's Human Rights (2016)	
Statistics and Data		
United States		Global
Homeland Security's Immigration Data and Statistics U.S. Department of State's Refugee Admissions Statistics MPI Data Hub: Migration facts, statistics and maps from the Migration Policy Institute.		IDMC: Figures from the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre. MPI Data Hub: Migration facts, statistics and maps from the Migration Policy Institute. UNHCR's Figures at a Glance UNHCR's Data Portal: contains data on current refugee situations World Bank's Refugee Population by Country statistics European Stability Initiative (ESI): The Refugee Crisis Through Statistics
Undocumented Immigrants		
Raritan Valley Community College Undocumented Immigrants Guide This guide provides resources for undocumented persons.		
This guide was created Summer 2017 and can be accessed online at http://libguides.brookdalecc.edu/refugees. If you need help with research, please contact a librarian: www.brookdalecc.edu/library		

Valerie Bonilla is Associate Professor, Library, Bankier Library, Brookdale Community College

What Would I Do?

To say that immigration is controversial today is an understatement. It has become a political issue that divides Americans, friends, and families. It has become a matter of national security, leading to the creation of fortified and militarized borders not only in the United States, but worldwide. There are those who ardently support all immigrants, both documented and undocumented, and those who vigorously maintain a position of exclusion and removal believing, among other things, that immigrants drain public resources and compete with native-born Americans for jobs. In reality, immigration is neither totally beneficial nor wholly damaging to the countries migrants leave and the countries that receive them. Emigration, the act of leaving one's country, can help ease economic tensions and produce new economic revenue through remittances. Conversely, emigration can also lead to societal instability due to separated families and parentless children.¹ Immigration, the act of being received by another country, also brings benefits. Immigrants tend to be highly motivated individuals who bring new ideas and new life

in the form of intellectual property and businesses. Additionally, while some undocumented immigrants may not pay taxes through their employer, they all pay sales taxes on purchases they make and many others do file taxes. According to the National Research Council, the average immigrant pays \$1,800 more in taxes than he or she costs in benefits.² When there are both benefits and detriments, how does one decide whether to support immigrants or oppose them? For myself, it boils down to one question: What would I do?

I am a mother to a three-year old boy who is my entire world. Providing him with what he needs to grow physically, emotionally, and intellectually is my central mission. It is the mission of every mother throughout the world. Historically, men have dominated immigration waves to the United States, but since 2000, more migrants are women. Many are single mothers, whose husbands divorced them or simply left them alone to care for their children.³ This phenomenon has become prevalent in many Latin American nations with patriarchal societies where men dominate in households and workplaces. Women are

¹ Sonia Nazario, *Enrique's Journey: The Story of a Boy's Dangerous Odyssey to Reunite with his Mother* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2007), 282-284.

² Darrel M. West, "The Costs and Benefits of Immigration" in *Brain Gain: Rethinking U.S. Immigration Policy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2010), 1-3, 11-12.

³ Nazario, xiii.

much less likely to have a skill or education that can enable them to provide for their children independently. Such was the case for Lourdes, who was featured in Sonia Nazario's nonfiction text, *Enrique's Journey*. After her husband left, Lourdes struggled to feed her children and pay for school supplies. She sold tortillas, used clothes, and plantains door to door while she lived in a two-room shack with a tin roof and no running water. She knew if she stayed in Honduras, her children would not be able to continue with school and many nights they would go to bed without food. At the age of twenty-four, she decided to leave her children in Honduras while entrusting her life and the little money she had with a smuggler who promised to get her to *el Norte*.⁴ While reading this narrative, I continued to ask myself, what if I were in Lourdes' position and I could not provide my child with basic needs like shoes, pencils for school, or food? Would I stay? Or, would I undergo a dangerous journey to a foreign land in the hopes of being able to provide for my child?

At the end of 2016, there were 65.6 million people forcibly displaced due to war, violence, and persecution. According to the UNHCR, that means that on average one out of every 113 people is someone who is displaced. Syria continues to account for the largest

Would I undergo a dangerous journey to a foreign land in the hopes of being able to provide for my child?

number of displaced people, at almost two-thirds of its population. And, children constitute half of the refugee population worldwide. The UNHCR also reports that most refugees were in low- to middle-income countries, which reflects the proximity of poorer countries to areas of conflict.⁵

I have had the privilege of being born in the United States, and I live in a neighborhood where I feel safe. Infrastructure is intact. Water is clean. Government is functioning and providing services to citizens. I can go outside any time of day knowing that I am not likely to lose my life. I do not hear gunshots or bombs nearby or in the distance. I have not lost family members to violent persecution or war. Fear does not dominate my range of emotions. Yet, I wonder what I would do if my situation was different. What if I was afraid to go outside? What if there were insurgent forces trying to recruit members of my family to fight? What if I lost members of my family to war? What if roads disintegrated, water became filthy, and disease ran rampant? What if I lost my home and livelihood? What if resources like food were difficult to obtain? What if the government failed to provide basic

⁴ Nazario, 3-7.

⁵ UNHCR USA The UN Refugee Agency. "War, Violence, Persecution Push Displacement to New Unprecedented High." www.unhcr.org.

<http://www.unhcr.org/en-us/news/press/2017/6/5943ec594/war-violence-persecution-push-displacement-new-unprecedented-high.html> (accessed August 19, 2018).

services to its citizens? What if fear did dominate my range of emotions every day and every night? Would I decide to board an overcrowded inflatable raft and cross the Mediterranean without knowing if any other nation would accept me?

The truth is that I do not know with certainty what I would do in those situations or in any of the other circumstances that push migrants out of their home. Honestly, I cannot even imagine living in conditions so dire that leaving home becomes the only option. Would fear and uncertainty immobilize me? Would I have the fortitude to abandon all that I know in search of a new place to call home? I cannot oppose individuals for making a gut-wrenching decision and taking a risk that I cannot conceive of. Truthfully, I hope that I would be as courageous, resilient, confident, and patient as the immigrants of today and in the past. Those who choose to leave have a certain determination that those who remain lack. Numerous studies suggest that immigrants add much more to a society than what they take from it. They start businesses, patent new ideas, and propel employment.⁶ They carry on a process that humans have been involved in for more than 100,000 years.

Essentially, humans have been moving since they existed. Hunters and gatherers in Africa began leaving that continent for other lands roughly 100,000 years ago. For more

than 95% of human history, humans were nomadic hunters and gatherers. They had no permanent settlements, no ownership of property, and no national boundaries. They moved typically out of necessity, such as lack of resources or climate change. They evolved and developed new ways of thriving in various climates. Even after the development of agriculture, cities, and civilizations (the remaining five percent of human history) individuals continued to move. By the classical period, empires invested in infrastructure that enabled long-distance trade in goods, ideas, and people. Technology progressed more dramatically than ever before as a result of more frequent and diverse human interactions.

Therefore, if migration has been part of the human success story for more than 100,000 years, I certainly hope that I would bravely select the same path as my ancestors, even today where border security and walls are becoming larger, more dangerous, and more common.

Dr. Ashley Zampogna-Krug is an Assistant Professor in the Department of History and Faculty Advisor for the Dreamers+ Student Organization at Brookdale Community College.

⁶ West, 20.

The Reverse of Life

Have you ever thought about how one decision or event can affect the rest of your life? In life, many events influence the way one acts or the decisions one makes. There was a strong event that had such a big impact and totally changed my life. For me, the life changing event happened when a massive earthquake with a magnitude 7.1 ravaged Haiti. This earthquake was the most powerful and destructive of recent history. That event and a book I read soon after influenced and changed my whole life. The lesson in my story is to keep my mind positive.

It was January 12, 2010. My day started as usual. I woke up in the morning, ate my breakfast, and then got ready for school. After school I went back home, watched TV, had my lunch, and then reviewed some notes. It was 4:55 in the afternoon when I felt the earth shake about 11 seconds. My heart was racing because I wasn't used to that feeling. Maybe I was just having a nightmare. I screamed even louder than my sister. My sister and I were in the courtyard, and we didn't realize what had just happened. We both went inside the house and started asking questions: "What the hell just happened?" After a few minutes, I told my sister, "Stay inside! I'm going to find out." I was very

scared, but I didn't want to show her my fear. I walked with heavy footsteps outside. Once there, I couldn't see anything because the air was dusty. A couple minutes later I heard people screaming everywhere. That was freaking me out, and I started to understand something bad had just happened. I saw people passing in front of my house with injuries and people who had died.

A few days later, I tried to call my school, but there was no response. I found out my

The earthquake had a side effect on my brain. Every half hour I felt the same sensation as though the earth shook. Even though it hadn't, I was traumatized, and a lot of things were still going on in my head.

school had collapsed with a lot of students and teachers. In Haiti a lot of construction doesn't meet the minimum standards,

and we don't know what behavior to have in case of an earthquake; that's why more than 300,000 people died.

I think the earthquake had a side effect on my brain. Every half hour I felt the same sensation as though the earth shook. Even though it hadn't, I was traumatized, and a lot of things were still going on in my head. I couldn't sleep at night; every time I closed my eyes I saw images of dead people, and I had the feeling the earth shook for a couple months. I screamed every time. I thought it was the end of the world because at this time

my brain stopped working, and I was praying to God to save my life.

My dream had been to become an engineer and find a good job in a construction firm, and I realized my dream couldn't come true in a country destroyed. I started to ask God, "What should I do with my life? If you left me alive after that event, it's because you had a plan for me. So, what's the plan then?" I was lost, and I didn't know what to do. My only option was God. A few days passed, and my life was still the same. A lot of my friends traveled, those who had money. That made me feel worse, because I didn't have that possibility, even though I wanted to. However, God didn't forget me. He put somebody in the road to help me, and that was going to be the greatest thing to achieve my goals.

I had a friend who lived in front of my house. He was an Engineer. One day he called me and asked me if I would like to read a book. He didn't give time to answer. He said, "Whether you like it or not I have a book for you." The name of this book is *The Secret* by Rhonda Byrne. *The Secret* is a self-help book about the power of positive thinking. It is based on pseudo-scientific theory called "The Law of Attraction."

After I finished reading this book, I felt I really had a power, and I understood I had to stop thinking about what I didn't want and do the inverse. My mind was blocked because I

thought too much about my bad situations. I started to question myself about what I wanted for my future. I understood the power was in my mind, so I flipped my mind. My priority was to travel, specifically to find a scholarship to proceed to school. Every time I closed my eyes, I started dreaming about the scholarship. I imagined myself in another country, studying Civil Engineering, and then coming back to my country to help rebuild with good construction standards. All that was a picture in my mind, because when I opened my eyes, I realized I was in the same situation, but that wasn't going to prevent me from thinking and dreaming.

One day, while my dad watched the news, he saw that the Senegal Government was offering scholarships to Haitians in

solidarity to the disaster.

Then later many countries did the same. It was at this time my smile began to come. Without wasting time, I went to that place and

applied for the scholarship. I had a good transcript in high school as well as in my first year of college. They didn't waste any time to give me a call and schedule an appointment with me. I went to the appointment, and they were more than happy to welcome me because I had good grades in Mathematics, Physics, and Chemistry. "You are the ideal person for this field," said the recruiter, which

I started to ask God, "What should I do with my life? If you left me alive after that event, it's because you had a plan for me. So, what's the plan then?"

was Civil Engineering, the field I want to proceed in.

"The Law of Attraction" came back, and my mind restarted to work. My body was in Haiti, but my mind was out of it. "You are going to be crazy if you keep acting like you already got something you didn't", said my sister. In my head I knew I wasn't crazy, but after reading the book, I had to put more energy to act like I already had everything I needed.

I had three more appointments with the scholarship board. They talked to us about the adaptation to a new continent, new country, and asked why we chose the field. They tried to know each person who wanted to do the same field with us. It was interesting to meet new friends and to share our ideas. They asked us to bring our passport and then set the date of the trip. A few days passed, and I was closer to traveling than to staying in Haiti.

I finally found this scholarship for Senegal, Africa. It was exciting to see my goals starting to be accomplished. I traveled to Senegal, and the language wasn't a barrier because they speak French. However, I faced some difficulty like the food adaptation, which wasn't easy for me. Their menu was totally different from mine. I had difficulty at school, because their school programs were more advanced than mine. Despite all of the obstacles I faced, I spent three years, and I got my Associate Degree in Civil Engineering. I went back to Haiti. I did not take too much time to find a job in an American Construction Firm named



Sherider Anilus, 28, and her daughter, 9-month-old Monica, sit on the spot where her home collapsed from the earthquake, in the Fort National neighborhood of Port-au-Prince, Haiti. Getty Images. <http://www.cnn.com/2010/OPINION/02/28/stark.chile>

AECOM (American Multinational Engineering Firm). I participated in some school and hospital construction, since my life started to get a new direction.

The lesson of my story is to tell you even if you are in a bad situation, don't focus on yourself in that situation. Try to solve this problem in your mind, and then make yourself believe and act like you don't have this problem anymore. You create your own universe, and the universe will manifest it, which is the "The Law of Attraction." Even though the earthquake had a bad impact on me, it also helped me find faith in God, which helped me to find a friend who handed a book to me, and ever since, my life has changed in a positive way.

Sati and Sampajanna

What do you do when you face obstacles in life? For me, I was brought up as a Buddhist, and I believe in Buddha, who teaches the basis of the eternal truth and meditation. It has been through meditation that I have also gained two very important things called Sati and Sampajanna. Sati means a recollection and is something that can help you choose the best way or path forward based on past experiences to solve problems. Sampajanna is a type of self-awareness that helps you better understand any present situation by looking at it in a pure way absent of emotions and feelings. So, when I face various obstacles in life, I always try to have and use Sati and Sampajanna to help me find the way through these situations and to help me focus on my own internal peace.

I was born a Buddhist, and it is this religion that is shown on my birth certificate. However, for a long time, I never really understood the teachings of the Buddha. My knowledge would only represent the bark of the tree when I compare my knowledge of my religion to a tree because I only know a relatively small amount compared to the total amount to be known. In the past, I often found it difficult to deal with the problems in my life, and I would sometimes get angry or depressed. I did not understand then that many of the principles

Dealing with all of these changes was extremely difficult and probably the most difficult situation I had ever faced. During these times, I relied on the teachings of Buddha.

taught in my religion could help me in my everyday life. The more knowledge I gained about the teachings of Buddha, the more I began to know how then to use them to be calm in dealing with challenging situations. For example, when I was young, I could never imagine myself marrying someone from another country. However, it actually happened. I met and married someone from another country. I then had to move and go to live in another country, speak a different language, and live with people who were culturally very different from me. After being married and moving to the USA, I realized that my mind was closed, and I needed to expand it and to develop confidence and friends in this new place. I found however, dealing with all of these changes extremely difficult and probably the most difficult situation I had ever faced. During these times, I relied on the teachings of Buddha. No matter how difficult the situation was that I faced, I tried to face the situation in the present with a calm unattached mind, which I think has really

helped me. Therefore, I think believing and using the Buddhist teachings is the best and easiest way for me to navigate through new difficult experiences in life.

In life, we all face lots of different situations, some that make you happy, some that make us sad, and some that make us angry. While I try to be happy and find situations that make me happy, sometimes I get confused and desperate when I feel that so many bad things seem to be happening to me. According to the teachings of Buddha, all of these different situations come in cycles; there is no gain without loss, no fame without obscurity, no praise without criticism, and no happiness without pain. The Buddha said these are the ways of the world that will be the ways of the world forever. After I understood this, it changed my perspective. When I feel happiness or sadness, I can use and rely on Sati and Sampajanna to help me understand the issue. I make peace with it and then do not obsess about just happiness or sadness. I want to be happy just like everyone. I do not want to feel pain or be sad, but I know that regardless of the happiness I seek that there will also always be times of pain and sadness. However, this is the way of the world, and to

... all I wanted was for my father to stop drinking, as he drank far too much which was bad for his health. I was unhappy because I continually hoped my father would change.

understand and accept this with a calm and aware mind make life much easier to live. Continual pain only comes from expecting and seeking constant happiness.

Let's think of some examples of what happiness may mean for people. For me to be happy all I wanted was for my father to stop drinking, as he drank far too much which was bad for his health. I was unhappy because I continually hoped my father would change his ways, and he did not. My happiness was then based on the hope I had that another person would change their ways. When they did not, it created my pain. I realized that I couldn't control other people and that my hope was actually the cause of my pain. If I could simply stop hoping for something, then this was my path to happiness. So, after I was able to use the teaching and principles of Sati and Sampajanna, to find my internal peace. I realized that whenever I expected someone to do something to make me happy, that was the beginning of my suffering. You can never control others, and I now believe that true happiness comes from my own internal peace. So by relying and using Sati and Sampajanna, I can achieve my own internal peace and my path to happiness. A way to then understand and achieve internal peace is through doing meditation.

In the beginning, it was not easy for me to meditate. I was a lazy person, but I knew if I did not try, it would not happen. When I started to meditate, the sitting position hurt

my legs a lot. At first I could only sit and do it for nine minutes, but it felt like all day. With my aching legs, my mind told me to stop doing it; that made me fight myself. I needed to have Sati and Sampajanna to focus on my breath until I could go through the pain or my legs no longer hurt, and enter a place where I could find my internal peace. My internal peace will improve the more often I meditate. This is very helpful as when I face a difficult situation, I am able to control my feelings and emotions to be able to deal with the situation much better than before. So, when the Thai restaurant that I work at gets very busy and I have many tables to take care of, I need to use Sati and Sampajanna to focus on my work and do my work well. Every day, I faced different experiences with different customers. Sometimes, I do not understand why they want to cause trouble and argue so much. I often find myself in a tough situation between a difficult customer and the owner of restaurant, and I need to find the balanced way for both parties. It is through the use of Buddha's teaching that I find my internal peace, which allows me to calmly deal with the situation.

On the other hand, when I don't have Sati and Sampajanna, I sometimes suffer and experience pain. For example, I wanted to have beautiful and straight teeth like my friends, so I decided to get braces. Before I could get braces, I needed to have my wisdom teeth removed, and it was the first time in my

life to have surgery. After I had the surgery even though I suffered a lot of pain, it did not stop me from still wanting braces and beautiful teeth. With the braces, I have had a lot of pain, and I need to wait for eighteen months before they can be removed. I also notice now that my teeth seem not as strong as in the past. After this, I now realize I was wrong when I felt unhappy as it is not straight teeth that will make me happy. This experience reminded me that true happiness comes from my own internal peace and not some external thing, which has taught me to understand some parts of the basis of the Buddha's teaching about eternal truth.

So, from all my experiences, I realized that my suffering came from my own wrong thinking. Sometimes life is not easy, and I need to have beliefs to rely and help me through life's ups and downs. Believing in Buddha's teaching is the best and easiest way for me to get through all of the new and challenging experiences in life. From Buddha's teaching Sati and Sampajanna, I am able to find my internal peace, which will always help me navigate all the various obstacles in my life.

Nathalie Darden

The Message is in the Bell

When my mother, Josiane E. Jameux, immigrated to the United States from France, she stepped into a world of unforeseen challenges, including segregated housing and economic disadvantages (due to “redlining”), a divorce that left her stranded with two young daughters, and a host of opportunities she thought unfathomable but that I take for granted. She had opportunities of education, jobs, financial investments and retirement.

Last year, at 89 years old, my mother demonstrated to us how valuable the opportunity of education is to her. She had fallen and had broken her hip for the third time, and was convalescing at my sister’s house. My mother knew her granddaughter, Geneviève, a college student at Rutgers University, had a paper due at midnight. That afternoon, Geneviève was sleeping, and my mother, concerned the paper would not get submitted in time, summoned all the strength from her 99-pound body to ring the heavy cow bell that was just out of her reach. Now awake, Geneviève dashed down the stairs in a panic, fearing the worst: that her Mémé had fallen again. Instead she heard the words “You have a paper due tonight.”

My mother, Josiane, was born in Paris, France in 1928. After graduating with the equivalent of an Associate’s Degree, she gained employment at the American Express office in Paris, with the position of tour agent, which ultimately set her on a path that she would never have predicted! Josiane met my father, Charles A. Darden, when he came to Paris to visit his uncle (of African-American / Haitian descent, on his mother’s side) who also worked at the same office as Josiane. After a period of courting and exchanging air-mail letters, Charles and Josiane decided to get married and that she would move to the United States of America. However, the year was 1955, when interracial marriage was legal in some states but illegal in others. It remained controversial throughout the 1950’s in the United States. Interracial marriage eventually became legal in every US state by 1967. Regardless of its legality, Josiane wanted to get married in Paris, so the arrangements were made at her local church.



Josiane E. Jameux,
1953



Charles A. Darden,
1954

Josiane immigrated and moved to Jamaica, Queens, NY where Charles, was living with his widowed mother. By marrying an American citizen, she immigrated to the US legally, but she didn't become an American citizen until 1967. Immigrants no longer arrived through Ellis Island; it closed in 1954. Because Charles was a Master Mechanic for TWA (Transcontinental World Airlines), a benefit entitled them to fly for free. Additionally, he knew the pilot. They were afforded first class seats and champagne! At the US customs in the airport, entry as an immigrant depended on Josiane's answers to certain questions, such as:

- 1) Are you a member of the Communist Party? (This was the McCarthy era.)
- 2) Do any members of your family belong to the Communist Party?
- 3) Have you ever committed adultery?

A sign of the times: these questions would never be asked today.

Josiane wanted to continue working, and she accepted a job in the French Tourism Office in Manhattan, located at Rockefeller Plaza. She worked there until her first child, my sister, was born. In 1960, Josiane and Charles seized the opportunity to buy a house in North Babylon, Long Island, NY, where Josiane encountered her first challenge, unknowingly. The neighborhood they moved to consisted of white homeowners but because of the practice of "redlining," it quickly became mostly segregated (several white families remained). White homeowners often moved out quickly by having their mortgaged amount reassigned to the new black homeowner, who only needed a down payment equal to the equity in the house. This is what Josiane and Charles did, using her salary for the down payment.

The Institute on Race and Poverty at the University of Minnesota Law School describes redlining in this way:

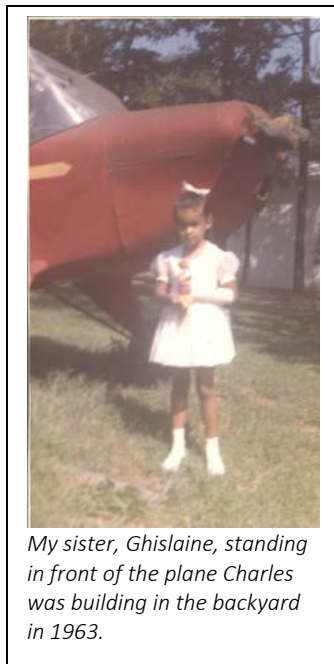
With the National Housing Act of 1934, the federal government opened up the suburbs to Whites. This law created the Home Owners' Loan Corporation (HOLC), which made home ownership affordable to millions of White families by subsidizing home mortgages in the suburbs. The government ensured the racial homogeneity of the suburbs by offering these subsidized mortgages only to Whites, and only for the purchase of homes in racially homogenous White neighborhoods. This practice of 'redlining' was subsequently passed on to another federal mortgage guarantee program, the Federal Housing Administration (FHA). The government also pushed



*home purchasers to adopt restrictive covenants prohibiting the future sale of these government-subsidized homes to people of color. In the post-World War II years, as Blacks migrated from the south to the north in unprecedented numbers, White northerners took advantage of the federal, state and local laws enabling them to move to the suburbs in droves, confident that urban Blacks would for the most part be unable to come with them.*⁷

The impetus for white suburbs was partly driven by the fear of Communism⁸. Redlining was the result of real estate, banking and insurance companies collaborating and adhering to newly created government laws to purposely practice housing discrimination. These laws were enacted due to the black population migrating north from the southern states in 1940-1960. These laws were designed to decrease opportunities and limit resources in all aspects of life for middle class blacks.

Besides housing discrimination, Charles experienced job discrimination. My sister was two years old when they moved to their new house in North Babylon and I would be born three years



later. Charles, longing to be a pilot, used the GI Bill for training and earning his pilot's license. He also wanted to become a Flight Engineer, so he took the test three times, but each time received notices of 'failing' grades. Exasperated, he went to Washington D.C. to view his graded test and learned he scored 100%. This is an example of how racial discrimination forced a lost opportunity upon Charles. He would never get promoted to Flight Engineer nor get a paid job as a pilot with TWA or elsewhere, even after the Civil Rights Act of 1968. A contributing factor for this was job competition between pilots who had far fewer opportunities to log airtime, and Veteran Army Air Corps pilots from World War II (1939-1945) and Air Force pilots from the Korean War (1950-1953). Years later, he flew planes recreationally, volunteered to refuel planes for the Coast Guard, and in the late 1970's, spent two years with Classic Warbirds, Inc. to completely

rebuild a downed North American T-28 C aircraft that arrived in 70 cartons with only 75% of its parts. He then flew the plane to its final destination in Florida.

Frustrated with the lack of opportunities at TWA, Charles launched himself into owning a dry cleaning business, even though the economic times did not favor such an endeavor. While I was an

⁷ Institute on Race & Poverty, University of Minnesota Law School, "Racism and the Opportunity Divide on Long Island", Susan Hartigan, John Powell, Gavin Kearney, Eric Myott, July 2002, pp.5

⁸ NPR – Fresh Air, May 3, 2017, Terry Gross interview with Richard Rothstein, author of "The Color of Law – A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America".

infant, the stress of being a Master Mechanic at TWA and a business owner became unbearable, and as a result, the marriage suffered, which prompted Charles to take a decisive step. In 1967, Charles and Josiane agreed there were irreconcilable differences and were divorced.

When the door closed at the end of this chapter of Josiane's life, opportunities and good will awaited her. At this point Josiane was a stay-at-home mom alone in a foreign country, with 3-year old and 8-year old daughters. Charles paid child support for one year and then stopped. His dry cleaning business did not prosper and was closed. He would always work as an airplane mechanic. Left with no options, Josiane went on welfare for two months and received food stamps for approximately four years, even though her mother regularly sent money in amounts limited by the U.S. government. Josiane could have returned to France where she would have had family around her, but she liked being in the United States where she would have more opportunities. "I find this country great!" she told me several times. Here in the U.S., she was able to go back to school part time at night, which fit her schedule as a single parent. If she returned to France, she could only go as a full time university student, which offered no flexibility for someone in her position. She would have had to get a job and an apartment, and she didn't think her children would have the same opportunities in France as in the U.S. Plus she had friends from her former job in Manhattan, a house, and a cousin from France, Jean, whom Charles and Josiane had been sponsoring.

Ironically and fortunately, Charles' uncle (on his father's side) took us in, became our benefactor and father figure, and imparted to Josiane the same strength he needed for his own struggles in life. Dr. Walter Theodore Darden was a medical doctor and was chased out of Tuskegee, Alabama for upstaging a white doctor who happened to be a Ku Klux Klan leader. "'Professional pride' forced the Klansman to demand Dr. Darden's immediate departure from town."⁹ He migrated north, established his practice in Newark, and purchased a very large house in Montclair, NJ, where he lived with his wife and two young daughters. About the time of Charles' and Josiane's divorce, Dr. Darden's wife had recently passed away. Coping with his own grief, he advised Josiane to go back to school, and he paid her tuition (\$500/semester at Hofstra University)! From that point forward we would spend every weekend at his house, with his young adult daughters. Every week he gave Josiane food money and every September



⁹ "Spoonbread and Strawberry Wine - Recipes and Reminiscences of a Family", by Norma Jean Darden and Carole Darden, Anchor Press Double Day, Garden City, NY, 1978, pp.128

gave her money for 'back-to-school' shopping. To this day, we don't know why, but everyone called him Uncle Bud. Uncle Bud, our patriarch and benefactor, was born in Wilson, North Carolina in 1893, the youngest of 10 children of a former slave named Charles Henry Darden.

Charles Henry Darden, affectionately called Papa Darden, was my great grandfather. Freed from slavery at the age of 14, he had acquired skills as a wheelwright and knife sharpener, and one day walked into the town of Wilson, NC. At church, he met a young girl and asked to marry her shortly thereafter. The family declined stating they didn't know him and that before any such union, he would need to prove himself as a suitable husband. Within a few short years, he did just that, at least enough for the family to allow their daughter to marry him at 16 years of age. Papa Darden had established himself and, in due time, owned a store and became a pillar in the community. The town of Wilson built a high school for black students in 1923. It was re-named after Papa Darden in 1937: the Charles H. Darden High School. Today, it is the Charles H. Darden Middle School. Even though Papa Darden could not read or write, he made each of his children recite their homework every night, and he attended every graduation. Each of his 10 children became medical doctors, lawyers, businessmen, nurses, or teachers. My father, Charles, was the last male Darden born, and I am the last Darden born.



Me, Josiane, and my sister, Ghislaine in 2008.

children. Josiane finished the started her Ph.D. but never finished Though she wanted to teach, an administrative position because needed a salary. She was offered a Scheduling Officer in the Scheduling Uncle Bud wanted to ensure that

By the time of Josiane's divorce in 1967, her cousin, Jean, had left France and immigrated to the United States. Soon after he started his own family. So now, all holidays were spent together at Uncle Bud's large Montclair house, with southern traditions mixed with a decidedly French flair. In 1970, Josiane graduated from Hofstra University and earned a scholarship to Rutgers University for her Master's degree in French Literature. We then moved from Long Island to Rutgers University – New Brunswick, New Jersey and lived in the old WWII army barracks on Busch Campus, as this was housing



Josiane at a costume party, November, 2016.

dedicated to married students or students with Master's program and writing her dissertation. Josiane decided to apply for as a single parent, she position at Rutgers, as a and Space Department. she could get to her new job,

and so he bought her a shiny new red Dodge Colt car. She lived wisely, within, and later below her financial means. She always told us to live comfortably and to increase savings and pension contributions by each pay raise amount.

Immigrants have a story to tell and a lesson to teach those of us who are born in the U.S. As we face the challenges life flings our way, we should not take for granted that we have the opportunity in this country to go back to school and be successful. We can then pay it forward to our children, whether it be monetarily or through encouragement. Josiane's life journey and experience gave her one goal: to arm her daughters with a college education so that they would never be in the situation in which she had found herself. She continues this same mission with all five of her grandchildren. At 90 years old, she remains an education advocate and has gone out of her way, sometimes with heroic strength and a cow bell, to keep each grandchild on track to do well and graduate from college.



The family's cowbell

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Further Reading Suggestions about Redlining:

- 1) "The Hidden Rules of Race: Barriers to an Inclusive Economy (Cambridge Studies in Stratification Economics: Economics and Social Identity)", by Andrea Flynn and Dorian T. Warren
- 2) "Black Exodus: The Great Migration from the American South", by Alferdteen Harrison
- 3) "When Affirmative Action was White: An Untold History of Racial Inequality in Twentieth-Century America", by Ira Katznelson
- 4) "The Color of Law – A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America", by Richard Rothstein
- 5) "Family Properties: How the Struggle Over Race and Real Estate Transformed Chicago and Urban America", by Beryl Satter

Excerpt from *Bridget's Hanging*

The story of an innocent, immigrant woman who was hanged in New Brunswick, New Jersey in 1867, for a murder she did not commit.

The Isle of the Blest is an otherworldly island described generally in the myths of multiple cultures including Greek, Norse, Indian, etc. And the concept of a ball of thread or clew also runs through the myths of multiple cultures, most notably the story of Theseus and his escape from the labyrinth in which he was supposed to die as a sacrifice to binding the loose end of the clew at the entrance of the labyrinth, killed the Minotaur, and then escaped by following the thread to his freedom. The Celtic version of this myth is described in written mythology as early as the 7th Century in the Book of Leinster. And though neither Bridget nor her father could read, the



Arthur Rackham, *The Rhinemaidens*, 1909.

stories circulated like nursery rhymes in urban and rural areas. The most common Irish version of the story, the Voyage of Bran, tells of a young man named Bran who is invited to the Otherworld, sometimes called the Isle of the Blest or the Land of the Young, by mysterious music that hypnotizes him. He travels with companions over the sea to this magic place and lands where there are beautiful women who invite him to live for a thousand years without illness or the troubles of age or hunger. The young men stay there for a time but some grow restless and want to return to the world. The people of the island warn the travelers that there is only one place where age and illness cannot trouble them; the queen of the Isle of Women throws her magic clew to the travelers and pulls them back to the mystical place.

The concept of the Isle of the Blest and the transcendent clew whose thread offers escape and sanctuary are obviously symbols to which most immigrants cling when they leave their homes. For someone like Bridget Deignan who was leaving a country that not only failed her economically and medically, but also spiritually, the magical thinking that prompted her to board a ship to first Liverpool

and then New York City promised her that she would not be hanged in August of 1867.

The first few days Bridget spent on The Orient were breezy and cool, but the sun was warm, and she enjoyed spending time on the deck looking out over the Atlantic Ocean. The reflection of the sun's rays off the rolling waves was blinding at times, and she occasionally became light-headed from the brilliance and the rocking of the ship on the pitches and swells. But the fresh air, as cool as it was, offered a welcome relief from the stale atmosphere in steerage. Bridget was aware that she could still be affected by her 'falling disease,' that is, her epilepsy, that she might become faint and lose consciousness on deck. But the stench of steerage drove her to risk being seen as too ill for her new country.

There was a little German boy named Willie who was traveling on the ship with family members, first and second cousins, was about four years old, and was often without supervision. Bridget shared her water rations with him beginning the second day of the trip because he was always thirsty. She had taken him into her heart as he seemed lonely and so dissimilar to everyone else on board. Even in her simplicity, Bridget saw in Willie something she recognized in herself, an irregularity, a jarring peculiarity. And just as Bridget spent hours during the first week aboard looking out across the Atlantic, Willie would stand on a small crate next to her and in mixed German

and English, talk about the 'nixy.' A nix or nixy is a German fairy tale creature about which parents tell their children to frighten them away from dangerous waterways; nixes are like mermaids in that they're part fish and part human. However, they can be male or female, can become invisible, and they are prophetic. Parents tell children that nixes hide themselves near rivers and oceans in order to abduct boys and girls, bring them to their underwater palaces and drown them. Bridget began to understand Willie's story about the nix and why a little boy might fear one.

Like Bridget, Willie was not well. There were quite a few people on The Orient who were suffering from the flux or dysentery which was not uncommon during ocean travel at that time. Water was collected and often stored in open barrels on deck; cleanliness was subject to the availability of water. Seasickness contributed to the duration and severity of the flux as the nausea from the ship's rocking caused vomiting and weakness. And Willie was sometimes both seasick and suffering from the flux. He was very thin with exceedingly pale, white skin and dark circles around his eyes. Willie quickly became disinterested in eating, regularly shivered from the cold and was often thirsty. In the sunlight, Bridget could see purplish bruising on his skin and noticed the hollows in his cheeks deepening. Within days, Willie was becoming weaker and was moving around the ship less and less. He started spending most of his time

in the steerage compartment on the berth where his cousin maintained her two children. On a Sunday morning, Bridget checked on Willie who seemed insentient; his body was cold. On Monday morning, he was dead.

Bridget had seen children die while living at the workhouse, but this death seemed different to her. The children who died in the workhouse died in the infirmary close to at least a few people who hoped for their recovery. On Monday before noon, Willie was wrapped in an old rug which the sailors secured with a heavy chain that served as a weight; the weight caused the body to sink and quelled mariner superstitions about ghosts and the splash of the corpse in sea burials. One sailor whispered a short prayer in German, and Willie was dropped from the side of the ship; his cousin stood by briefly and then returned to the steerage compartment. Bridget watched as Willie's small, trussed body sank into the Atlantic, and she noticed that threads from the rug that were loose remained on the surface as the rest of his slight form floated downward. She felt confused... she imagined Willie, even in death afraid, being dragged to the nix's underwater palace to be drown, but still she watched the threads from his shroud floating on the surface of the softly rolling water remembering the ball of thread unwinding in her father's description of the Isle of the Blest. What was at play? she asked herself. Disoriented by her own inability to understand,

she thought of Willie's fear of the nixes and their ability to prophesize... what had they been foretelling? A little boy's death? She tried to separate that confusion from the hopeful omen of the thread, rolling and unwinding on the surface of the Atlantic Ocean, portending her own good fortune. How can that sign be promising when someone very like herself, an outsider, had just been dropped, cold and stiff, off the side of the ship that was, by virtue of her father's promise, carrying her to a place not unlike heaven?

Bridget had never been able to understand the day-to-day operations of the world and its citizens. So few thoughtful things had ever made sense to her that she'd stopped asking why, even in prayer. After she'd watched her brother James buried in the workhouse graveyard, she'd paused for one moment and asked God, "Why do these things happen?" That was the first and last time she'd asked that question for as long as she remembered. And she'd asked it expecting no answer. A curse, a malevolence had befallen her family. Bridget watched the threads on the ocean's surface unwind. Bridget spent that evening in the steerage compartment of the ship lying on the left end of a berth with a mother and daughter who were suffering nausea from the ocean travel. After Willie's death and burial, she was certain she would be affected by her "falling sickness;" she stayed on the berth all night finding herself in and out of 'slumbers' which is what her mother called the after

effect of her seizures. If she could keep to her place until after midnight, she knew no one on the ship would know she had falling sickness, and she could begin her new life in America. But life on The Orient wasn't so simple. Food and water were distributed to the steerage class passengers on the deck morning and evening. Body waste buckets were on deck, and on windless days the air in steerage became hard to breathe.

Nighttime was the most difficult as sleeping men stunk from drinking and smoking, children needed changing, and berths were filled to capacity and sometimes beyond. There were nights when Bridget slept on the compartment's floor because of crowding, and she'd find herself wanting to walk the deck to alleviate her stiffness. If she heard men's voices as she climbed to the deck, she would return to the compartment; if she didn't, she would move quietly to the port side of the ship, lean her head and shoulders over the water, inhale deeply, and pray.

Four nights after Willie's death, Bridget leaned on the bulwark and listened to the sound of the waters. She could hear the subdued voices of men from the bridge, but everything else was quiet. Within a few minutes, a man approached her, a remittance man she believed, speaking German. She was startled but cordial and told him that she knew no German. He smelled of brandy, an apple brandy that many of the second-class passengers drank, of stale smoke and fish. He

fell against her and laughed, saying something in German; Bridget understood two of his words, ozean and frauen (ocean and women). He grabbed both her arms, and she struggled to get away. Bridget woke the next morning on the floor of the steerage compartment; her body ached but she couldn't be sure what had happened to her. She'd had nightmares as she slept... dreams about the nix and his deep water palace of dead children, about the workhouse infirmary, about the smell of the ships with their damp decks and damaged hulls at Killala Bay. She dreamt of boys stealing stones from royal graves, and old men crawling to those same graves to return them. She wasn't sure what had happened to her or whether anything she remembered was real or not.



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Caroline Calogero

My Immigrants

Like the song from The Boss says, I was born in the USA. But I too have an immigrant past. It begins with Donato Calogero, who died long before my time. My family became Americans because of him. At first, we were New Yorkers, Democrats, and municipal workers. And further along, we became suburbanites and professionals.



Donato Calogero as a young man

We became New Yorkers because that's where he arrived in the 1870s, preceding the waves that entered at Ellis Island, and it's where he stayed, marrying and raising his family in lower Manhattan. He became a Democrat and with that connection, a municipal worker, pushing a wheeled barrel with broom in hand, for the Department of Street Cleaning.

More established Americans sought to make citizens and party line voters of recent immigrants, and Donato brought home his experiences raising a beer and singing with his new found buddies in the saloons of New York. He shared his favorite drinking song with his son, my grandfather Michael. "Don ista Ginty nonja botta nonja see, drist een hees bist soodee claus." Making little sense at first in English or Italian, my grandfather, Michael, a native speaker of both, listened hard, accounted for the accent, and eventually translated this ditty as "Down went McGinty to the bottom of the sea, dressed in his best suit of clothes." According to YouTube, the song was written by Joseph Flynn in 1889.

Education was not highly valued by my immigrants but the ability to earn money and contribute to the well being of the family was. Michael was forced to drop out of high school after two years and he followed his father into the Department of Street Cleaning. Michael rose through the ranks by acing the Civil Service exams and eventually became the Borough Superintendent of Staten Island for the Department of Sanitation, the modern version of the Department of Street Cleaning. Two of his three sons, my uncles, also worked for the Department.

My grandmother, Caroline, Donato's daughter-in-law was born in Flatbush,

Brooklyn when farming was still a local industry. Her father, another immigrant, often disappeared on long trips to South America and the family he left behind needed cash. After completing eighth grade, Caroline began work in the fields digging potatoes with her mother. A small person, she was at first too light to obtain her working papers and so was fattened up on bananas until she reached the minimum weight. Caroline's dream to go to high school to study and become a kindergarten teacher was never realized. But to provide her with some of the skills of a lady, she was taught to crochet by a neighbor and her lacy confections grace my tabletop, windows, and dressers. It took three generations to produce the first college graduate.

Donato's influence, and that of my other great-grandparents, immigrants all, runs deep. Bits of dialect, behavioral norms, and an intact food culture have wended down through the generations.

My great grandparents from my mother's side came from Sciacca, a town in southwestern Sicily. The family loved children. "Bedduzze," little beauties, they called us girls, despite our scrapped knees and bedraggled clothes. My brother was "beddu figgu," beautiful son. It took years to realize that this odd sounding language wasn't Italian. It was Sicilian, perfectly comprehensible when repeated to the island's natives years after my own Siciliani were gone.

Visitors should be welcomed whatever the circumstances. They should be promptly fed, preferably to bursting, no matter when they arrived or how many times they declined a meal. "Gli ospiti sono sacri," guests are sacred, was the reason.

The first time a young person enters a room, the adults there are to be greeted with respect and a kiss on the cheek. The vagaries of adolescence do not exempt one from this obligation. It is inculcated into the very youngest children.

After arriving from Sicily, Mario, my mother's grandfather, peddled fresh fish and olive oil to restaurants in lower Manhattan. His son, Anthony, my grandfather, finished eighth grade and then worked with his father. Eventually, they bought a fish store in Newark and Anthony worked hard there six days a week. On the seventh, Anthony got up early, balanced his accounts, and then spent part of the afternoon at his "club," an empty Brooklyn storefront near the elevated train, walking distance from home, playing cards and smoking. As a child, my duty was to fetch him for dinner. Into the dark and hazy room, I went stopping first to kiss and greet Uncle Joe, Uncle Frank, Uncle Ignatio, and each of his innumerable brothers and friends, before reminding Poppa it was time to leave. I have eaten food cooked by three of my four great-grandmothers, omitting Grazia, Donato's wife, who died from breast cancer when my grandfather was still a young man. For me,

Grazia survives only in a large photograph unusual for the time because of its informality. She is seated at the kitchen table, a stained apron tied around her waist, looking as if she's been caught in the middle of her housework. The small calendar pinned to the wall above her head noted the date as March of 1917.

Grazia spoke only Italian as did the rest of my great grandmothers did, although they arrived in America as very young women. I think of this as I grapple with understanding the heavily accented English heard so often in our multilingual state.

The immigrants passed down their tastes in food, too. We eat antipasto to begin our Sunday dinner. Because of them we have cured olives, made sausage, and in summertime, tucked sprigs of basil behind our ears to just savor the smell. Fig trees flourished in my great grandmother's backyard, and through the summers of childhood, I devoured many. My own tree started as a cutting from one planted in Brooklyn by my mother's family at the turn of the 20th century.

I am no longer a New Yorker and I will never be an immigrant. Norway, New Zealand, and Canada all appeal but I will not depart America. I cannot imagine leaving my mother or my siblings behind. America, chosen by my great-grandparents, is where my family and I have flourished. Here we remain soon to welcome the next generation, my first grandchild, a baby girl due at the end of the

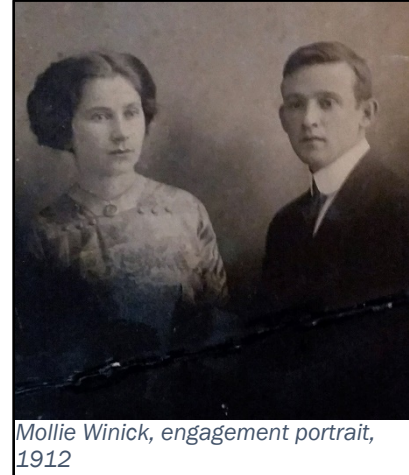
summer. She will be Donato's great-great-great granddaughter. She too will be connected to my immigrants.

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Adam Hostetter

An Ancestry of Assimilation: Russian Ashkenazi Immigration to the United States

One truth about almost every citizen of the United States living today is that at some point in their family's history, their ancestors were immigrants who came to that country with the hope of opportunity. One such American citizen is Evelyn Hostetter, a retired fashion designer living on the Lower East Side of New York City. Her grandmother Mollie Winick (nee Simon) entered the United States at the turn of the twentieth century during a period that saw the largest migration of her people, Russian Ashkenazi Jews, in American history. Through an interview with Evelyn, a framework was formed of who Mollie



Mollie Winick, engagement portrait, 1912

was and through research, an understanding is reached of how she fit into her place and time in history. First, a history of Jews in Russia will help us comprehend the political and violent persecution they faced that forced them to leave their homeland. Once they arrived in the western hemisphere, Russian Jews, such as Mollie, faced difficulties of prejudice that all immigrant populations faced during the Progressive Era. Despite this, the Jewish people of Eastern Europe did what all immigrants must do to initially survive in the United States: they supported each other. By understanding the professions and lifestyles of Jews who lived in Russia, it becomes clear what led Mollie to make of herself what she did in the United States, a dress tailor. As well, her high sense of fashion and belief in higher education for her children are seen to not be an individual characteristic of her own, but one of many Jews who left Russia for a better life. Russian Jewish Immigrants were a persecuted people in their homeland who fled to the United States after a century of prejudice exploded into violence; in doing so, they became one of the most prosperous ethnicities in American history.

An important first step into delving into an immigration population is to understand the steps that led to the departure of their country of origin. Samuel Joseph, a Doctor of Philosophy and instructor at the Commercial High School in Brooklyn, New York wrote of these steps in his 1914 book *Jewish Immigration to the United States from 1881 to 1990*. He states that between 1772 and 1795, the partitioning of Poland gave Russia the rule over millions of Jews in Southwest Russia. As Russia progressed more slowly than Western Europe, anti-Semitic ideas grew there through a medieval Christian society that had once plagued Western Europe. This medieval mindset was behind the creation of the Pale of Jewish Settlement, an area meant to keep the Jews in their area of residence at the time of the partitions. Over a century the number of laws restricting the lives of Jews

grew extraordinarily, eventually controlling their employment, property rights, and education (Joseph 56-57). The purpose of the laws was to persecute a newly added minority to the Russian Empire. As Joseph states, "The direct consequence of these laws was to mark the status of the Jews as the lowest in the Empire, placing them in the position of aliens as to rights and citizens..." (57).

Samuel states the majority of these laws in the nineteenth century were mandated under the Tsars of Russia, who dictated the lives of the Jews who lived in the Pale of Settlement. Tsar Nicholas I used tactics of oppression to limit interaction with the Jewish and non-Jewish population (Samuel 57). Following Nicholas I was his son Alexander II, a true reformer. Alexander II gave the idea of "real emancipation" to the Jewish population. Jews, as well as everyone else, benefited from Social reforms under Tsar Alexander II as laws were enacted to allow Jews to live outside the Pale to oust competition for employment inside it. The opening of schools and universities for Jews with these reforms made it appear that the "walls of the Pale needed but little more to be broken down" (Samuel 58). Unfortunately, these reforms would not last, as Tsar Alexander II's reign came to an untimely end.

Samuel continues that the 1881 assassination of Tsar Alexander II was a point of regression for the Jews in Russia (59). As an already frowned upon minority, they were an easy scapegoat for his assassination, as some of the anarchists who were arrested for the explosions that killed him were Jewish. The new government, headed by Alexander III, used them just as that. An attack on Jews was created on multiple fronts, including economic limitation with the May Laws of 1882. These laws restricted their movement out of the towns of the Pale of Settlement and their ownership of land outside of towns to prevent their economic prosperity. Interpretation of the May Laws forced the huddling of almost all the Jews in Russia into the limited space of the towns within the Pale. As well, restrictions were made in 1886 and 1887 to how many Jews could attend schools and universities to ten percent. The "percentage rule", as it was called, led to a large proportion of the Jewish population without an education (Samuel 59-62). As devastating as these limitations on the Jews were, a series of violent events would be a catalyst to why families such as Mollie Winick's left.

Evelyn Hostetter stated in her interview that Mollie Winick only spoke of one word about her childhood in Russia, "*pogroms*." Samuel states the biggest effect on the Jewish population in Russia were these *pogroms*, which he refers to as a "combination of murder, outrage, and pillage" (63). The *pogroms* were not random acts of violence but were developed outbursts of racism built up from the culture within Russia. The first *pogroms* occurred in the first month of Alexander III's reign in 1882, and although the government did not begin the attacks, support was shown by the passing of the May Laws. A second wave of *pogroms* occurred in 1906 as Jews were blamed for the revolutionary movement occurring in Russia (Samuel 63-66). In summary, a combination of the economic

repression of Jews, limited opportunities for education, and physical violence of the *pogroms* are what made Jews leave Russia. The country seemed to be eager to be rid of the Jewish population as they allowed emigration from the country with the 1892 sanction to Baron de Hirsch for the planned mass movement of Jews from Russia (Samuel 68). As stated by Joseph, "[The Jews] were given one right not enjoyed by other Russians, that of leaving Russia under the obligation of abandoning Russian citizenship forever" (69). This sanction is what allowed Mollie Winick and her family to leave for the United States in 1894, but once out of the Pale, their journey was not an easy one.

With inhospitality plaguing Jews in Russia, many eagerly left for other parts of the world. Joseph Edelman, a research director for the Hebrew Immigrant Aid Society (HIAS), states in his article "The Centenary of Jewish Immigration to the United States: 1881-1981" that between 1881 and 1910 over 1.6 million Jews from Eastern Europe, mostly from Russia, entered the United States (219). Edelman continues that the journey for these Jews was a long and difficult one, going across Europe, often passing borders illegally and riding on crowded steamships from Germany or England. Sea voyages involved disease, spoiled food, and seasickness (Edelman 220). Once immigrants like Mollie made it across the Atlantic to Ellis Island, they faced a milder form of persecution than they saw in Russia. Erika Lee and Judy Yung, authors of *Angel Island: Immigrant Gateway to America* state that Jews from Russia had difficulty entering the United States. They state the Commissioner of Immigration at Ellis Island, William Williams, held prejudice Nativist ideas. As they state, "Many of the newer Southern and Eastern European immigrants, [Williams] wrote in his 1911 annual report, were from 'backward races,' had very low standards of living, possess filthy habits, and are of an ignorance which passes belief" (221). Commissioner Williams attempted to curb this immigration by implanting a rule that new immigrants needed twenty-five dollars as well as a ticket to a final destination. Many Jews were deported due to this. The HIAS, however, challenged and won a court case against this rule (Lee and Yung 221). Finally passed the gates of Ellis Island, Jews such as Mollie continued to face persecution.

Evelyn Hostetter stated of her Grandmother Mollie that she never heard much about her childhood in either Russia or the United States. Part of the reasoning for this is that Mollie likely faced persecution that plagued her younger years and did not wish to speak of it. The time that Mollie entered the United States is known as the Progressive Era, pertaining to the years from 1890 to 1920. Theodore Eversole, the author of "Jewish Americans in the Progressive Era and World War I" for the online encyclopedia *Jewish Americans* states that although Jews made up no more than three percent of the total American population, their high numbers in urban areas, such as New York, brought criticism upon them from some progressives and their belief that immigrants were the cause

of problems in the United States. With the practice of Eugenics that was so popular in the Progressive Era, many believed Jews such as Mollie were inferior beings. As Eversole States, "Of all immigrants during the Progressive Era, Jews often received the most vitriolic commentary and hatred. They were blamed for rises in crime and general unfair practices. Jews were seen as the source of a host of economic, religious, and social misfortunes."

This racism sometimes erupted into violence in the streets of New York, as seen in 1902 with a riot that broke out during a funeral procession of a central Orthodox Jewish leader of the city. The July 31, 1902 *New York Times* article "Riot Mars Funeral of Rabbi Joseph" speaks of the violence that occurred in the Lower East Side, where Mollie first lived in America and where Evelyn resides today. The group of more than 50,000 Jews passed the R. Hoe & Co. Printing Press where the workers were on their lunch break. The workers spent their time of leisure heckling the mourners and throwing buckets of water at them from the factory. This juvenile behavior was followed by much more violent actions as the articles states, "Bundles of paper saturated with oil, bits of iron...and other missiles followed from the windows. The mourners...now became an uncontrollable mob." Tired of the treatment, the men of the procession incited fights with the factory workers. In a call back to their dealing with *pogroms* in their home countries, the article states one man yelled the rhetorical question, "Is this Russia?" The *New York Times* article continues by stating that those Jews who lived in the Lower East Side next to the printing press often dealt with this type of persecution and that persistent abuse was the reason for the eruption during the funeral. Although in this event ethnic comradery drove Jewish immigrants to violence, more often it protected newcomers with legal means.

The one thing Russian Ashkenazi immigrants had like many other immigrant populations did when they came to the United States was assistance from established people of their ethnicity, who knew what newcomers had been through and what they were to face. As previously noted from the novel *Angel Island*, Erika Lee and Judy Yung state the Hebrew Immigration Aid Society (HIAS) fought persecution against Jewish immigrants on Ellis Island by winning a court case against a rule requiring money and a ticket to a final destination (221). Although this happened over fifteen years after Mollie entered the United States, Joseph Edelman states that earlier immigrants received similar help. As he states in "The Centenary of Jewish Immigration," "Among other services provided by agencies which were predecessors of the HIAS, were interventions to...improve the shocking conditions obtaining in ship's steerages, and the location of relatives of those immigrants who had been cleared at Ellis Island" (221). The HIAS also opened an employment bureau to aid Jewish immigrants in obtaining jobs (Edelman 223). Aid amongst the Jewish community came from other organizations as well. One such organization was the Hawthorne School of the Jewish Protectory and

Aid Society in Westchester County, NY, where Evelyn Hostetter stated Mollie Winick eventually settled with her husband Abraham. "Jewish Protectory for Boys Opened," a *New York Times* article dated May 13, 1907 states that members of the aid society built the Hawthorne school as a "reformatory for the Jewish boys who had been sentenced in the Children's court." The article continues by stating that the school's cottages were able to room five hundred children and included a library and gymnasium. Once settled in the country, giving money back to the community required employment, and many Jews used skills they had learned in Russia to prosper.

Evelyn Hostetter, a retired fashion designer, stated that her decision in career was from inspiration she obtained from her Grandmother Mollie. "Her interest in clothing," Evelyn stated, "led to my interest in clothing, which led to me becoming a fashion designer." Mollie was an incredibly fashionable woman who always adorned a hat and ran a business out of her home, tailoring dresses for local housewives in her neighborhood. Mollie's profession being in the fashion industry was due to her being a part of a lineage of garment workers from Russia. Samuel Joseph states in *Jewish Immigration to the United States* that Jews in Russia's largest occupations were in industry and commerce (43). In the Pale of Settlement, this was even truer. Some seventy percent of Jews were employed in industry and commerce. The Jews were far more industrial and commercial than the rest of the non-Jewish population, which was predominantly agricultural (Samuel 43-44). He continues "The most important industry is the manufacture of clothing and wearing apparel, which employed more than one-third of the Jewish working population...It is in effect a Jewish industry: practically all the tailors and shoemakers in the Pale [were] Jews" (44). In addition to the work she did, the location Mollie performed her work was something she had learned from the old country.

Evelyn Hostetter spoke fondly of childhood memories helping her grandmother with the dress shop she ran out of her house. Running a business out her home was nothing Mollie's culture was not used to. Neil Cowan, a public affairs consultant, and Ruth Schwartz, a Professor of History at



Mollie Winick, in her kitchen, 1960. Credit: daughter, Ruth

SUNY, state in their book *Our Parents' Lives: The Americanization of Eastern European Jews* that running a business from home was a very common practice among Jews from Eastern Europe. In Eastern Europe, Jews were accustomed to working out of their homes, and when they came to the United States, they implemented this custom. A popular trade for Jews to practice at home were the "needle trades" of the garment industry that so many

Russian Jews already had experience in. It was especially popular because it was work that could easily be done with limited space, such as in a tenement (Cowan and Schwartz 53-57). Clearly, Mollie's profession being in fashion was not a mistake, and neither was her high sense of fashion, which in fact had to do with her people's desire to assimilate.

Mollie Simon was a fashionable woman, even into her later years when her granddaughter Evelyn Hostetter saw her always sharply dressed. This partaking in fashion by Mollie was not out of place in her community of Russian Jewish immigrants, and in fact was a part of their desire to assimilate into American culture. Barbara Schreier, the curator of the Hope B. McCormick Costume Center of the Chicago Historical society wrote in her article "Becoming American: Jewish Women Immigrants 1880-1920" about the importance of fashion to newcomers to the United States. She states that "American clothing and appearance" were second to learning English in importance of assimilating to the United States (25). Schreier continues by stating that adoring American clothing is important for all immigration populations, but some key features of the

Jewish community made it much more important. First was their control of the garment industry that gave them a "heightened fashion consciousness" (Schreier 26). The second feature into their want of fashion was that most Eastern European Jews came from very religious communities, where they wore specific outfits for the Sabbath and received clothing as gifts for holidays. The most important feature, Schreier states, is that Jews from Eastern Europe who came to America between 1880 and 1924 were more likely to permanently stay in the United States than any other immigrant group (26-27). As she states the reasoning, "Forced to live as outcasts in their homeland, Jews came for far more than economic opportunities – they came for survival...Determined to start a new life, Jews embraced the American lifestyle and American clothing with a level of devotion, purpose, and zeal unmatched by other immigrant groups" (27). This determination of Mollie and other Jews is what made them one of the most prosperous immigrant groups in American history.

Next to fashion in the reasoning behind Eastern Europeans Jews ease into assimilating into the United States was education. Although Mollie was not a college graduate, Evelyn Hostetter stated a very important part of Mollie raising her three children was to make sure they all obtained what she



Mollie Winick, 1943. Credit: daughter, Ruth

had not, a degree from a higher education institution. Like many facets of Mollie's being, this desire of education for her children was due in large part to her being a Russian Ashkenazi Jew. Leonard Dinnerstein, Roger Nichols, and David Reimers speak of this in their book *Natives and Strangers: A History of Ethnic Americans*. Dinnerstein et al. state that of immigrant groups who focused on education, none had an amount of social mobility close to the Jews. In Eastern Europe, their praise for education was often for religious scholars, such as Rabbis. Once in the United States, though, Jewish immigrants' focus on education became more general (Dinnerstein et al. 160). As stated by Dinnerstein et al. "A higher percentage of the children of Eastern European Jewish descent graduated from high school and college, when given the opportunity to do so, than did the scions of any other ethnic background" (160). As well, the authors state that in one study of social mobility in Boston, the results showed three-quarters of second-generation European Jews became a part of the middle class after beginning in the working class, more than any other immigrant population (Dinnerstein et al. 161). Clearly, education played an enormous role in the success of the Russian Jewish immigrant population's success in the United States.

Years of developed persecution and bias in nineteenth-century Russia drove vast numbers of Jews out of that country and into many others. Most, like Mollie Winick, made their way to the United States amongst millions of other *émigrés* from other countries looking for a better life for themselves and their families. As they faced persecution, Jewish immigrants assisted each other knowing that without one another they would not succeed. As with all other ethnicities, the story of Russian and Eastern Europeans Jews in America is unique and personal. Through research, the details explained by Evelyn Hostetter of Mollie Winick's character are seen to have been enforced by traditions that she brought from a land that she fled. That character of a hard-working person with the pursuit of making her descendants' lives better than hers, is what made Mollie and other Jewish immigrants so successful in the United States. What stands out most from speaking with Evelyn Hostetter is that she never thought of her grandmother as an immigrant or someone whose home was not the United States; that is because Mollie Winick's homeland always was the place where she and her people finally found refuge. After finding peace from over a century of oppression in Russia, the Jews who emigrated to the United States made a home for themselves as they prospered and pursued the American Dream.

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A Hungarian Immigration Story of 1978



“The best birthday present was the gift of my family’s freedom.”

–Alex Szekely

Being asked “where are you from” can get a multifaceted answer when speaking to those who immigrated to the United States of America from Cluj-Napoca (or in Hungarian, Kolozsvár), Transylvania in Romania, during President Nicolae Ceausescu’s reign from 1965 to 1985. Cluj-Napoca is a small metropolitan city that was a fluctuating hub of Hungarian and Romanian culture. The city now remains predominantly Romanian and is a sanction of Romanian territory. The flux of Hungarian and Romanian territory lines would continue to shift throughout the two World Wars and with the leadership of Nicolae Ceausescu. Why does this city have two historical names, yet it resulted in a Romanian acquisition? The ultimate answer is due to the treacherous regime of Nicolae Ceausescu and his communist power. The hostile living environment that communist countries create, make the want and possible need of emigrating imperative. It was this environment that drove Alex Szekely to escape from Romania with his family and eventually settle in the United States.

The 1970’s in Romania was drastically different than the 1970’s in the United States of America, but it is vital to understand the polarity of the two. America in the 1970’s experienced a second wave of immigration. This was not unforeseen as immigration was an expanding issue. The Hart-Cellar Act was passed in 1965 by President Lyndon B. Johnson, which allowed an annual number of 120,000 people from the Western Hemisphere to immigrate, with exceptions of immediate family (Dinnerstein 245). Within the next five years, immigration would slow, but it would

continue to grow. “By the 1970s economic conditions on the continent had improved and the numbers of Europeans seeking entry into the United States had declined. Nonetheless, there were still problems in the region that prompted more people to seek a new life across the ocean” (Dinnerstein 200). Specifically, in 1978 legislators would amend and diversify the policy due to its specificity of territories worthy of immigration: “in 1978 the legislators created a uniformed worldwide system. In place of national-origin quotas, each nation received 20,000 places [290,000 in total], excluding immediate family members of U.S. citizens” (Dinnerstein 198). Opening these borders would allow an influx of multicultural immigrants of whom would not be able to emigrate prior. Culturally, this was a time of self-expression, devoid of stereotypes and expectations. The President in office was Republican Richard Nixon who broke the thirty-six-year Democratic streak. Although Nixon was Republican, he followed several liberal ideologies. He proposed affordable health care and aided the environmental movement; the feminist movement was in its more inclusive second wave. Then, the pivotal Watergate Scandal befell and the adherence to popular culture instead of politics materialized. (History.com Staff).

Romania in the 1970’s was already under communist control. Nicolae Ceausescu became the President of Romania by being the successor to the position when communist president Gheorghe Gheorghiu-Dej died before finishing his term. Forty years prior, the two met and formed an alliance in prison that would change the course of history (“Nicolae Ceausescu Biography”). In October of 1970, the presidents of Romania and the United States of America met to discuss their relationship and how to politically profit from one another amidst the Cold War. In a toast to the dinner, President Nixon remarked “it is extremely valuable for the President of the United States to have the opportunity to speak to the President of Romania to discuss the problems, not only that we have between ourselves, but also these broader world problems in which Romania, because of its special position, can make a very constructive contribution to the eventual peaceful world we all want to share together” (Szulc “Ceausescu Visits Nixon”). In addition, Ceausescu had other business to attend to. Not only would he have a two-hour meeting with President Nixon, make an address at the United Nations, meet with businessmen to discuss the European market and American capitalism, but he would experience America on his own behalf. “The captains of American capitalism are preparing a full schedule for an East European Communist leader, President Nicolae Ceausescu of Rumania. He arrives Tuesday for a two- week visit to the United States” (Szulc “Capitalists to Turn”).

After visiting several communist countries, Ceausescu yearned for a cultural revolution due to his newfound inspiration. On July 6, 1971 Ceausescu gave a speech of his July Theses to lay out his new social plan. An excerpt of his, translated, July Theses elaborates on his rigid concept of

national homogeneity which would map out the hostile environment that masses of citizens would eventually flee (Sauciuc).

“... it is necessary to continue acting for the even more powerful consolidation of unity and brotherhood between Romanian, Magyar¹⁰, German, Serbian and other working people, who, animated by the same interests and aspirations, achieve together all the country's material and spiritual values, take part with spiritedness in the struggle for the flourishing of the common homeland – the Socialist Republic of Romania... Political work must act unflinchingly against any manifestation of indiscipline, of violation of the norms of social cohabitation, in the direction of the development of respect towards collective belongings, towards the country's laws, to strengthen socialist lawfulness and public order” (Asphalt).

Essentially through this order, Ceausescu marked the beginning of his extreme socialism, thus, making the country a fearsome place to live, if one did not adhere to his party, and an inadequate place to live, regardless. Hungarians would be forced to assimilate to the Communist Party to have a place in society, and if they did not, they would become a silent victimized population. The mistreatment of Hungarians in Transylvania did not begin here. World War II gave Hungarians a substantial reputation. “As Hungary had allied itself with the Axis Powers, Hungarians everywhere became ‘the object of condemnation and collective punishment’” (Popham). With this hatred, Hungary was devastated morally and physically. “The end of the Second World War left Hungary facing even greater material difficulties than had its predecessor. ... in ruins, fields scorched, communications wrecked; in particular, all the vital bridges between Buda and Pest had been blown up” (Macartney 236).

Despite the Hungarian stance of World War II, inalienable human rights of a singular group should never be ceased, although this is not a new phenomenon throughout world history. However, Ceausescu came fairly close to achieving this with the final fluctuation of Transylvania's territory lines landing an initial piece of Hungary into Romanian domain. Food shortages became common due to the economic state of Romania under Ceausescu's reign which lead to food rations that were unevenly distributed (Sauciuc). The social custom of the sacredness of nutrition is common for Hungarians because family is the center of their social structure (Commisceo Global Consultancy). Feeding your family is one of the most intimate and gracious acts a person can do. Having a necessity rationed from specific groups was one of the numerous tactics the government and common people used to discriminate against Hungarians in Transylvania. Ceausescu and his communist government stripped everything from other ethnicities living in Romania in search of his

¹⁰ Magyar means Hungarian

extreme nationalism. “Religious and ethnic minorities were repressed, freedom of speech, press, association, and movement were largely nonexistent. Torture, extrajudicial killings, and arbitrary imprisonment were commonplace” (“Romania”)

Due to Ceausescu’s dictatorship, many claimed refugee status to flee Romania:

“Life for most citizens in Nicolae Ceaușescu's Romania (1965-1989) was exceptionally harsh. In the 1970s, many members of Romania's political and intellectual elite fled to the U.S. in fear of retaliation from the regime for publicizing human rights violations and were allowed to enter as refugees” (Isa-Landa).

Alex Sandor Szekely, his wife Eva Szekely, and his two daughters, Gabrielle and Ildiko Szekely, were one of the many Hungarian families living in Cluj-Napoca, or known to them as Kolozsvár, escaping Nicolae Ceausescu’s reign. From Cluj-Napoca, they planned to immigrate to the United States of America. In 1975, Szekely went to the police department to get a visa to visit his sister in the United States. Three long years later and on his thirty-fourth birthday June 27, 1978, he held the postcard in his hands that would change the course of their life, “the postcard of freedom” (Szekely). The next three months were some of the hardest for the Szekely family. Prior to receiving his golden ticket, Szekely had worked as a head of an engineering company; after, he would be demoted to a janitor. Due to the small size of the village they lived in, the family experienced extensive discrimination because after all, they were Hungarians in Romania who would not align themselves with the communist party. On September 21, 1978, the Szekely family left the only land they had ever known with two suitcases and hope. All valuables, money, and jewelry were taken by the Communist police.

“We were only allowed to bring two suitcases to the United States with us. The police tried to take the little earrings from [Gabrielle, 8] and [Ildiko, 10] and [Eva] started crying, saying ‘how could you take this from them? With everything else?’ We were able to keep the earrings” (Szekely).

Szekely’s sister had already left: “My sister claimed refugee [status], stayed at a camp in Italy as a halfway point, and made her way to America” (Szekely). The Szekely family would follow Alex’s sister to New Jersey where the core of Hungarian immigrants would settle.

“In New Jersey, Hungarian immigrants founded hundreds of societies... newspapers, social centers, athletic and political clubs, scientific and educational groups, choruses and singing societies, self-culture and theater groups.... New Brunswick has been referred to as the ‘most Hungarian city in the United States’” (Molnar).

Forty-years later, the Szekely family is at peace. Alex and Eva have a beautiful family and five grandchildren. The lessons they bear from living in Ceausescu's Romania have an impact on their everyday life. One can see it in Eva Szekely's cooking. As she takes the traditional dish of Hungarian goulash, she hand crafts her homemade noodles and hearties the meal up by adding nutritious vegetables. One can see it in Alex Szekely's work: at seventy-three years old, he has started his own consulting agency for plastic engineering. The two remain grateful for the life they have in the United States and keep their intrinsic Hungarian customs thriving.

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Carrying Our Dreams

I've titled this essay, *Carrying Our Dreams*, because I know when we cross the border we are carrying our dreams of education, of opportunity, of success, and the dream of receiving compassion. We admire America for its discipline, its education, and its big heart. We came here for the opportunity to live as Americans, the opportunity to be as successful as Americans.

Leaving Mexico and coming to the United States was very demanding and difficult. But I had to carefully make the best choice for everyone. My children and I had to face those changes and do a lot of hard work because at the beginning, the US was not our country. It was not easy for us, especially for my kids. They are living through many changes because our culture is different. But I know for the people who come here and work hard for things, the door is open. Our success depends on ourselves and our actions. *Nosotros mismos*.

I'm glad to have an opportunity to have the doors open for my education. I'm trying to get my GED as soon as possible. I know it's hard to get a GED, but the hard things give me the feeling of real success, and one day I know I will get it.

But ultimately, I came here for my children. And each of my children has a good story and they make me happy because they can be successful. My kids are good kids because I help them. My son, Alan, is 23 and was born here. He has been given the chance as an American to travel to different countries in Europe. He is in Brookdale Community College, and he's a good kid. I've told him, you can do anything to become who you want to be. Education is the key. Alan is smart and has become a good man. When he was a child, one of the paintings he painted in school was displayed in a gallery because he won an art prize. While he and I were at the gallery looking at the paintings, his teacher said to me, I know when he grows up he will do something special because he has the power; he has something different. I was able to help him become a moral and ethical person and teach him positive behavior. This is true of my other children as well.

My son Oscar who is 15 years old is very, very smart. Since kindergarten, he has been the translator for family member who don't speak English and helped his teachers understand the Moms of other children. Even at 5 years old, he had so much compassion and thought it was important to help others. I

asked him, how are you so compassionate, especially at your age? He has always been in gifted classes because he is so intelligent. I'm proud of him because he always has A's and A plus grades, but also because he has such a big heart. Corazón Bueno. I think he will do something great for America, especially in education. I know he wants to be an engineer, and can do it because of his education.

I am proud of my youngest child, Josemaria, because he is smart and so handsome, and I believe he will be an important person when he's older. He was born in this country, also. Every morning, we sing God Bless America, and we have a great time doing that. He enjoys school and is doing very well. My son would like to be an eye doctor when he grows up. I believe he will do this because I see him in action now, and I see how he devotes himself to his work. I always tell him he has to do something great for America because he has the knowledge to do it.

My daughter, Yaretzy, which means, "The Presence of God" had a different situation from my other children because she was born in Mexico. I brought her here when she was one year old. I made the best decision I could for her. But when we arrived, she didn't have the opportunity to go to the pediatrician like other children. In fact, there were many things she could not do that my two sons were able to do as American citizens. Sometimes I see

her sad because she cannot travel like my son. But now she has the DACA program, and she's a student at Brookdale. Because the DACA program has given her opportunity to earn a college education, she is more motivated to succeed. As are other DACA

students, my daughter is a DREAMER. We love this country.

I feel so glad God gave me the chance to live in the US because my sons feel free to do whatever they dream of doing, and they know that

education is the key. America is my country now, and we've met very good people here, especially the teachers in the public schools and in the GED program, the people who have knowledge to share with us and others. I thank God for my situation, this festival, and all the people involved in my success, the success of my children, and the success of all the immigrants who have carried their dreams across borders. I believe one day we deserve to have the doors open throughout the entire world.

**America
is my
country
now.**

Nine Numbers

My name is Noelia Jimenez-Rojas, and I am a Dreamer. I came to this country when I was only 8 years old because my parents were looking for a better future for their children: for better opportunities and a better life. I have two sisters and one brother. I'm the only child who graduated from high school, and in a few months, I will be graduating from college with an Associate Degree in Education. I will be the first child of my parents who has made it this far in life. The path has not been easy but was clearly not impossible. When I graduated from high school, I told my mom that I wanted to go back to Mexico because I wanted to have a career, and staying here would not let me accomplish the dream.

A month after I graduated from high school, my mom and I went to a cosmetology school to see if I could at least attend. That was not the career I wanted, but at least I was going to learn something, and one day could maybe have my own salon. We walked into the office, and the woman at the counter was super cute; she explained everything to us: how much the classes were and what I could learn. I could just learn to work in a salon or learn many other things. . . but at the end of my interview, she asked, "Do you have your social security card?" I looked at my mom and told her what she just had said in Spanish, and my mom asked if there is any other way I could attend. I

asked, but the woman said no because the school requires a social security number. We walked out to call a taxi and went home. I was sad because that only confirmed what I already knew, that I could not make my dreams come true in the US without a social security number.

*I want to be a teacher ...
I want to teach them that they
can be anything in life ... to
know where they come from:
their culture and la lengua de
sus padres.*

I talked to my mom and my dad; I told them the same thing I had told them before... that I want to go back to Mexico and keep going with my education. I knew that made my parents sad because we were all here, our lives were here, the country where all the dreams come true but not for me. I decided that I was going to stay and work for one year to save my money and go back. But, one day my mom and dad saw on the news that President Obama signed into law the Dream Act. My mom called a lawyer and made an appointment with her; we went to see her, and she said that I have all the proof that I need to

apply for DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals), and that there was a big chance of me been accepted!

We did everything she told us to do, and within five months I had my work permit, and I have those nine numbers that give me a new opportunity to be able to attend college. All that I have now is thanks to God and to my parents who were there for me every step of the way.

My parents came here as I said when I was a child. My father Benito came here first and started working in a factory for two years. Then he brought my mom Teresa to New Jersey. She worked in a Mexican store for twelve hours a day. After a year and a half, my mother and father brought their children here. They were living in a very small apartment but were able to save enough money to get a house large enough for their children. My mother now usually works eight hours a day, but sometimes will work twelve hours. However, she still spends her whole weekend making mole the old-fashioned way. She also makes tamales and everyone who tastes her food falls in love with it.

My mother is old fashioned, but she notices that I am not. I think differently than my older sister and my other relatives. My brother and sister sometimes talk about going back to Mexico, but I want to stay in the United States because this is where my life is. I think I belong here. And I want to thank the teachers who believe that I could do anything in life.

Now with more than 14 years of being in this country, I call it home. All I know is here. My family, friends, and my whole life is here. I been working in a restaurant and every person who works with me and knows me always tell me that I can do anything I want because I know Spanish and English. This is my superpower because not everyone can. I'm always happy to help people who don't understand English. That's why I want to be a teacher, so I can help kids understand the importance of knowing two languages. I want to teach them that they can be anything in life, not just know two languages, but to know where they come from: their culture and la lengua de sus padres.

Thank you.

Dreaming in a Foreign Land

The United States is a land that was founded by immigrants from Europe a long time ago, and since this happened, the United States has become a huge country with lots of diversity of races from around the world. However, sometimes immigrants do not come legally to this country. That is why we have a big group of young people who were brought to this country without documentation when they were kids.

“Dreamers” is the way that we know them. This program named DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) was created in the Obama administration in 2012. It is an American immigration policy that provides to DACA recipients temporary relief from deportation, as well as work authorization across the country. This program has not only improved the lives of undocumented young people and their families, it has opened a lot of opportunities for the recipients. This complex issue has opened a lot of arguments and many ways to think. However, the best way to resolve the problem of undocumented childhood arrivals is to allow Dreamers to become citizens because it opens relations between Dreamers and the American society in education, employment impact, and in the economy.

DACA is having a big impact on education. This immigration policy opened a great way for DACA recipients to follow their dreams in continuing their education in college, giving them the opportunity to get a degree or even to receive a higher education. “I pursued educational opportunities that I previously could not,” said one unnamed DACA recipient in a report by Tom K. Wong from the University of California.

Another example is my friend M.H. He finished high school, and with this authorization, he obtained the opportunity to continue with his education. Now, he is at a university and working hard; he is always working toward earning his degree in business. For his report, Wong surveyed 3,063 DACA recipients, and he found that “45 percent of the respondents are currently in school. Among those, currently 72 percent are pursuing a bachelor’s degree or higher. Also, 36 percent of respondents have a bachelor’s degree or higher.” This is important because this help is not only for the Dreamers; they are also helping this country by getting a career and contributing in different areas, such as health care, business, law, and education, to name a few. These areas make a big impact on the economy and better prepare the Dreamers for these positions.

When DACA recipients have permission or authorization to work, it makes an impact on their employment. According to Wong, “Work authorization is critical in helping DACA

recipients participate more fully in the labor force.” His survey showed that 91 percent of respondents are currently employed. Most of the DACA recipients were earning a low salary, but after getting DACA, “69 percent of the respondents reported that they moved to a job with better pay.” This work permit opens a new way to get a better salary, instead of getting the minimum wage or maybe less than the minimum wage. Also, with this authorization or permit, Dreamers can have better working conditions; Wong emphasizes that “56 percent of those surveyed moved to a job with better working conditions.” In addition, Dreamers not only get the opportunity to get a better place to work or better salary, this policy also helps to keep things fair for DACA recipients and citizens as well.

Dreamers are helping the economy by starting their own businesses and creating more opportunities of employment.

The purchasing power of DACA recipients continues to increase making an important positive difference in the economy of this country. The survey from Tom K. Wong reports that “65 percent of the beneficiaries bought a new car.” When they received their permit or authorization, some DACA recipients purchased their first cars. However, they are not only paying the full cost of the car; they are paying the fees and taxes that each state collects, along with the additional fees for registration, title, plates, insurance and driver licenses. Also, the survey from Wong found that, “16 percent of the recipients purchased their first house.” Some of the Dreamers purchased their first home after receiving DACA, helping in the creation of jobs and in local economies. Additionally, big companies are making money employing Dreamers. Wong says that “5 percent of the respondents started their own business.” Dreamers are helping the economy by starting their own businesses and creating more opportunities of employment. For example, my friend M.H. and his father came to The United States having lots of dreams. As a result, they created their own business in New Jersey. They are creating more employment opportunities and now, they are employing around four or five people. If my friend could get citizenship, he could create even more employment opportunities in the community where he lives.

On the other hand, some people think that illegal immigration is making this country worse, and they are against illegal immigration. As Donald Trump said in his discourse when he announced his presidential campaign, “When Mexico sends people, they are not sending the best. They are sending people with a lot of problems. They are sending people who are rapists, who are murderers. They are bringing drugs; they are bringing crime.” As we can see, the president is creating a negative message about illegal immigration. In this statement he ignored the benefits that illegal immigrants provide to this country. They, as illegal immigrants, are not a problem because people

who immigrate to this country are just looking to find and get a better life. They came dreaming for a better future, not only for themselves, but also for their children. We know that this country has a diversity of immigrants from many places, not just Mexico. While Trump referred to them as people with “a lot of problems,” many of these immigrants are also creating employment opportunities and covering jobs that Americans don’t want to do. These so-called “rapists” are going to make sure this country continues into the future with new generations and keep this country as a world leader.

Senator Ted Cruz has said, “We must... fix this problem in a way that... respects rule of law.” He insists “providing a path to citizenship undermines the rule of law and is an insult to the millions who have immigrated to the U.S. legally.” However, illegal immigration is not a problem because people who immigrate to this country are just looking to get a better life. They came dreaming of a better future not only for them, but also for their children. That is why the solution to this problem is to allow Dreamers or DACA recipients to become citizens.

In conclusion, we know that this complex issue has opened a lot of arguments and many ways to think. However, the survey that Tom K. Wong conducted showed us the value of having this program that we know as DACA or Dreamers. DACA recipients are helping this country in education, employment impact, and in the economy, to name a few. Therefore, the best way to resolve this problem is to allow Dreamers to become citizens because if they get citizenship, Dreamers are going to contribute more to this country than they are already doing. Consequently, this country is going to be stronger than it is right now.

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Leaving Home, Finding Home: Other Personal Stories

Holding On and Letting Go

Ambition: Pointed Towards the Sun

Great Troubles at Home

Search for Belonging

Holding On and Letting Go

The Power of Change

Alienation, boredom, loneliness and the lack of meaning in my life, all of these symptoms and many others, of course, draw me back, far from my reality—to the world inside me, which is behind the distant mountains, where my country is and where my family lives, to a place where everybody knows my name, to a place where I was happy. I had been resisting the change, then I realized that it is hard to live in a different world, where everything reminded me that I did not belong here, and I needed to go back and chase my memories.

It had been ten years, when I was trying to convince myself that I could live here in America. But I was swimming against the tide; I did not have a paddle to face the power; I didn't have family or friends beside me when I faced some odds in my life; I didn't have anything that could compensate me for their absence. My husband's work was hard, and, for a long time, he was working as a nurse in a hospital. We barely had weekends to enjoy family time together. I didn't have the courage to go outside to discover places where my kids could have fun, and my husband didn't encourage me to because he was worried about me exploring outside since I didn't have any experience. Above all of that, I had some medical issues that caused me to stay in the hospital for a period because I was very sick.

The worst part, for me, was being in the hospital and having no one visit me. I didn't know anybody and I didn't have friends. I had only my children and my husband, and they were all my family and all my friends. In spite of that, I felt sorry for them because they also lived in the same situations as me.

Once upon a time my oldest son—and he was six years old back then—asked me: “Mom. Why is there nobody coming to visit us? And why we don't have friends?” But the most shocking question is “Do I have a family?” I had a feeling of guilt and shock, which formed and crept inside me. I felt that way because I grew up in an extended family. And I wanted to raise my kids the same way my family raised me. But I was torn apart between my children and myself. I was scared. All that I wanted was the best for them. My husband and I decided we should go back to Jordan, just the kids and me for a certain amount of time; I can say it was a kind of sabbatical leave. We wanted to create a solid base of customs, traditions, and religion for our kids. We thought it would be an excellent opportunity for them to get to know their family and establish a strong bond with them, and learn the origins of Arabic reading and writing. We booked the tickets and went to Jordan, behind the distant mountains, where

my family lives, where everybody knows my name, and I was happy.

When the plane landed in my dream land,

I felt as if my soul had returned to my body again. . . . My tears rained to end the thirst of years of longing and nostalgia.

on my country's ground, I felt as if my soul had returned to my body again. I met my home with a full smile on my lips, and a joy dancing inside my heart. My home also welcomed me with the warm hugs through my family and my friends who came to the airport to meet me. I couldn't express myself well with words back then, so I let my tears to do it for me. My tears rained to end the thirst of years of longing and nostalgia. We got in the car to go to our home; the spring-warmed sun kissed my cheek. We passed through the streets which I knew, even the faces of the people who were walking down the street were familiar to me. When we got home everything looked the same from the outside. The neighborhood was quiet, and some kids were playing soccer in the street. There was no heavy traffic beside my house because we lived on the top of the mountain. The cool mountain breeze was dancing with olives trees leaves, those trees my dad planted in our house garden. I rushed to open the door of the house, but I was scared. My hand was shaking when I put it on the doorknob. Once I opened the door, I received a firm slap in the face from the reality that the

house was empty of my mother. She died when I was in America, and I didn't have a chance to see her or kiss her goodbye. That was my first visit after the death of my mother. I realized the fact that the absence of my mom had changed the face of everything. With my first step inside the house, I felt like I was stepping over a deep well. I thought that I would feel down, but for a moment I imagined my mom standing in the middle of the guest room with her precious smile on her face in front of me. Then I realized that her soul would never leave me and she is with me. I wished I could hear her voice again and rest my head on her shoulder. Regardless of all those feelings, I didn't even cry or show anybody my sadness or sorrow, because I am the oldest daughter and all of them were counting on me to bring the joy again to the house and fill it with the laughter and happiness of my children. I didn't want to break down in front of them, although I did want to have my moment. But more than that, I wanted to help them heal from what they suffered after my mother's death.

After that, my days passed smoothly and ordinarily. I put my children in school, and they began to learn Arabic very well, and they were happy with the new country and family; they were pampered by their grandfather and uncles and aunt. We were living in a family house, where we used to have many visits from many family members, and that thing my kids were not used to when we were in

America. But after a period, the boys started to miss their father very much, and they were looking to enjoy many of the little things they were missing back in America: such as the seaside, their old school, our quiet house, and being within their small family.

By the end of the second year I spent in Jordan, it was the time for the graduation party for the kids from school. Usually, the mother and the father attend to this kind of ceremony. The kids were excited because they participated in few shows. I went to the graduation ceremony with my dad. And when we sat there I looked around me, and there were all the parents for the kids. I realized how much my husband had missed since we had been far away from him, and they missed him as well. Then my dad told me: “the children need their father, no matter what, and there is nobody who could compensate them for their father absence.” I didn’t say anything, and then he conceded: “I know it’s very hard for you to live in a different place, far away from your root and your family. And I know that you are like a fish if you get of the water it will die. But you need to adapt to the new situation and the new life you have. You are a mother now, and your responsibility to your kids is to provide them stability, and a homey atmosphere that consists of mother and father.” And that was the moment when I realized that nothing would be the same as it was before.

I was chasing a particular image in my memory, and when I held it in my hand, I realized it wasn’t the same as what was printed in my head. My mom wasn’t there; my brothers and sister weren’t living in our house anymore because they were married now, and each of them had his house, and own family. And the most important thing, I wasn’t the same girl who wore the uniform, went to her school, and whose only responsibility was just school books. I had to grow up. I had my own family now. I expected everything, but not the shock that I experienced when I returned home and realized that it is no longer as it was in my mind because I had changed. I felt ashamed of myself because, during my trip back to the past, I made my children move away from their future. I did not see the things as they were, but as I wanted them to be.

“Life is a balance between holding on and letting go.” Rumi. After Two years in Jordan with my kids, living there with my memories surrounding me, I decided that it was the time now to return to America .every day I spent in Jordan was a light pressure, such as the pressure generated by orthodontic and after a while everything is correct. And I was on the right track with a whole new point of view. By the end of the day, there is no doubt that memories are our comfort pillow we need to rest our head on our precious moments, but we need to wake up next day and put on our

reality and go on with our life. We need to leave the past in the past. At some point, you need to let it go. My dad came with me to the airport to bid farewell, and he said:” my house is open for you and your kids at any time you want to come and visit, and don’t forget this will always be your home.”

I read once that what you seek is seeking you. I am seeking happiness and stability, so I decided to have a new start now and adapt to the new situation. My children returned to their schools, and I registered in a college as well to chase my future. I know many places in

Here I belong.

New Jersey where I can take my family. And I know some friends now. We visit each other from one time to another. And just as my parents did back then, I will do with my children, and I will build them beautiful memories in their home and with their family. When they grow up, they will remember me and their father and these beautiful days. Difficult roads often lead to beautiful destinations, so my home land now is where my kids’ future will be and where my small family is, and here I belong.

Was I Right?

As I walked down the old dirt road, I looked behind. I saw my family in the door waving good bye. I had a lot dreams, and I knew if one day I want to achieve them, I have to leave my loved ones. I never thought that was going to be the hardest thing to ever do. I had to make a big decision in my life when I was only 12 years old. Stay and live a simple life, living day by day, or leave my loved ones for a better life and other opportunities.

I was born in southeastern Brazil. My parents were poor, living a simple life on a very small farm. Our house was made of dirt with a floor of clay and windows of wood. We didn't have electricity, and for cooking we used a wood stove. I'm sure most of the people here have no idea what I'm talking about. To survive, we ate chickens and cows.

I was only eight years old when I had to take care of my two younger siblings. My brother was six years old, and my sister was four. Everyday my parents left early around four o'clock in the morning to go to work. We stayed home alone. I was afraid, so many things used to cross my mind, things like someone could knock on the door and kill my brother, my sister and me. Any noise outside paralyzed me, but I could not let my siblings see that. I was only eight years old taking care of two kids, which was a lot of responsibility.

After waking up and getting myself ready, it was time to get them ready too. We used to walk to our teacher's house. She taught 15 kids of different ages all at the same time.

After school, we walked back home. My brother and my sister used to play outside until the sunset, while I cleaned the house, washed the clothes and

prepared dinner. My parents used to come back home around eight o'clock. By this time, I had my siblings already bathed, fed, and ready for bed.

The years were flying by, and I was almost 13, when I decided to move to a little town, with my cousin. She got a job at a clothing store, and was going to school at night. She invited me to move with her. She was living with her grandparents, but she was not happy. She wanted to have her own place, so we could live together. I knew, I had no future, if I stayed there on the farm. I had so many dreams, and I wanted to go to college and become a doctor; if I stayed there, I wasn't going anywhere, and I was probably going to be like my parents, working almost day and night just to survive. Moving to the city, I could have a better future and I would have a chance to help my parents to have a better life. That night during dinner I said, "I want to move to the city to live with my cousin." I said that and looked down because I did not know how my father was going to react. He looked at me and said, "Are you crazy or what? What do you have in your mind? The city is too dangerous. What are you going to do there?" I knew they were going to be like that. I was prepared, and I had my arguments.

I said, "I'm serious. I can live with my cousin, get a job and go to school at night. Look how happy she is." I had my mind set, and they knew that. When I wanted something, nothing and nobody could make me change it. I looked at my father and saw tears in his eyes.

My father said, "We don't have too much to offer to you and your siblings, but we are all together here; how are we going to live separated?"

How are you going to survive in the city without us?”

I just said, “Don’t worry father, everything will be just fine, I’m not abandoning you guys. All that I’m doing is not only for me; it’s for us. I want to give you guys and my siblings a better life.” I was very excited about the idea, but at that moment I felt a little sad, thinking about leaving them.

One week later I was moving. I picked up a few clothes, put them in a bag and was ready to leave. My parents and my siblings were in the kitchen waiting for me to say good bye. I was very excited and happy, but at the same time I was anxious and nervous to start new life far away from my family. My heart was in pain to leave them. My mother could not stop crying, my father was trying to hold his tears back.

He gave me a tight hug and said, “We don’t want you to leave, but we understand. It will be better for you. Never forget who you are, and where you come from. Keep God always in your heart and continue to be the honest and humble person you are. We are always going to be here for you. If you change your mind or need us, just come back home.” At that moment, I thought I was not going to have the strength to leave. All I wanted was to stay there in my father’s arms forever where I felt so loved and protected. For a moment I thought to stay, then I looked around. The house barely had some furniture and all made by my father’s hands without any comfort. The windows and the walls were falling apart. I thought to myself, no, I have to go, they deserve to have a better life. They are getting old, tired of hard work. They don’t have much energy to continue to work

on the farm for too long anymore. Inside me, I knew it was the best thing I had to do for everyone. With a knot in my throat and a bleeding heart of pain, I gave everyone a hug. As I walked down the old dirt road, I looked behind, I saw my family in the door waving good bye.

For a moment I thought to stay, then I looked around. The house barely had some furniture and all made by my father’s hands without any comfort. The windows and the walls were falling apart. I thought to myself, no, I have to go, they deserve to have a better life.

Today I stop and think. How could I do all that? I can’t imagine my daughter leaving the house right now at age 12. But in the end, it is worth it, all what I have done. I didn’t become a doctor as I wanted to, but I gave my parents and

siblings a better life. I never abandoned them. I was there with them every time I had the opportunity. Today they still live at the same place by choice, but in a new house with all the comfort, and they don’t work anymore. My siblings are both married, have kids, and are doing very well in life.

It was very hard to make the decision to leave my parents’ house, probably the most painful thing I have ever done in my life. But to achieve my dreams, and help my parents have a better life, that was the right decision. I couldn’t miss out on that opportunity. I didn’t want to stay in the farm living day by day, and have the same simple life my parents had. I knew I could do something to change our life.

Together Once Again

It had been three years since the last time I had seen my mom. The emotions of seeing someone for the very first time after so long are so strong that to describe them is just hard. After hours of being in a car with strangers, I was finally able to see her again. There she was, standing outside of a laundromat, covered in a heavy coat with some faded jeans. Her black, wavy hair was tied in a high ponytail. She hadn't really changed since the last time I had seen her. As the car was pulling up in the parking lot, my heart started beating like crazy. Just as the car came to a stop, I jumped out and ran to her. I hugged her with all the strength that a 10-year-old has. For just a moment, I thought that I was dreaming, and that if I let go of her I was going to wake up and she was going to go away. There was so much happiness that nothing in that moment was going to ruin it. At that moment, it was just me and her and nothing else mattered.

Seeing my mom after so long was such a thrill. I had been seven years old when she left Mexico. We were struggling financially, so she had decided to come to the U.S and work so that she could provide a better life for me and my two siblings. She didn't want us to come with her at first because she didn't think that it was the best thing to do. My mom is the kind of person that always thinks ahead of her and

tries to see all the options. She knew that when coming here to the U.S, we weren't going to have a place to live, and starting from scratch for her with three kids was not going to be easy. So, for her at the time, she did what she thought was the best for everyone and left us with her sister. I was just a little kid when all of this was going on, so I didn't really know what was happening.

For just a moment, I thought that I was dreaming, and that if I let go of her I was going to wake up and she was going to go away

Those three years without my mom were not the best ones. When my mother left, my siblings and I were staying with my aunt. It wasn't really a great choice because we weren't really accepted there even though they were our family. When it came to be part of family events at school, for example, we weren't involved. If they would go out, my siblings and I had to stay home because it was meant for only them. After a couple of months of living with my aunt's family, my mom realized that we weren't really fitting in and that we were struggling to get along with them after my siblings and I complained to her. So, we moved in with our godparents. We couldn't

live with our grandparents because they lived in another state in Mexico. Also, my mom at the time was not talking with her parents because of something that happened after I was born.

Since not having our mother with us, my siblings and I grew close. Even though we were with people that we had known for a long time, we didn't fully trust anyone. For us, it was just us against the world. My brother and my sister had to mature very quickly when they were just 10 and 11 years old. With my godparents, the situation was more tolerable. They made us feel welcome and always tried to be fair with us and their grandchildren who lived with us, too. For any school event or holiday, we were always made to feel like we belonged with them. But even that couldn't fill the void that only my mother could fill. No matter how much fun I could be having, my mom was not part of it. Memories that should have included her did not. Those three years without her were the hardest ones of my life.

Adjusting to my new life once I was reunited with my mother in the U.S was hard. I did not know the language; however my mother made sure that I was enrolled in school so I received all the help I needed to learn the language. She showed me all the places that I could go. The first places that she took me to see were the mall and to the beach. My mother knew that the beach was something that I would want to see first, so we went to the beach first. I was so mesmerized

by the way that the waves would crash against the shore. She introduced me to foods that I had never even heard off like pan de queso, pupusas and a lot more foods. The good thing about that moment was that she understood how hard it was to adjust to a new environment. She never forced us to do anything that would make us feel uncomfortable. She knew that it was going to take time for us to get used to our new life.

Now that I look back at that memory of being with her in front of the laundromat, I realize that it's one of the happiest ones that I have. Every time I think about this memory, it makes me appreciate my mom a lot more. Even though we fight sometimes, being with her makes me very happy. My mom has a lot of influence in my life and now that I think about it, if I hadn't been brought here to the U.S, I would have probably been a different person. Instead I probably would have been someone that she would not be proud of. I believe that at that moment, my entire life changed. It was a moment where mother and daughter were reunited once again, a moment that not a lot of immigrant families get to have.

Saying Goodbye

Through the years, I have learned that goodbyes will always hurt. Memories, good or bad, will bring tears and no words can ease the pain brought by the sensation of saying goodbye to the ones we love, especially those who we have no clue if we will ever see again. I have always believed that for some of us the first time we experience saying goodbye to our loved ones, not knowing if we will ever see them again, is the most difficult feeling we have had to deal with at some point in our lives.

It's hard not to remember my first time. I was only eight years old and even though I knew that Mom had planned to travel outside of the country for what was supposed to be only three months, I had to keep it a secret. Keeping that from my older brother was hard. Nobody had any idea at all that we were leaving and not coming back anytime soon. I know Mom just wanted the best for my little brother and I, a new start of just us three, without dad hurting us. That was the best for our future. But, before she made the decision she needed to find a way to get us out of there without my dad being suspicious.

At the time, she had not received any answers to all the letters she had been sending to her dad for months, my grandfather. She was worried and upset,

worried that nobody knew anything about him nor where he was, and the fact that no one did anything to look for him was even more upsetting. I noticed Mom seemed to be the only one, out of almost 15 kids my grandfather had, who was always helping them any way she could and checking on him all the time. She felt the need to go look for my grandfather, and the idea clicked. That was the excuse she would use to make Dad believe we were leaving for a temporary time and come back after three months.

Thankfully, Dad agreed and Mom started working on all the paperwork needed for our trip.

The day we were leaving had arrived, and it was a sad day. It was the day to say goodbye to our loved ones. I remember that day we woke up early in the morning and Mom got us ready. I was wearing my favorite outfit, a long sleeve red dress and a pair of shiny black shoes that my older brother Alan had gifted me a couple months earlier. I was never a fan of dresses, but that red dress was one of my favorites because my older brother had gifted it to me. While my mom made sure we had everything we needed and that we were not missing any important documents, my older brother Alan prepared breakfast.

Breakfast was finally ready, and it was my favorite meal, smashed avocado on toast. I really liked the crunchy sound when I took a bite of toast together with some cut fruit and hot chocolate. It was the last time we had a meal together as a family. The memory makes me feel sad. My brother had bought fresh flowers. He knew Mom and I loved the smell of fresh flowers. They were on the center piece table. Somehow the table felt like it got smaller when my two older brothers, Mom, Dad, my little brother and I finally sat down, prayed, and started eating. Everyone was smiling and saying funny things as if it was a normal day, but I could see sadness in everyone's eyes, especially my older brother Alan. For a moment, he looked like if he was lost in thought. He was the best brother ever who loved us and took good care of us every time dad was away working for long periods of time. Maybe not knowing when we were going to see him again is what made me feel even more upset. The day I was born he was the only one who was there for Mom. He helped her in the best way he could, as he used to say; he learned how to be sort of a dad with me.

The drive to the airport somehow felt long and short at the same time. I made sure to take a glimpse of our house, as if I was never to come back. I observed Dad's face and my older brother Alan's face. They both looked worried and sad, but Alan always had those funny ways to make everyone laugh at

I was wearing my favorite outfit, a long sleeve red dress and a pair of shiny black shoes. . . . that red dress was one of my favorites because my older brother had gifted it to me.

"quiet times." He was kind of the clown on our family. Mom observed my little brother and me like if in her mind she was trying to say "one step closer."

We arrived at the airport, took our backpacks and luggage, and the driver went to park the car. We walked inside of this huge place with many people walking fast and others not so fast. When we got there, for a moment I stopped thinking. I was so amazed at the size of the airplanes that it was somehow scary to go in. "What if the plane falls?" I thought. "How does it hold so many people inside?" It was time to say goodbye, but I wasn't ready. I felt scared. My heartbeat was so fast I felt it was going to come out of my mouth. I loved Daddy, even though he was so harsh on us maybe he didn't know how to be nice, I thought.

A voice on the intercom started making announcements, and it was time for us to board our plane. Why couldn't time stop for a couple of minutes, I thought. I ran to Alan's arms. He hugged me very tight, and I saw tears running down his eyes. It made me feel sad; he gave me a teddy bear that was a monkey to keep me company. Then I hugged Dad. He kissed my forehead, and he was also crying. He held me in his arms not wanting to

let me and my little brother go. Again I felt sadness. I knew it would be a long time until I could see him again; we all said our goodbyes. As we walked away and waved goodbye, I felt sad. I think that's when I realized that it was really happening. We were leaving Dad and our older brothers, our friends, our school teachers, our favorite places, and our cat.

Mom was walking quickly, afraid that my dad would change his mind and stop us from leaving. She told us, "don't look back." She was also crying but not because she was sad, or maybe she was, but because she wanted a better future for us. She had made a difficult decision.

We found our seats. Mom helped us put our seatbelts on, and she looked at us and told us that everything was going to be fine. It would just be the three of us. We were going to love where we were heading, and everyone was so excited to meet us, especially grandma. We had a big family to meet with a lot of cousins to play with and a lot of places to explore, but I still felt sad and tears came out of my eyes. I just felt the urge to hug my monkey and think that I wasn't alone. Mommy was there and my little brother too. The thought of not having my older brother anymore was what made me sad. Now I was the older sister alone.

Finally, the airplane took off, it was a weird feeling in my stomach and my ears, I could see everything from the little window. My brother and I waved and said, "Goodbye

home," like sillies. We all hugged hands. The feeling of sadness was gone now. Mom looked at us smiling, saying how much she loved us. I will always remember that day, the most difficult day in my childhood. Saying goodbye to the ones we love is never easy. The feeling in our hearts is overwhelming, and the urge to cry is unstoppable, until we meet them again!

Ambition: Pointed Towards the Sun

No Longer Alien

“Please don’t go!” The house is full, hot and stuffy, almost to the point of suffocation. Beads of sweat form on my forehead and trickle down my flushed face. People packed the room, from corner to corner. Wails and moans thicken the air as people cling to me and my mother, pleading us not to leave them. The attacking hands were desperate, the voices grievous, and I, confused. I looked on with eyes the size of saucers as my determined mother freed herself from their grasp and plucked me out from the midst of the chaos. Tears streamed down my mother’s distressed face as she hugged her parents goodbye for what would turn out to be the last time in years. Looking back on my younger self, I could never have imagined the life I have today. In one twelve-hour plane ride, my life went from dirt roads lined with palm trees and teeming with personality to banal paved streets with sidewalks and suddenly I found myself surrounded by the strange sounds of an alien language. My life would never be the same again.

A few weeks later, I celebrated my birthday, alone with my mother and father. We had left all of our friends and family behind in Egypt, our native land. We were the first generation of immigrants in my family. We knew nothing here. We had no one. We were

alone in a foreign land. My father had come months earlier to gather his bearings and provide us with a place to live. We knew it would not be easy, but we were determined to live the “American dream” that we had always heard about.

People looked at us strangely, at the way we dressed and the pocket dictionary that never left our sight. During the post 9/11 days, we could no longer speak Arabic to each other in public.

We soon came to realize America was not as glamorous as all the stories made it out to be. We lived in a small, dirty apartment in an old run down building in the inner city. Our neighbors were scary and rude. Used needles and cigarette butts littered their doorways. My father could not keep a job because he could not speak English. My mother’s day as a stay-at-home mom was lonely without her family and she soon fell into depression. People looked at us strangely, at the way we dressed and the pocket dictionary that never left our sight. During the post 9/11 days, we could no longer speak Arabic to each other in public. No longer surrounded by my plethora of cousins, I had no friends. I tried to watch

Sesame Street, but I couldn't understand what they were saying. I'd turn off the TV, close my eyes, and remember the wind swaying the palm trees I so fondly remembered. I could almost feel the warm Sahara sand between my toes and the sun beating down on my face. In my head, I had traded the constant honking and cursing outside my apartment window for the sounds of children playing with a soccer ball on the tiny dirt road outside my grandparents' house. As far as I cared, I was back home.

Then came the day I started pre-school. To my curious and insatiable little soul, it was quite the adventure. Although I could only speak Arabic, I participated in every play-time activity and tried to soak in every bit of my surroundings. The classroom was covered with letters of the alphabet that I had yet to learn. I was ready to learn and experience new things. It was shaping up to be an amazing day - until nap time came. No one had ever explained to me the aspect of sleeping for a short period of time DURING the school day! It was unheard of! My mind racing, I quickly came to my own conclusion that my parents had given me away and I would live there for the rest of my life. I felt lost, alone, petrified. The teachers' attempts at soothing my panicked self - in a language I didn't even understand - were futile. In Arabic, I spent over an hour trying to belabor her, arguing that surely my parents didn't mean to leave me there - they loved me! My parents were

contacted and asked to come to the school to pick me up. I could not have been more relieved and traumatized all at once.

After this instance, one of the teachers suggested I be put in ESL, a program to help teach me English, and was quickly met with opposition from another teacher, Ms. Smith. I would not be where I am today if it were not for Ms. Smith. She refused to let anyone put me in ESL, arguing that I was too bright to be put in a class that underestimated my ability. She believed surrounding me with other kids who could not speak English would only hinder me. Instead, she pushed me, to my limit and beyond, to soak in every English word around me. I repeated colors and shapes and "please" and "thank you" in my sleep. I had conversations with everyone around me, forcing myself to form sentences that made sense to others. My mother took me to the library every day, urging me to look at books I couldn't even read until the words were etched in my brain. Over time, pictures became words and those words started to make sense to me. Books became my favorite escape. I lost myself in the pages and added multitudes of words into my arsenal. Over time, I became better at English than everyone around me.

Now a college sophomore, I appreciate my roots more than ever. This is part of the American dream that immigrants long for. I'm furthering my education and making a career for myself. I come from a country where

women don't have many opportunities and have a myriad of obstacles to overcome before those opportunities are even within reach. Nevertheless, I am living my life as an independent woman with plenty of opportunities right within my grasp. As a woman and an immigrant, I am breaking barriers everyday just by being a successful college student. If you would have told my preschool self that I would be here today, I'd have scoffed at you. Who could imagine that I'd go from a one-bedroom, six-person household to signing a lease for a brand new apartment of my own? Who would have thought that I'd go from a crappy inner city public school to getting into some of the best colleges around?

All those long nights my father spent working various odd jobs and all those long walks my mother took to the library with me were finally worth it when my college acceptance letters started rolling in.

Ultimately, I have to give my parents the credit they deserve. They came to this country for me. They left their families and sacrificed everything they had to give me the opportunities I have today. All those long nights my father spent working various odd jobs and all those long walks my mother took to the library with me were finally worth it when my college acceptance letters started

rolling in. I understood that their incessant carping was only out of love and that they only demanded more because they knew I was capable. I had overcome the odds and made more for myself than what I was born into. Stepping out of your comfort zone is a lesson that cannot be understood until you experience it firsthand. Sometimes being intransigent will only hold you back from a lifetime of possibilities. All it took was a push out of my comfort zone and I was able to take off. I defied odds and overcame barriers. I am an example for girls around the world who want more for themselves than to be the housewife that society expects them to be. I am living proof that with hard work, anything is possible. I came to this country looking at people who spoke English like they were aliens. 15 years later, here I am, tutoring English students whose first and only language IS English.

2,904 Miles Later

Everyone has someone who inspires them. Who comes to your mind? It could be a family member, a friend, a singer, an actress, a scientist, an athlete, a coach, a teacher, etc. Whomever came to your mind must influence you and motivate you in order to be your inspiration. This person can also be your role model. Think of someone? I did. My mother.

At the age of nineteen my mother took a plane alone to the United States of America from the country of Ecuador. She left everything she had ever known for an opportunity to come to America. When my mother's plane landed at John F. Kennedy airport, she realized she was very far from home, two thousand nine hundred and four miles, to be exact. There was no turning back. She lived with my aunt in a very tiny packed apartment in the Bronx and worked cleaning a building in Times Square. This inspires me because it shows how brave my mother is. Moving across the world into the unknown is something that most do not do. She left her comfort zone in search of a better life.

At first, my mother knew very little English. She would try to learn more and more each day. Learning a second language is hard and requires great skill. Day by day, my mother became stronger and stronger in the English language. My mother is very determined. Today, she speaks better English

than I do. Here and there my mom will pronounce something funny and my siblings and I cannot help but to laugh. Immediately she shoots back, "You know this is my second language. Let me know when you are fluent in second language. Then you can laugh." We all usually shut up right after because she is right.

My mother is the strongest person I know. When I was two and a half, my parents went through a divorce. It was very hard for both parents. They sold our old house and my mother and I lived in an apartment down the street. I remember that apartment, waking up in the bright early mornings to the birds singing and my mother whipping up pancakes in the kitchen. Those are my favorite memories. Being a single parent was hard due to the fact my mother was going to college full time. Somehow she always seemed to make it work. She still made every game, every class party, and every school concert. She was a superhero in my eyes and she still is.

My mother gives tough love. When I was younger it was hard to appreciate it, but now I am glad she raised me the way she did. I remember sitting at the tan scratched dining room table for hours and hours because I was not allowed to leave until I finished my soup. There were no exceptions, ever. I could sit

there for five days and she would not care, as long as I finished my soup.

Recently, my mom booked a vacation for my family to go to Ecuador. Upon arrival I pictured myself at a resort tanning under the palm trees. My mother knew that was not going to be the case, and man was I in for a culture shock. My mother did not want to go to a resort; she wanted us to experience the real world first hand. She took us across the country. We travelled by plane, taxi, bus, and boat for three weeks. I learned a lot about my Ecuadorian heritage.

Although scary at times, I am beyond grateful for that experience. I found it scary because life in Ecuador is very different from the United States

where I was born. There is a lot of poverty, and stray dogs roam every street. It made me so much more grateful for the life I live. Anytime I get upset over a first world problem my mother always says, "Remember the other ninety five percent of the world Kim," and it reminds me that there are worse things going on in this world.

My mother is a goal setter along with being a goal achiever. My mother wants something? She gets it. My seventh grade year a tragedy happened within my family involving my aunt. At the time we were close to buying a house, but this was a major setback. We had to take her in along with my

two cousins. It was a packed house. At one point there were eight people living in a two bedroom apartment. We had very little money and nothing was looking too great. My mother took the lead and started working extra hard. She had two jobs and was still going to college.

My mother taught me that all things come with hard work and time. My mother's biggest accomplishment is the house we have now. She did everything to our house including the hardwood floors. We did not have money

to hire someone to do it, so my mom would say her favorite line ever: "It's not going to do itself. Let's start it." Anytime you hear her say that, run. Unless you feel like lifting a

hundred pounds of tile and making a backsplash in the bathroom.

My mother inspires me on a daily basis. She is the most hard-working, selfless person I have ever met. She was at the bottom and strived for the top. Nothing would stop her from getting there. Her determination and hard work is so inspiring and something I would love to gain. I am beyond lucky she traveled those two thousand nine hundred and four miles.

*She was at the bottom
and strived for the top.
Nothing would stop her
from getting there.*

Being a Leader While Being an Introvert

To become a good leader, it requires a little bit of courage. I consider myself an introvert who accomplished many goals in life, since I was born to become a successful leader.

I spent days in my mom's arms going from hospital to hospital. She was looking for medical help because I had such a high fever when I was six months old. Every doctor she visited told my mom that I had a flu virus, and I could rest at home. However, my mom had a strong maternal sense which made her think something about the doctor's diagnosis was wrong. In her struggle to find the right doctor to understand the reason of the high fever, she arrived at a children's hospital where a doctor sent me directly to the emergency room. After seeing my weak body, and doing some preliminary revisions, the doctor knew that I was not well, so he ordered several exams. A few hours later, the doctor came to talk to my mother who was crying. She received the news that I had been diagnosed with "Pneumococcal meningitis." The doctor said that he was going to do everything possible to save my life because I was very ill. Of course, those words were not at all comforting for a person who has her six-month-old daughter in a hospital emergency room.

Unable to do anything about my health but leave it in the hands of the doctor, my mother was in the waiting room for another hour. Unfortunately, luck was not on our side because she heard that I had to be hospitalized a few days,

days that became weeks and then months. For two months I was hospitalized due to my health condition. Those were two eternal months that I did not see my mom. Of course, I was too young to understand all the sadness that my sickness would cause to my family.

The day of my departure from the hospital had arrived. The doctor called my mother because he wanted to give her an important announcement. My mother approached the doctor's office with fear and anguish. The doctor told her, "One day, your girl will be an important person because she was brave and has been saved miraculously." Suddenly, her sad face expression became a happy smile, so she thanked the doctor for helping us.

After that day my life went back to normal. I remember that every time I failed in any decision during my childhood or adolescence, my mom reminded me the phrase that the doctor had told her the day I was going to lose my life. However, I had always thought that those words were created by my mom to encourage me.

At the age of fifteen, I considered myself an introvert who would never have the opportunity to succeed, so how could my mom say I overcame death when I was 6 months old?

During my last grade of high school I started to have many questions about my life. I spent the last six months of that year planning my next step at the university which guided me to study

gastronomy at the University in Colombia. I enjoyed this career because cooking made me lose track of time.

After my experience at the university, I decided to change my introvert personality into a leader one to become a successful chef. I felt I needed to get out of my comfort zone, so I looked for the learning of a new language because it would be helpful in my career and would open many doors throughout my life. After I completed my gastronomy program, I got a job opportunity at a recognized restaurant called “Andrés Carne de Res.” It is a place where many tourists go. I was working in front of the public by selling fruit salads when one lady came and talked to me about the food in English, but I could not understand what she said. I felt sad because I knew about food, but I was not prepared to communicate.

One lady came and talked to me about the food in English, but I could not understand what she said. I felt sad because I knew about food, but I was not prepared to communicate.

The curiosity of speaking English motivated me to dedicate part of my busy college days to taking English classes. Consequently, I looked to the internet for possible options to travel and study English directly with native people. I applied to a program and got the opportunity to travel to the United States.

Since I knew that traveling was my next step in my life, I started to open my eyes to the world. I looked for opportunities to help me gain money to afford my travel.

As a decisive person, I went to free entrepreneurship classes, which the Colombian government was offering for students. I was curious to see what I could learn to gain money. While I was learning about how to develop my own entrepreneurship qualities, I came up with the idea of creating a healthy fast food business. I knew how to cook and manage business, so I started my plan. It took me eight months to plan the recipes, the cost, the uniform, and the design of the stand. With the money that I saved from my job and my parents' help, we built a grill stand with all the cooking supplies which I put in front of my house. It looked fantastic, and I was proud of myself because I was a leader who developed a successful business idea, and who had overcome all the fear of failing.

After ten months of running my business, I realized I had enough money to buy my ticket to travel. My achievement of getting everything to travel had a profound impact on my mom, so that she decided to take me to the hospital where the doctor who saved me was working. I could not believe when he recognized me when my mom told him who I was. The doctor looked in my eyes and told me that I was a person who had struggled to live and who achieved it at such an early age. When I heard those words, I was convinced that my mom had not created them, and that perhaps these would have some meaning in my life.

I finally came to the United States! As soon as I got everything ready to stay, I started my ESL classes at Brookdale Community College. During my experience in this country, I saw new opportunities that I never saw in Colombia, such

as the accessibility to many books and information to study. In my process of learning English, I visited many libraries to find new books in English to read and practice. I used to read cooking books, but one day, I decided to explore another section. I found amazing medical books which had information about nutrition. I started to read more about science and the medical subject because it was something that had attracted my attention.

Through my journey going to different bookstores, I discovered that there is no limit to knowledge. I found a great desirability towards learning nutrition and the science of food. I could not wait to study and learn more English to be able to develop my new career.

After my ESL classes, which prepared me efficiently to communicate in English, I became a transfer student at Brookdale Community College to pursue my degree of food and nutritional science at Rutgers University. I took a nutrition and health class in which I got confidence to follow my dream. This class was not easy because of the language. However, as a person with a leadership quality, I overcame my fear with the desire in my heart to become a food scientist.

Currently, I am taking a composition class which I consider important to expand my knowledge and to get a better understanding of communication. I do not give up every attempt to continue improving my writing in English. Likewise, I am a member of The National Society of Leadership and Success in which I improve my leadership skills that will help me in my future as a professional person.

Since now my goal is to become a food scientist. I want to use the art of cooking and put the science behind it. I want to contribute with the research of new ways to improve the human and world health. As a successful leader, I will work

The doctor looked in my eyes and told me that I was a person who had struggled to live and who achieved it at such an early age. . . perhaps these words would have some meaning in my life.

with a team to look for a nutritional environment by discovering new food sources and new ways to nourish our society easily, safely and healthy.

Finally, I am living my leadership experience as a new member of The National Society of Leadership and Success. I am getting closer to the community to see how we can positively influence people around us. I am preparing myself by assisting the events in the community, by going to member programs that help me get involved in the society, and by listening to or sharing my ideas to other students or people. I want this opportunity to enrich my future by working on my leadership qualities.

Better Future

I still don't believe that I'm currently in the United States. I grew up in Iran, which is a country not friendly to the United States. Around forty years ago my country had good relations with America, but after the revolution in my country, we became enemies. After the revolution in my country, the new government started to destroy it. They made conditions in Iran every day worse than the day before, and living in Iran became impossible. Three years ago, when I thought I couldn't live in my country anymore, I applied for America's immigration lottery to make a better life. When people apply for it, they wait many years, and they often don't win. I thought if I started early, maybe after six or seven years, my name would be announced among the winners. In the first year of waiting, my name was announced! I got worried, because my husband and I thought that we would have a few years to prepare ourselves to come to the United States. Everything happened very fast. Deciding was hard. I was shocked. We weren't sure whether we should move that time or not. We decided to endure the hard work to get ready to leave Iran and start a better future.

The first step after seeing my name as a winner was that I needed to get the documents from the

American embassy. Because of the problem between the governments, we don't have an American embassy in Iran. As a result, we had to travel to the neighboring countries for the interview. In our letter of acceptance, they made an appointment in Armenia for the interview. It was hard for us to travel to another country because we had to pay a lot of money for the flight, hotel, food, and interview. However, we were faced with this difficult situation to reach our goal. I bought the tickets and prepared the required documents. We went to Armenia a day before the interview. We were worried, but at the same time, we were hopeful, too. On the day of the interview, when we were waiting for our turn, we talked with some people like us. It wasn't a good idea because they made us more worried. They told us that because our governments are enemies, the American officers don't like Iranians. They said that the officer would talk disrespectfully and reject us.

The time for us passed slowly. We were stressed, and this was difficult. After a few hours waiting, they called us. We entered a clean and very simple room where an American man was sitting with a smile. The man had blue eyes and his hair and his beard were light brown. He talked

Persian. He was very polite and treated us with great respect. After checking our documents, he asked us some simple questions and told me to come back the next day and pick up my visa. He said, "Your visa will be ready tomorrow, and you have six months to enter the United States. If you don't arrive at this time, your visa will be revoked." He looked at my husband and said, "You have to wait two or three months, and after this time, we will call you for to come and get your visa." We were confused. I had my visa, but my husband still didn't have a visa. On the other hand, we had only six months' time. That was very hard.

We came back to my country after a few days, and we were waiting for some news about my husband from the embassy. The days spent waiting were getting worse for us, especially after four months since the interview when there was still no news of my husband's visa. I couldn't imagine leaving alone. Finally, the hard days of waiting ended after 125 days. We had to travel to Armenia again. My husband's visa was ready without a second interview. Everything was done easily and quickly.

Suddenly, an officer called my husband's name. They took him to a special room. All the people were boarding the plane, and I was still waiting for my husband behind the door. I had a very bad feeling, and it was a very hard time. I was nervous about my husband's situation and our flight.

The second step of the process was getting ready for moving. It was very hard. (I need to mention that if they didn't give the visa to my husband, I never would have moved without

him.) Because it was so hard to get the visa, we did not mind getting ready for immigration in less than twenty days. Because we weren't sure about my husband's visa, we couldn't risk quitting our jobs or selling our house.

As a result, between getting his visa and my visa expiring, we had only twenty days' time.

In twenty days, we quickly and cheaply sold our house, appliances and cars and

quit our jobs. We said goodbye to our lovely family three days before my visa expired. Because there are no nonstop flights from our country to the United States, we had an eight-hour stop in Frankfurt, Germany. Frankfurt's airport was really big and beautiful. I can't describe my feelings at that time. I was happy because we were very lucky, and we made it through all the hardships. On the other hand, it was impossible to imagine life without my mother and my sister. When they called for getting on the airplane, I was thinking about the past and future. Suddenly, an officer called my husband's name. They took him to a special room. All the people were

boarding the plane, and I was still waiting for my husband behind the door. I had a very bad feeling, and it was a very hard time. I was nervous about my husband's situation and our flight. At the last moment, the door opened, and he came to me. They said sorry about the mistake, and we got the flight.

The final part was difficult, too. When we arrived in the United States, we couldn't speak English, and we didn't have jobs or enough money. My cousin picked us up from the airport. After fifty four days, our green cards arrived, and we started to apply for jobs. We found jobs at Wal-Mart. Because of our language barrier, work was hard for us. We couldn't communicate with others. After three months, we started an ESL program. At first, it was very difficult because the other students had lived more than four or five years in the United States. They could speak well and just needed to organize their sentences. However, our English was very basic. Still, we did it. We worked full-time and studied English. After six months, we got promotions at work, and we got more motivated.

In conclusion, we have lived in the United States around twenty-two months after overcoming many hardships to get here. We left behind our lovely family, home, job, education and everything in our country, and we moved to a strange country with a different culture without a job, family or education and ignorant of the language. The only thing

that would have given us hope to stand up to the hardships of persecution in Iran was the peace that we lacked in our country. We work hard, maybe harder than in our country, but we have a peace here. We have very hard days and much stress, and we miss our family, but to make a better life for ourselves, we don't stop trying.

Huge Changes

Have you ever experienced some sudden shocks? We can choose to face these troubles or escape them. If we accept them, we will appreciate them making us strong. In 2008, some sudden things broke my happy and peaceful life. I didn't want to face them, but I had to accept those cruel facts. Those things changed my whole life and made me strong. It still is engraved in my brain, and I cannot ever

I had to accept the changes and make myself stronger, because being stronger is the one thing I can do.

forget.

In my youth, my parents and my sister's parents were busy at their jobs, so I, my sister and my grandmother relied on my grandfather. I was always happy with my sister and grandparents in our house which was built by my grandfather and my grandfather's family. We liked our house very much. It had five floors, a big backyard garden and a big pool. First floor was kitchen and dining room, second floor was my grandparents' room, third floor was my and my parents' room, fourth floor was my sister and her parents' room and last floor was a gym. Our grandparents always played with us in the garden. I liked to do gym at the house. My grandparents gave us a really happy childhood, so I never experienced any bad things. I remember a funny thing: my grandfather said I

was a very greedy child, I would always steal some food to eat when he was cooking. This house has many happy memories for me. I love my old house and my grandparents.

But in 2008, my life got big changes. First, we faced to move out of my old house, because in my country, if a house built for more than fifteen years, the local government must dismantle and rebuild it. We knew that policy, but the local government just gave us some new apartments and did not rebuild our house, and it made us angry. After our lawyer negotiated with local government and negotiations failed, local government cut the supply of water and electricity for our house; they also let some people try to destroy our house; then we wrote the letter to the national leadership about the requirement to rebuild. It didn't affect the result, but we still lived and defended our old house. I don't remember how long we insisted on living there.

For a long time, we lived without electricity and used well water near our old house. We had to use wood buckets to get the well and this was not an easy thing, so we needed save the water. Also, we needed to use candles to do everything. At the beginning, I didn't adapt to that kind environment, so I asked my grandfather to cook food whatever I wanted. My grandfather loved me very much. He had never said anything and just cook everything and did everything what I wanted, although it was difficult to cook and do

everything because of no electricity and use well water. I recognize I was a know-nothing child. Afterwards, my sister told me I couldn't do that, it made grandfather very hard. When I saw that my grandfather was tired out, I seemed to understand why my sister said that, and then I understood I couldn't change the environment, I had to make myself be strong to accept that kind environment.

Even so, we were still happy to live in our old house, until one day, my parents thought my grandfather's face looked yellow, different than normal. Then they took him to familiar hospital to do medical examination. We thought it was just small troubles, so I went to school as usual. It was my favorite season that was a brilliant summer and my first day I went to middle school. I felt excited to spend the first day, but after class when I got home, I listened to bad news that my grandfather got cancer. At that moment, I was shocked and really didn't want to believe that, but I understood it was trust and I had to accept that. Shortly, my eyes filled with tears, so did my sister. But we couldn't cry, because our grandfather didn't know yet, we needed tell a lie to him. I asked my sister the reason why our grandfather was a very kind man but he got cancer. She said "Everyone experiences sickness and death in their life, it is the laws of nature, same as our grandfather." After a year, we moved to our new house, but the big family was divided to live in different towns. Finally, my grandfather died at his new house. At that moment, I felt the house was very quiet so that I could listen to everybody's breaths. It seemed time stopped at that

moment. I didn't know what I could do, except cry.

These attacks affect my life because grandfather was our support. We lost our house and my grandfather at the same time; it made us collapse. I saw my grandmother didn't eat anything, just saw my grandfather's photo and cried from time to time. Even though I had tried to give up, when I saw my grandmother, I told to myself I must be strong and take care of my grandmother. My sister had same thought as me. I tried to learn all the housework and how to cook. When I was in middle school, I went to grandmother's new house to cook lunch and prepare the dinner, then back to school, and I went back to my own house after evening class. My sister and I took turns to do it. Although it made us a little tired, we knew grandmother was the saddest person because our grandfather was her all.

Consequently, I understand a truth: you will not know what will happen in the future, tomorrow your life may change, you must make yourself strong in any environment, any situations. Like me, I had to accept the changes and make myself stronger, because being stronger is the one thing I can do. Nowadays, I appreciate these changes, it makes me more and more strong in any troubles that I meet.

Earthquake in Kashmir

It is hard to forget those beautiful faces. In that moment the time was going so fast. When I think about why it goes so fast, I figure out that it goes fast because of social connectivity. Every day was passing in the same way for a long time. Every day was very peaceful for me. Then a day came that started in the same way as it started every day but ended with a very horrible moment. This experience taught me a lesson that life shows both happiness and sadness.

It was very hard for me to wake up in the morning and go to college. It's not that I did not like going to college. It was because it was hard for me to wake up. Once I awoke and got ready to go to college, I became very happy and I forgot all my stress that I had in morning. It was very fun and that kept me happy the whole day. The distance between my home and college was ten to fifteen minutes of walking. In the morning time, professionals used the same route I used. It was fun to meet the different people and exchange greetings with them. A lot of other schools were also on the same route, so I also had a chance to talk with the students of those schools and got information about their schools. We talked about our schools and going to college. It was like enjoying a party in the morning.

Our first period was chemistry, which started at 8:30am. The chemistry teacher asked for the test and we gave him our test and sat back in our seats. We started playing around with each other as we usually did while the time teacher passed our papers.

After ten to fifteen minutes, suddenly the earth shook and it shook our college building. It shook us in the building and all the people of Kashmir in a moment. We started running out of the building to safe places where we could save our lives, and could find out what was going on. After 3 or 4 minutes when the earthquake stopped, people started looking for their kids, brothers and relatives. I saw a lot of young boys and girls laying on the ground, with broken hands and legs. Many had broken heads. Blood was coming from them without stopping. I heard the little kids screaming for help with very scared voices. Most of them died just because of having no



Muzafarabad, Pakistan (Oct. 13, 2005) The city of Muzafarabad, Pakistan lays in ruins after an earthquake that hit the region. Public Domain. https://www.navy.mil/view_image.asp?id=28889

facilities to help them. Most of the wounds happened just because of running at the same time in the same direction, because everyone was trying to get out of the building to save their life. I was running too, to save my life as the other students. The building was shaking and the walls and the roofs started to come down. Most of the students were under the building. Some of the students, especially girls, died because they were not able to run as fast as boys ran. Some of the teachers died in that earthquake too, because they went back in the buildings to get out the little kids. The earth was continually shaking and the roofs came down on people. Everyone was crying, running to find their family members and their kids.

Many of my classmates and relatives died on that day. Many people got injured and some of them lost their kids, family homes and their jobs. In a few seconds, thousands of students aged 12 to 25 were killed. The loss of little kids made everyone cry, because they did not think or expect that anything like that could happen, and they would not come home again. The day was terrible, because after every half hour, the after-shocks started; people got scared.. In the afternoon, a heavy wind with rain started and some of the buildings came down because they were already weak. A lot of people died. For one month our college was closed, and everyone was scared for their life. Then the teachers decided that the boys had to go to college and take classes and the girls had to stay at home with someone or get together in the shelter to study. The whole day and the week were terrible. A lot of people died, and a lot of damage happened. People were very afraid with all of that, but after few months' life started coming back to the normal.

Despite the horrible things that happened, a lot of positive changes came. Before the earthquake, the city had just one high school and one college, but after the earthquake six new schools were built, because different countries built schools and colleges. The United States of



U.S. Army Sergeant Kornelia Rachwal gives a young Pakistani girl a drink of water as they are airlifted from Muzaffarabad to Islamabad, Pakistan, 19 October 2005. Source: Technical Sergeant Mike Buytas of the United States Air Force . Public Domain. <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=1823>

America helped the people with money, and they divided a lot of shelters among the people. England's government built colleges for the students. The countries from the Middle East helped with the building of different markets, roads, and good hospitals. The U.A.E king built a beautiful hospital for the Abbaspur people. Different private organizations played important roles in rebuilding the people's strength with different kinds of training centers.

After the earthquake, the lives of people changed. The organizations who visited the city and towns took a lot of people with them to different countries. Now, they would have a better education system and free education for all students. Before the earthquake, education was expensive and some families couldn't afford the expenses. They were not admitted in to the university just because of financial issues. Now because Japan, Saudi Arabia and Turkey built the universities and colleges that were paid for by the governments of these countries, students could get admitted easily. Health issues were solved with the help of American and German donations. They gave free medicine to people. Now the whole district felt better and had a good life.

The earthquake affected my life deeply. I still cannot forget the people who died in the earthquake because they were very special to me. Those members of the community—they were very helpful people in that district. They were the people who helped those students who couldn't afford the books and clothes to study. They paid the fees of all poor families' children, because we did not have any organization or government support.

That day began the same as the days before, but anything can happen at any time. I did not think that the day would change to such a bad and horrible situation that we would never see some faces again. The people who always helped others they were great people in the community, who tried to save the community life. They taught me a lesson to help others.

Ping Phillips

An Adventurous Experience

Imagine one day you go to China with your young daughter. You don't know anyone and only speak a few words of Chinese. You need a car and you need to find a place to live. What would you do next? This is a true story, but it is about me and my young daughter, Becky, moving to the United States from China about three years ago. Even now, when I recall the experience during the first month after we came to the United States, it seems like a movie and all the pictures come back into my mind. It is just like it happened only yesterday. If I close my eyes, I still can feel the combination of excitement, strangeness, helplessness, stress and fear. Nevertheless, the most important feeling that I have, the one that warms my heart, is although we had a very difficult time, Becky and I never stopped supporting each other and that was a precious and unforgettable experience for us.



On the road to our new home. Credit: Ping Phillips

At the end of August 2014, after a long distance flight, Becky and I arrived at Newark airport at midnight. When we got out of the airplane and walked into the hall of the airport, I heard a lady's voice coming from the loud speakers, which was speaking English. Coming into my sight were different colored people quickly passing by us. Although I had seen some bigger airports before, I confusedly looked at those strange English signs and got nervous. Everything reminded me that I had gone far away from my family, my friends and my country. Becky seemed calm. Her English was much better than mine. She looked around at the signs and said, "Don't worry, Mom. Let's follow the flow of people and go through customs first." Then she held my hand to walk among the crowd until we saw some lines where passengers were waiting to get through customs.

Becky was going to study in a high school in Toms River, New Jersey. I planned to come with her to look after her, and so she wouldn't feel lonely. Before we left China, I did some research, and I met a Chinese woman online. She said that she lived in Bayville, New Jersey, with her American husband

and a few Chinese international students. The woman said that she was happy to be a host family because she liked to help Chinese children, and she also would like to help us. She suggested I rent a room in another house that she owned, from which Becky could take a bus to school. Nevertheless, she did not show me any pictures of the house even though I asked her a few times. She said that I could rent for a month at first to see if we liked it, with the condition of paying her the rent before we left China. Although the rent of the room seemed ridiculous compared to other information I found online, I decided to rent the room because it was difficult to rent a house in New Jersey when we were in China.

After standing online for a long time, Becky and I left the airport lobby carrying four big suitcases and finally found a taxi to go to Bayville. There was a slight chill while sitting in the car during the wee hours of the early morning. It was quiet and dark outside on the highway. The night sky was clear and many stars were shining in this deep dark night of autumn. They looked so far away from us, again reminding me of how far we were away from our home. Becky fell asleep on my shoulder for more than one hour until the taxi arrived at a small house where we were to meet our contact. I had called the Chinese woman from the car to let her know we were going to be there soon.

The woman who I met online drove a car to meet us in front of the house. She didn't smile or say anything polite and seemed not to look as friendly as she did online. After she opened a half-glass, small door in the back of the house and turned on a dim light, we walked behind her and passed by a narrow hallway, which had a double-burner stove on a tiny counter. Two doors next to the counter were opened. She pointed toward one of the doors, which was a small room with a bunk bed and said, "You can live in this room. The other room I'm going to rent to other people. " With a few words, she walked out of the house, jumped in a nice dark car and disappeared into the dark.

Becky and I looked around the room. It didn't look like what the woman described to me online. Actually, it was not a normal room. It was separated by partial walls that looked like they had not been finished yet, even the doors of the two rooms could not be closed because they did not have locks but two holes for handles but no handles. We felt uncomfortable in this house, but we were very tired, and I had paid already. So without saying much to each other, we lay down on the bunk beds and fell asleep quickly.

The next day, we looked around the house again. We found the small house had a second floor and some people living inside. Actually, the first floor looked more like a storage room but it was transformed into two bedrooms. We made a decision to find a better place to live. However, Becky's school was going to start soon, and she needed to get ready. The first step was that we had to rent a car before school started. Becky helped me search information on her laptop for renting or buying a car and renting a house. Fortunately, we discovered a car rental company close to where we

were staying. We walked there and rented a small car. It was nice to have a car. At least, I could drive to the grocery store with Becky to buy food and things that she needed for school. However, renting a car is expensive, so we still wanted to buy one as soon as possible.

School started a few days later. Becky took a school bus in the morning and came back in the afternoon. I stayed in the room by myself and felt a little lonely. In addition, I could not go out without her because I hardly spoke English. I tried to look for information about cars and houses on my laptop, but I did not understand much. I felt anxious. Every day, in the afternoon, I frequently looked out of the only little window of the room, hoping to see my daughter come back early to help me. I waited until the first weekend after Becky's school started. I drove the car with her to a large automobile market. I had never bought a car by myself before. We walked around the market the whole weekend, learning about different cars, but we did not know which one to buy.

It would take too much time if we waited for every weekend to look at cars, and we needed to save time. I decided to drive to school to pick up Becky when her classes ended so that we could go out together to look for a car and a house. Usually, we did some research on the laptop at night and found a place we could go to the next day. Then, I would drive to school to meet her in the afternoon when she was available. One day, the Chinese woman came to the house when we were looking for information on the laptop after we had dinner. She asked me if I wanted to sign a one-year lease with her. I told her I did not want to sign it yet because we were looking for other houses. She did not show any facial expression, and she said, "It doesn't matter to me whether you rent my house or not, but I don't think you can find a house to rent." After she left, Becky and I both felt more stress. I tried to comfort my daughter: "Don't worry. We can figure it out! We will keep trying!" Over the next few days, we kept working as we did before, until one day, we could not use the internet in the house. The laptop showed the WiFi's password was incorrect.

I called the Chinese woman who rented us the room for help. She said the internet was broken and she would fix it, but she didn't say when. We waited and waited many days. Then one day, without any explanation, the woman said she didn't know when it would work again and said, "I'm not trying to scare you, but you are not home in China. I don't think you can buy a car or rent a place in the United States." She also told me if we wanted to continue living in the room, I had to sign a one-year lease with her and pay a year rent in advance. Or, if I could not buy a car or rent a house, I could go back to China and pay her to let Becky live in her house with other students.

I realized that we would not have internet anymore because this terrible woman wanted to stop us from finding a car and a house, and I became determined to leave the dangerous place as early as possible. I would neither let her stop me nor control me or my child. Becky said, "Maybe we can find Wi-Fi somewhere. I'll ask friends in school tomorrow." The next day, she was told that public

libraries had internet access, and we found one which was not far from the house. We brought the laptop there and kept trying. We found different automobile markets, going from one company to another and learning a lot of information about cars. Finally, after a couple of weeks, we bought an SUV at a Volkswagen dealership. We liked the car very much, especially because it would be safer to drive in snow in wintertime because I never had experience driving in snow.

Nevertheless, we still did not find a place to rent and time moved on. I was depressed when the “one-month lease” was getting close to the end. One day, I was driving to Becky’s school after lunchtime because Becky said she would try to leave school earlier so that we could look for a house together. Just as I reached Hooper Avenue, which was a road in front of the school, I saw a car with lights on the top driving behind me. I worried that it was a police car and I did something wrong on the road, but I wasn’t sure, and I got nervous. I saw an entrance on the right side of the road, so I turned to the right to see if the car still followed me. Coincidentally, the car turned right as I did. I still wasn’t sure if it was a police car and didn’t know what I was going to do. I kept driving slowly for a short distance, and then, I saw a few rows of red brick buildings on the left side and some cars parked in front of them. I decided to park there and see what was going to happen, so I turned to the left into the parking lot and stopped. Thank god! The car behind me did not turn. It went straight and drove away!

I was relieved, and then, I noticed those buildings looked like rental apartments. A hefty man with brown hair was moving boxes into a van from a building. “Wow, this is a very good location!” I thought. I was pleasantly surprised by the unexpected discovery. I practiced a few times in English to talk to the man before I got out of the car. Then, I walked to him and said, “Excuse me, I want to rent an apartment. Can you tell me where I can rent it?” The person was nice. He said some things I didn’t understand much, but I did know he was calling someone to help. Then there was a man named George who came to meet me. George was a medium height person with half gray hair. He wore a pair of glasses and looked very friendly. He smiled and waved his hand to let me follow him, and then, opened an apartment on the second floor to show me. I walked in a living room with George and looked around. It was nice. Every room was bright and had a nice view from the window. It was neat and big enough. Even the kitchen looked bigger than the room where we were living in Bayville. George pointed to the cabinets and flooring and said, “They are new, just finished.” “That’s perfect for me!” I thought. I told George I liked it, and I wanted my daughter to look at it. Then, I urgently walked across the street to the school and found Becky waiting for me. Becky was surprised to hear my story. Excitedly, she walked back with me to look at the apartment. As I expected, she liked it very much. My daughter looked so happy. She gave me a big hug and said, “Mom, you are great!” I hugged her back tightly and felt tears filling my eyes.



*Assembling their new furniture.
Above, Ping's daughter. Below, Ping.*

We decided to rent the apartment, and George gave us an address, which was an office of a lawyer who we could sign a lease with. After we left George, we met the lawyer in his office. The lawyer was a middle-aged person and looked like a gentleman. Becky translated for us when I talked with him. He recognized the school uniform that Becky was wearing and said if we lived in the apartment that would be very convenient for us. However, he had to talk to

other people because he could not decide by himself, so we had to wait for a few days. Waiting made us feel anxious. Finally, I signed a lease with the lawyer a few days later. He gave us about two weeks free so we could prepare to move into the apartment, and the price was cheaper than the room in Bayville!



We started to move things from Bayville every day and bought things step by step for our new home. We bought window blinds and figured out how to set them in the windows. We bought modular furniture such as beds and a TV bench and read instructions to put them together. When we bought a TV, we had to find where the TV service companies were and which price was better. Thankfully, we moved out of the house in Bayville a week earlier than the one-month lease required. It was like escaping from jail.

It was a big day for us. We jumped for joy because our plan had come true by supporting each other. We knew that we had found our new home sweet home. Furthermore, we both appreciated this indelible experience and now it has a significant meaning for both of us. It is not about finding a car or an apartment. It is about facing a difficult challenge together, sharing happiness or sadness together, and encouraging and supporting one another. Although this experience was difficult, I am grateful that it brought me and my daughter closer.

My Odd English Speaking

Have you ever visited or lived in a different country? Did you try to use a foreign language to communicate with native people? Have you ever gotten in any trouble when communicating? When I first came here, my English was so rough. Moreover, I used to ask some people for help, but instead of using the right and suitable word in a sentence, I used the wrong one. Therefore, it pushed me into some very unexpected situations. Nevertheless, after getting through those incidents, I learned that if I practiced talking in English more frequently, I would get used to it and not say those words wrong.

English is not my native language, so I have had a lot of trouble with it, especially at the time when I just came to the U.S. In fact, I had a thick accent, terrible pronunciation, and a very slow reaction in speaking English. I could write a very basic sentence, but I could not use it to speak whenever I needed to communicate, even though I thought about what I would like to say before deciding to speak. One of my weaknesses was that I easily made a mistake while using “you” and “I,” especially when I asked someone a question.

I still remember that cold winter day two years ago, when I was in my first semester at Brookdale. My friend Nicky and I were walking from LAH building to the library. We surprisingly met an American guy who was riding a wheelchair on the same way as us. I thought he

absolutely was having a hard time with his wheelchair because there was a lot of snow melting outside, and the road seemed like it was very dirty and slippery.

When we were going to approach him, I walked a little bit quicker to get closer to him. To be honest, I really wanted to help him to go through a bunch of rough snow easily. I tenderly asked him, “Can you help me?” That guy just kept quiet and continued rolling the wheel. I thought I might not speak loudly enough to let him notice me. Then I patiently repeated and touched proactively the metal bar at the back of his wheelchair to pull it forward. That guy suddenly turned around and seemed like he was very panicked. His reaction really made me feel startled too. My heart beat a strongly, and I felt a little scared and confused. Nevertheless, I smiled at him shyly, and calmed down to ask him once again, “Can you help me?” as he continued trying to pull his chair. He quickly shook his head and said, “No, no, thank you.” I replied awkwardly, “Are you okay? . . . Have a good day!” I quickly stepped aside to wait for my friend Nicky, who was walking behind us about four or five footsteps. At that time, I did not understand why he denied my help.

Then I told Nicky, “He does not want my help. Do you think he will be okay?” In my mind, I really expected a sympathized answer from her, and I breathed heavily. My friend did not say anything except she started to laugh very loudly.

In a short moment, I felt a little upset, and I asked her, “What was wrong?” Although my friend was trying to keep calm, I could see her whole face turning red. She continued asking me, “What did you say to him?” and kept laughing out of control. Because it was around 9 - 9:30 a.m. on Friday morning, the campus was very solitary and tranquil; therefore, my friend’s laugh reverberated terribly. It made me feel not comfortable at all. I said impatiently to her, “Tell me, how was I wrong?” She replied, “What do you think?” I glanced at her and started to think of everything just happened.

Although feeling a little disappointed in my friend, I still tried to rewind everything that just happened and remembered carefully what I said. A few moments later, I started to laugh even louder than my friend. At that time, I realized that instead of asking him, “Can I help you?” to suggest to pull the wheelchair, I confidently asked him, “Can you help me?” like I needed him for help. My face completely turned red. I began laughing crazily. I was also feeling very embarrassed. I wished I had practiced enough to communicate in English fluently. I thought maybe that guy thought I was an impolite person who was trying to make fun of him.

Surprisingly, that was not the first time I mistook between “you” and “I.” Two months before I came to the U.S, I had a trip to Hong Kong. I met a young girl the same age as me, who sat next to me on the air plane going back to Vietnam. Before I got into my seat, I wanted to ask her to help me to bring my suitcase into the cabinet above. In my opinion, she might have

figured out that I was the person next to her from far away, so she proactively stepped aside to wait for me before I came. Otherwise, after she heard me ask her for help, she stopped confusingly a few seconds to listen again because I asked her very candidly, “Can I help you?” Meanwhile I was giving her one side of my suitcase. Fortunately, she understood what I meant and helped me very enthusiastically. However, **I felt so embarrassed after I realized I used the wrong question.** I noticed she just kept glancing at me when I kept my head down to pretend I was sleeping.

Those two moments happened during my first five months here. I thought my English ability was good enough to help me survive, but I might have thought wrong. Sometimes, I wish I could switch those situations to make them be normal but I can not. In brief, the moment when I realized that I used the wrong words was very unforgettable to me. I knew my English was not good enough, but I had never thought that it was that horrible. However, after that day, I practiced speaking in English by myself at home so many times in the hope that I would never have these problems again. Today, two years after those incidents happened, I feel a little more confident in communication, although I am still working. Nevertheless, I decided to share my story with people, because these were not only the memories I could not forget, but they were also the experiences which forced me to practice English harder and harder. Besides that, **I also hope that the native speakers will hear my stories to have empathy for the struggle of the second-language speakers like me.**

My Immigration Experience

As a young child, I was told by an Indian astrologer who used to come to my grandmother's house that there was a strong indication in my horoscope that I would leave my homeland and travel far across the oceans one day! It was hard to believe that, in those times, and even though I was excited, I was not sure if I really wanted that. As I grew older, I really never gave this prediction much thought, as I was completely involved in my University education and enjoying my time with family and friends. However, that prediction came true and before I knew what had happened, twenty-five years had passed and I was looking back upon the heartbreak of leaving home and settling down to a life in the United States.

I was teaching at a Teachers' College in India, which was training both preservice and in-service teachers, while my husband was an administrator with the Government of India. He was granted study leave and he chose to come to the US on a student visa, as he has family here.

My husband joined the MBA Program in Finance at Hofstra University, in Long Island, New York. He was terribly homesick so, my little daughter and I joined him about a year later. For the most part, our initial stay was great. My daughter started first grade in the local school and I became active in the school's PTA and their Girl Scout Troop. The entire school was intrigued by our presence there, as we were the

only family from India, and we always stood out during events like the International and Cultural Festivals alike.

Meanwhile, my husband, who worked as a graduate assistant, introduced me to his eminent professor of Education at Hofstra University. She and the other faculty were always very warm, inviting me to events at the school: be it a conference, a seminar, or a workshop. I have always liked to wear my traditional Indian clothes, and they appreciated that very much. I had a distinct identity and they accepted me for who I was – it really did not matter that most folks were Caucasian or that I looked different and spoke with an Indian accent. They always introduced me as a “visiting professor” from India.

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In less than a year, they offered me the position of an adjunct professor in their School of Education. They were ready to offer me a full-time position after a semester, and encouraged me to go for my Doctorate. At this time, I jumped several hoops and joined the Ph. D Program in Educational Psychology at The Graduate Center of CUNY. It was a hectic few years trying to balance a teaching job, a long commute to New York City to school, and also manage the care of

my home, especially my young daughter. For a couple, who were both in grad school with a young child, it was a huge challenge; however, with the strong support and encouragement from my PTA friends and my wonderful neighbors from the Caribbean, my daughter was always well cared for! We were still students, living on a tight budget with no car. During hard times of illness or being jobless, these kind people made sure that our needs were met, and my daughter never missed a playdate, a movie, a camp or the circus . . . Needless to say, even to this day, we are good friends and consider those who helped us to be part of our family.

My husband and I completed our studies and began working here full time. However, the one issue that caused us a lot of stress was the immigration and naturalization process. It was not only expensive but, at times, we felt that the government workers were throwing their weight around and making it seem like they were doing us a huge favor when, in fact, we were working hard and contributing to the nation's economy. Yet, at a later time when my husband was jobless, they were flexible, and that meant a lot to us. Also, when there was a serious issue in granting our child permanent residence, they worked with us, as they cared immensely to support a child's future and well-being.

I believe that coming here with a strong background of university education and work experience, helped us weather the storms we faced. We were able to adapt constantly to what the environment and circumstances demanded of us. However, I want to emphasize that

everywhere we lived in the US, we always had great neighbors, colleagues, and friends who were racially and ethnically diverse. As I wrote earlier, being accepted for who we are is the best thing that happened time and again . . . in academia and everywhere we went.

I am proud of my Indian heritage and have raised my daughter in its roots, but we have internalized the best of the American way of life; we are very blessed to be happy "Indian Americans". Fortunately, there are enough ethnic grocery stores, markets, and restaurants, as well as places for religious and cultural activities. At the same time, we have also come to enjoy multi-ethnic cuisines and traditions of all people. Living here has helped us to appreciate and value India's own ancient traditional roots, and it is heartening to see that at the end of the day, regardless of our differences, we are all affected by the same joys and sorrows, ups and downs of life.

We are indebted to several people who genuinely cared for us, dreamed, and walked with us, as we worked hard to build a successful life here, and the least we can do is to pay it forward!



Photo credit: Keith Mueller, CVA Exhibit

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An Identity, with Subtitles

I thought I was unique the first time I realized I was having an identity crisis. Moving to Honduras at 22 fresh out of college (technically still in college) to live and work as an English teacher was life-altering, unlike any other cross-cultural experience I had before. When I returned to the U.S. a year later, I realized I now had something in common with immigrants around the world. I thought I knew “exactly” what they were all going through—the struggle with identity amidst a dizzyingly new language and culture.

How do you know who you really are? A last name? A ZIP code? A box checked off on a form? There is so much that goes into defining an identity—our stories make up the fabric of who we are. Who we are is more than just a label - race, gender, age, occupation. We are the stories that we have lived through, in the roles we have been given; we are the stories we have lived through, on the paths we have chosen. We aren’t just one thing. We are so many different things to the many people in our lives and in the many places we have been.

At 22, I thought I knew who I was. I was Donna. I was a college student, an English major. How could you not know everything about me just by looking at me? I was a Dead-head, I wore mismatched socks with my Birkenstock sandals and thrift-store skirts, and I didn’t shave. Many of my friends were like this, too. We took pride in being “different.” We called ourselves “feminists” because we didn’t want to look like stereotypical American women. I was a poet. A vegetarian. I recycled.



My dad took this picture of me at the airport, on my way to Honduras for the first time.

So, now, who was I, this 22 year-old girl American, dragging a giant duffle-bag through an airport in the Central American capital of Tegucigalpa, Honduras? All the markers I used to calibrate my identity were lost. I was now just a strange gringa.

I rented a room from a well-off family who was mostly not around, but their maids now served me, which felt strange. I didn’t have a lot of friends in this new country. No parties to hang out at. Nobody read the books I read. I didn’t have anyone with whom I could discuss my ideas about poetry or politics. I didn’t really know much about the literature or politics in my new country (though some Hondurans I knew were aware of U.S. politics).

Nobody liked the music I liked— almost no one had even heard of the Grateful Dead. The skirt I wore—meant I was poor, maybe. A lot of the peasant Honduran women didn't shave either. My Birkenstocks with mismatched socks—just got me a lot of funny looks. I had never thought about how much my identity was connected to my culture and environment.

Language absolutely played a huge role in this. I found, despite four years of “honors Spanish,” my competence in the language was definitely overrated. Most of the family I lived with, as well as a number of the support staff at my school, did not speak English; neither did most of the general population. There were many things I really wanted to tell people, but I couldn't, because my Spanish wasn't good enough to say what I meant.

And when I made some friends, I still felt a little lonely because they would sit around and tell jokes and stories in Spanish, and I couldn't really understand everything they said. In Honduras, there is a tendency to point with the lips—I had never seen that before and got really confused when I thought someone was trying to hit on me at the dinner table, when all they really wanted was the salt. In the teachers' room, all the teachers spoke in Spanish to each other, so it was easy for me to tune everyone out and not pay attention. I would simply concentrate on my work. And I'll always remember the day I realized my name “do-na” (with a long “o”) is what Hondurans call *donuts*. (So that's why the students were laughing at me.)



My teacher friends and I outside the school



Listening to a student presentation

My music, my education, my language, my friends, my clothes— all the things that defined who I was—didn't have the same meaning here. All of a sudden, the safe and secure rug of American culture was pulled out from under me.

It affected me emotionally. I felt lonely. I craved American television (I watched a lot of *General Hospital* re-runs and *Beavis and Butthead* with sub-titles.) I went out drinking a lot at the discos and bars with the few Americans I knew. I wrote a lot of letters back home. And, I struggled at my job.

On top of all the emotional battles, just living and adjusting to this new culture, I was negotiating another brand-new identity - as a professional in my first teaching job. I worked at a bilingual school, teaching (in English) a traditional American-Literature curriculum to five different grade levels (grades seven through eleven), an enormous class load for any novice teacher. All the typical new challenges of the young, inexperienced teacher (lesson-planning, grading, and discipline issues) were mixed in a crucible with a school system that was literally foreign to me, and had decades-old technology (1970s mimeograph, anyone?).



Our school secretary

I kept a journal in which I switched back and forth from Spanish to English. Public transportation. Going to the movies. Shopping. Traveling. Getting a haircut. Hanging out with the other Honduran teachers. Going out with friends. And so, so, so, much more—I would write about my daily activities. All these things were teaching me a new identity. It was almost like the more I learned about the culture, the more I had to redefine who I was and my position in the world. I learned what certain behaviors and body language meant; how to get a guy to leave you alone at the bar; how to be nice to the secretary (who didn't speak English), so that she would let me use the highly-guarded precious Xerox machine. (That is, if we happened to have "luz" that day.) If we had a parent-teacher meeting at five o'clock, it was normal for no one to show up until six. I got used to it.

Eventually, things improved. As I became more familiar with the ways of the culture, I got more comfortable, I learned what to do, how to behave (most of the time). I cut my hair, shopped downtown for clothes. Though I sometimes preferred the food from my own country, I learned to like new foods, like carne asada; tortillas con quesillo, yucca. When I



At my desk in the teachers' room

got tired of the CDs I brought from home, I listened to the radio and found some Spanish-language music that I really liked—like Shakira, Enrique Iglesias and Maná. And it was in Club Garibaldi that I first heard that worldwide "favorite" "La Macarena." One day on the way to work a construction worker whistled at me (which is, unfortunately, not new), but he yelled, "¡Hola gordita!" I was at once flattered and embarrassed. In America to call someone "fat" is an insult, but he was actually giving me a compliment!

Upon my return to the U.S., I felt I could now identify and empathize with generations of immigrants, including my own European ancestors. Our nation has always grappled with its own identity. We are a nation of immigrants: Some came freely, and some were brought captive as prisoners and slaves; together with Native Americans, we are a diverse mosaic of language and culture. Over the years, I have come to realize that many immigrants face so much more than *just* a struggle for identity; they also face discrimination and disadvantage on many levels, rooted in the dynamics of race, power and privilege, a struggle that I, educated, middle-class, and White, will never truly experience. Language is power; it gives one purpose, gives one identity in a group or culture. It also can divide. In a crowd of people speaking a different tongue, we may feel lost, insecure, disconnected. The power to communicate our thoughts to another makes us feel safe and in control, a part of a larger whole. In my classes today, I strive to empower students with that kind of connection.

I still count the time I lived in Honduras as a significant period of my life, as I knew it would be even as I struggled through it. To be liberated from the expectations you have grown up with your whole life—every American student should have such a life-changing opportunity. It was the first time I really saw my country like an outsider. Attempting to transcend the language and culture and the artificial symbols and constrictive stereotypes of any culture— I tried to learn what being me really meant.



On vacation in The Bay Islands, Honduras

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