

*Expressions of Life and Language
Around the World*



A Collection of Stories by VITA ESL Students

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VITA

Volunteer Instructors Teaching Adults

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VITA offers ESL (English as a Second Language) classes for individuals with limited English-speaking skills so that they may improve their skills and participate fully in our society. The ESL students are tutored one-on-one, in conversation groups or in TOEFL study groups. They also attend the VITA computer lab to improve their English reading, writing, speaking and listening skills. The ESL students enjoy their conversation classes and have achieved many successes. Several have passed the citizenship test, the entrance exam for ULL, and most have gained English skills that help with the quality of their everyday life.

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HURRICANE MITCH

When I lived in Honduras, I worked in a town not too far from where my family lived. The bank I worked in began operations two months before Hurricane Mitch destroyed part of this town. The day this unexpected phenomenon happened was terrible. I remember the whole day it was raining even though I opened the bank and everybody came to work.

Through the day the situation was more difficult because the Choluteca River became full of water and began to overflow into the first three streets of the town. The houses located in these streets were destroyed from the river's hard current. Around 4:00 in the afternoon, a friend of mine came to the bank and told me that the river was near my apartment, but I really didn't believe that. I said, "The water isn't coming to my apartment." One hour later my friend came again and said that the water was in the parking lot of my apartment. I tried to stay calm, but as soon as possible, I went to the apartment to see for myself. When I got there the water level covered the tires of my car. At that moment, I started to pick up everything in my apartment. The water level was increasing by the minute. By the time I finished packing my things in the car, the water covered half of the car.

The bank was located on a little hill. I settled my things in the bank where I was safe, and I decided to spend the night there because the church was near by, and I thought if the whole town was flooded, I could go upstairs in the church where I would be safe. That night was the longest night of my life. The people that lived in the streets near the river looked for shelter in safe places. I saw entire families pass by the bank with dogs, pigs, chickens, and everything they thought would be necessary for the next days. These people asked me if they could spend the night at the bank because the building had a big porch, and I said, "If it is possible to accommodate you here, you can 'come in' but without your animals.

The next day I knew we could be isolated because the bridges over the river might be destroyed from the strong current of the river. The next seven days we didn't have food, gasoline, communication or transportation. The only way to go to the capital, Tegucigalpa, was by air in the Army Helicopter, and it was very crowded with people who needed to go urgently to this city.

The entire town was disappearing, and people had lost houses and possessions. Other people had saved their lives in trees or on the roofs of houses. I know of cases where people had crawled from the river and hung to the branches of the big trees.

Other cities of my country had been destroyed by this phenomenon like Tegucigalpa where the current of the Choluteca River and the Ciquito River pass by the important streets in Comayagua. The problems in these cities were bigger than other cities even though we had prompt help from the local Red Cross and the Army. International Aid began to come three or four days after the hurricane. Meanwhile, a lot of children and poor people didn't have anything to eat or drink. I'm talking about the people who lived in the rural areas because the water was contaminated with dead animals and dead people in the river and on the river bank.

The most important thing that happened in this disaster was the solidarity of other countries, such as, the U.S.A., Mexico, Spain, Germany, France, Venezuela, helping our population during this disaster. They came in groups to save other people with problems. They shared food and everything they had with people who didn't have anything to eat or to drink.

Ricardo Acosta
Honduras
March 9, 2004

A SPECIAL VALENTINE DATE

I remember this story happened a long time ago. Another couple who were friends of ours and ourselves had planned to go out to celebrate Valentine's Day. We lived in La Ceiba, the third largest city of my country, Honduras. Roberta, my wife, worked as a school teacher, and I was working in a bank. Our friends lived and worked in Ceiba also. On Valentine's Day we decided to go to the best restaurant in town called "Ricardo's Restaurant." When we approached the restaurant, we saw a boy who was walking as if he was drunk.

I asked Roberta what he was looking for and she said to go and meet him. When I met him, I knew he was handicapped. He was a person about 4 feet tall, with severe problems in his arms and legs and with difficulty in his speech. I asked, "What are you doing here?" He answered, "I am lost; I don't know anybody in the city." He said he was very hungry and thirsty too. He told me that he didn't have a place to stay because he was alone in the city. His family was living in a village 300 miles away.

He told me his family had a fight with him because the day before he lost the money he made in his business. The money he made was the money his family needed to survive because he was the only person who worked. I tried to remain calm because this situation broke my heart. I decided to ask him if it was possible for him to wait for us for several hours because we made a reservation at the restaurant for a particular time and it had arrived. He agreed.

During dinner, we discussed how we would help this guy with a room, food, and other things that he needed for the night. We decided to rent a room in a modest hotel and put him there. I ordered in the food that he ate for dinner, and I knew the better food for him would be rice, plantain, and meat. We drove him to the hotel and told him not to worry. Tomorrow Roberta would come by to bring him something to eat and drink. We told him to stay in the hotel because it had been pre-paid for a week.

He disagreed with us because he wanted to work, and what he needed was some money to begin a business with selling cigarettes, candies, snacks from a cart in the street. We in Honduras call "Chicleres." We arranged everything for him and got some cigarette, candy, and snack companies to stock him with goods. We also found him a home with a friend of ours who had a bigger house. We saw Manuel deJesus everyday, and he became part of our family.

Ricardo Acosta

Honduras

March 23, 2004

EARTHQUAKE

It was October 1992; I had just arrived home from a long, hot day. I started my air conditioner, and after 5 minutes, at 3:15 p.m. the walls started to shake and the chair that I was sitting on began to move. The first thought that jumped into my mind was that the building was collapsing. I ran out into the street, and thank God, my apartment was on the first floor. When I ran to the street, I stood outside the building and looked at it. It was moving left and right very strangely. I started to notice that all the people from the other buildings were in the street too. I wondered what was happening?

It was an earthquake! The first strong earthquake that hit Egypt. It was my first earthquake. I will never forget that day. I was scared like I have never been scared in my life, but when I look back, I ask myself: "Is this really the first earthquake in my life?" The answer was 'no'; that year was full of earthquakes.

In 1992, I was a 17 year old girl who had finished high school. I took my high school diploma from The United Arab Emirates; this country borders Saudi Arabia. When I finished my high school, I had to move back to Egypt to go to the university. You know why I considered this event an earthquake. Because it was like taking a 17 year old girl from Lafayette and putting her in New York and leaving her alone. My Mom and my Dad couldn't move back with me because of their jobs and my sisters schools. I had to be on my own. That was an earthquake.

The second earthquake in the same year was when I had an accident before my final exams and couldn't pass that year. It was an earthquake. You know why? Because I was always first in my school, not only my school but in the whole city.

After that year, I realized that 'earthquake' shouldn't only mean 'ground movement.' It means the things that change you, the things that make you who you are now, the things that make you stronger. That is my story about the earthquake.

Yara Alnady

Egypt

March 26, 2004

THE WORLD is VERY SMALL

Today I want to tell a story. When I was living in the United Arab Emirates, there was a tradition they do for the students who graduate from high school. At the end of each year, they publish a big newspaper containing the names of all the high schools in the country and the names of the students and their final grades.

When it was my turn that year, I checked my name in the newspaper. Something caught my attention. It was a greeting from a school to their Egyptian student because he was first in the school, and he got the full mark in math. I didn't know why I was reading that name over and over.

After two months from that day, I had already moved back to Egypt to go to the University. When I went to the classroom for the first time, the teacher asked us from which high school we graduated. After the class I discovered that there was another student who graduated from the United Arab Emirates also, and he was the same student that I read about in the newspaper. After the class, he came to me and started to ask me from which school I graduated.

Day after day we became close friends. Now, this is my husband. And year after year, we became a happy conjugal family and live in a state of connubial bliss with the most wonderful little boy in the whole world. And it was all started with a name in the newspaper.

Yara Alnady

Egypt

May 14, 2004

STORY of MY DAD

My story will be about my dad. You all know that I'm an Arabic Moslem girl. I know when you hear that, the picture that jumps into your mind will be of a house like a jail with a huge fence and a very strict family. You are wrong. Let me tell you about my dad. My dad is an Arabic Moslem man who believes that women and men are equal.

We are five sisters and one brother. He always used to tell us, "You are equal to any man. You have the same mind so you can do what any man can do." You know why we are six kids instead of two or three?-- not because of my dad, but because of my mom. Each time my mom had a baby girl, my dad was very happy and before she returned from the hospital, he prepared a surprise for her. My mom said, "Every time I saw him happy with the baby girl, I became more sad because I didn't give him a boy."

You know what my dad always says, "If you don't have a baby girl, you don't have children." This man gave his daughters freedom and trusted them. He taught us good principles in life and how to respect our religion, family, traditions, and above all, how to respect ourselves. And then it was up to us to respect this freedom. And I think we did.

We are five sisters; four of us have already graduated from universities, and the last one will graduate in a couple of months. Sometimes I wonder if I can raise my son as my dad raised his children. I wonder if I can do the job as perfectly as he did. I love that man, always look up to him, and try to follow his steps in life.

My dad is my hero.

Yara Alnady
Egypt
March 19, 2004

A LEGEND is BORN in SAHAGUN

This is a real story from my hometown of Sahagun; it happened twenty or thirty years ago before my time.

There was a boy called Daniel Vergara Mendez; he was very humble because he was born in a very poor home. Since he was a child, he had to work doing different house chores such as cleaning, running some errands and even baby sitting to earn his living. Daniel liked music very much – especially vallenato music (I mean music played with accordions). He once received a harmonica as a gift from Don Miguel, one of the wealthy persons of the city. Daniel spent his leisure time trying to get the best of his harmonica, and soon he became an expert, and the people were very delighted to hear his tunes.

Time went by, and Daniel had to continue working to support his family. He was even working for my uncle Mono Calle as an ice-cream boy; he had to be in the streets selling ice creams from door to door. Soon he became very popular and all the people loved him and called him “the harmony boy.” Daniel’s biggest dream in life was to buy an accordion because he wanted to be one of the greatest vallenato singers in Colombia; however, a black shadow of fatality was about to cut short his fate and his dreams.

Daniel made many good friends in the town and with them, he shared many good moments where he used to play his harmonica and sing some popular vallenato songs. Some wealthy persons helped Daniel’s parents to make his dream come true; Daniel got his accordion and soon he had his own vallenato singing group. Daniel was very happy because at last he had his new accordion and that way he could get together with his friends to give serenades and concerts in the popular “casetas” (popular parties celebrated in closed places such as restaurants, streets, or even in schools). Daniel became very famous in the region. Many people would hire his service as a singer and accordion player. Soon Daniel replaced his old harmonica from his childhood with a new amateur accordion. Part of his dream had come true, and he was still a little boy.

One Saturday afternoon, Daniel and a group of his friends were gathered at the corner of his neighborhood, talking and laughing the time away when a man with “cachaco” accent (cachaco refers to the accent used by the people from Antioquia region in Columbia) got close to them. “Hey guys, where can I get some bottles of liquor here?” The boys realized the cachaco was drunk and began playing some jokes on him. “Don’t pull my leg, scumbags!” Daniel was worried and asked his friends to leave the drunkard alone, but they didn’t stop making fun of him. Then the drunkard made signs of going away, and the boys turned their backs to him. But the cachaco had other evil plans in mind; he took one of the empty bottles of liquor he was carrying with him and hit it on a stone violently leaving a heap of cutting pieces of glass on the ground. In the twinkling of an eye, he took one cutting piece of glass and came up to the boys at the corner. Fate had put the humble Daniel in the lane of fatality. He was the only one who received the wild attack of the cachaco. In no time, his wonderful throat was impaled on the cutting glass, and his dreams tumbled down in streams of blood that soon covered his young body. The sun-heated sands of the ground opened their arms to accommodate his great dreams – a humble man’s greatest dreams.

Daniel died on the spot due to his deep wounds and despite all the efforts of his friends and the people who came over. The news of his death spread like wildfire and for the very first time in my town, news of a death incited my town people to riot. The cachaco was protected by the police in the town jail where the people rioted to lynch the killer. My mother says she will never forget about the image of tragedy of that night.

Since then, all the artists and vallenato music followers in my town get together to organize a festival that was named after him to commemorate his despicable assassination – the Daniel Vergara Mendez Accordion festival.”

Every year, in June, all accordions get together in my town to cry for Daniel’s death.

Dania Milena Alvarez
Colombia
April 23, 2004

ADVICE THROUGH TIME

Most of the nights I have dreams, and the next morning when I wake up, I just have one thought on my mind, “What did I dream this time?” Then, if it was a beautiful dream, I write it down in a notebook that I call “Encounter with the Unknown.” A few years ago, I was a time traveler. Yes, I was! Believe it or not, I made a trip to the past, and now I don’t know if it was a dream or if it really happened.

That time, early in the morning, I had the strangest dream that I’ve ever had. I went back to the past, and I saw my mother as she looked at that time. She was in her house with my grandma and my aunt. All of them were really busy, walking from one side to another in the house. I looked around, trying to figure out what they were doing. At that moment, something attracted my attention. On one table close to me, one calendar was showing the year 1971, but I could not see the month. Grandma noticed my presence and interrupted me saying, “Oh, my little girl! I want to tell you that I was with your mother when you were born, and also I stayed beside you when you got sick days later. You will give your mother more happiness than you do now. Please, tell your mom that her sister needs some good advice, and you, try to learn how to cook rice from now.”

Usually my mother talked with me about grandma, but she never mentioned when grandma died. The only thing I knew was that she died before I was born. So, the first thing I did that morning when I woke up was to run to my mother and ask her when my grandma died. She said it happened in 1973. Then, I let her know my dream and the reason for my question. She told me that it was a beautiful dream, and both of us laughed about the rice.

Two days later, my mother went to visit my aunt and she related my dream to her. When she heard the story, she started crying and said, “Well, in fact, I’m in trouble now!” Then she explained her problem to my mother. She advised my aunt and both of them were amazed how opportune my dream was. That’s a coincidence!.

For years I was unable to understand what my grandma tried to tell me about the rice; I thought it was only a funny thing in my dream, until now, when I have to cook my food, and I always spoil the rice.

Dania Milena Alvarez

Colombia

April 23, 2004

MY ACCIDENTS

This last year I was prone to suffer accidents. I don't know why I felt so clumsy, but the fact was that each step I took exposed me to suffer some kind of accident.

Everything began the night when I fell from my bed. I was sleeping placidly when suddenly I felt that under my body, there was no bed. I tried to put out my feet to avoid the fall, but that made it worse because they were too far from the bank so the effort only made the main part of my body fall more heavily. What a crash! The first thing that collided with the floor was my forehead, and it was so strong that I could not repress a horrible scream... "Mom!!!" The following day, the pain in my neck was unbearable, and my forehead seemed bigger than it used to be.

Just after that, perhaps one or two weeks later, my second fall happened. I left my house; in that precise moment I noticed that my feet didn't want to follow me. I gave a tremendous wrong step, and I fell on my knees at the small stairway of the entrance of my house. "Brilliant!!" I told myself. It was a beautiful compliment for the lump on my forehead! My knees were showing some enormous scabs.

My knees had not healed when I made another horrible mistake. What was I thinking? Leaving the bathroom, I opened the door...and what do you think? I didn't move myself apart, and I crashed my forehead with the door! Another bump on my poor forehead! That day I decided to start looking for my brain because for sure I didn't have it with me.

That was not all. The last one and the most horrible of my accidents happened while I was eating a mango, cut in pieces. I don't like to get my hands dirty, so I was eating it with a fork. I was distracted talking to my nephew. My fork slid from the plate, and I tried to avoid it falling on the floor. My surprise was when I discovered that the fork had not fallen, but it was beside me with the tips up. You don't want to know how I discovered it! It was simple! The first of the tips was inserted in my thumb, just between my thumb and my nail. It happened when I was trying to avoid it falling. Oh, thanks to God, I didn't fall into shock. Neither did I become nervous; my nephew, however, lost all his color. I simply pulled the fork out from my finger with the biggest naturalness. And then, yes, I ran screaming terrified to Mom! For my luck, the finger didn't bleed; perhaps the fork didn't touch any tissue. But I was not able to move my finger to write for many days.

After that, I got scared thinking that maybe the next time something worse could happen to me, so I decided to be more careful. Thanks to God, I still continue alive.

Dania Milena Alvarez
Colombia
May 25, 2004

ONE VISIT to STAY

I was born in one small town on the Caribbean coast of Colombia called Sahagun. When I finished my college degree, I went to visit an aunt in Valledupar. Valledupar is also on the Caribbean coast about five hours from my house. I have so many memories of that visit; I had never been there before, and I didn't want to go back home.

When my aunt called to invite me to go for one week, I was not really excited because I wanted to go somewhere else – maybe out of the country. But I decided to accept her invitation, and two days later I was in Valledupar. Mountains that are always green surround Valledupar, and they give to this town a beautiful landscape. At the edge of the town there is one river, the Guatapuri. People say that any visitor who takes a shower in that river will never want to leave, and probably that is true because I am delighted with that place. Inhabitants go to that river to have fun on Sundays. They swim in the crystalline water; families make barbecue and listen to music; girls dance; children play, etc. If they don't want to cook, that's no problem. Somebody is selling fast food, cookies, sodas, ice cream, beer and rum. People of all ages have a good time.

But the river and mountains are not the only attraction of Valledupar. People there are special. They make a living from art; there are too many painters and musicians. In that part of Colombia was created the Vallenato music, a kind of dancing music with accordion and some other instruments that complement that contagious rhythm. They

make love songs, songs about women, songs about daily things, and songs from stories. Also people in that town love sports; the most popular sports are line skating and baseball. I think skating is the thing I most enjoyed in Valledupar; they have a big complex with different tracks for skating. I love skating, and I spent hours in that complex. I was invited to practice with one team, and it was wonderful. I dreamed of being a part of a skating team when I was a child.

I liked Valledupar a lot, and skating made me stay in Valledupar for one month. Now I am planning to find a job in this country and work hard to buy me a house in Valledupar. I would like to live over there and have fun all the time.

Dania Milena Alvarez

Colombia

April 16, 2004

A DIFFICULT MOMENT

My husband is a diver, and he told me this story about one of the hazards that divers face in their work.

When the water is cold, divers use hot water machines like a heater. The water is pumped out of the sea to the hot water machine where it is heated and then pumped to the diver through a water hose. It comes in through a hose or cable where there is one for air, one for communication, and one pneumo for taking depth readings. Occasionally, water isn't the only thing sucked in.

On this dive, one diver had the water hose stuck in his wetsuit so that the warm water ran down his back. He was working when he started to feel a burning sensation in his lower back and buttocks area. It got worse and worse until he had to quit his dive and surface. By the time he got his wetsuit off and into the chamber for decompression, his entire groin area was inflamed, and he was in considerable pain. His helper couldn't help but laugh when they found out all of this had been caused by a jellyfish that had gotten sucked up by the hot water machine.

Lourdes Aragon
Panama
May 5, 2004

FUNNY SUCCESS

One day my husband and I, along with my cousin and her husband Don, went on a trip to scuba dive. My cousin stayed in the boat while Ray, Don and I went diving with a few more friends.

We were diving in pairs for safety; it was very pretty. My husband stopped to fix his fin, and I forgot him. I was supposed to stay close to help him in case he needed air or we needed to help each other.

Everything was fine until I looked around and couldn't see my husband. The water wasn't very clear, so Don and I came to the surface thinking maybe he was up too. He wasn't, and no one in the boat had seen him. At this point, I was really worried so we went back down in the direction we thought he might be.

After a few minutes, we saw him. He was in front of us with his back toward us. I swam up to him and grabbed one of his fins. This was a really bad idea. When I grabbed his fin, he turned around so fast, he almost hit me. He also had his knife halfway on me before he saw it was me and not a shark.

He was very mad at me for a little while because he came very close to hurting me, but after he calmed down, he laughed about how he thought a pretty little shark was going to bite him.

Lourdes Aragon

Panama

May 5, 2004

MY GRANDMOTHER

Lina is my granny's name; she is 98 years old. My granny is a wonderful lady, very lovely and a wonderful grandmother. She was a young lady who loved dancing a lot; she went with her family and friends all the time. It didn't matter how far, dark or bad weather it was or the saloon fiesta, she would go. She went many times: sometimes they rode horses; walked for hours to be there; sometimes the road was very dangerous. Sometimes they put extra clothes in a plastic bag because they needed to swim to the other side of the river because it didn't have a bridge to cross to the other side. The most important thing for them was to have a great time.

She married with a widower who had four kids. His name was Octaviano. He was a farmer, and she was a housewife. They had fourteen children. Granny said all of her fourteen children were born in her house with a midwife. She lived with her husband, but it was not so easy for her because he treated her very bad. She left him for another man who promised her a better life.

He was a security officer for an electrical company. He retired a few years later and worked like a fisherman and married with my granny. His name is Luciano, and they are together yet. They are very happy grandparents and a big inspiration for their family because Granny is a courageous lady with a big heart.

I wish we could celebrate with Granny Lina on her 100th birthday because she looks strong lady yet. I am very happy because my son Logan and my husband Ray met her last year, and my son told all his friends about his great grandmother Lina. I always tell my granny, "Thanks for a wonderful granny and the wonderful time she gives to us and her family."

Lourdes Aragon

Panama

May 4, 2004

A DIVINE INTERVENTION

We call it a miracle. It happened a long time ago. This is a big family. My parents married very young. They are farmers. It happened one day around 12:30 p.m. Roberto was one of the young twins; they were 4 or 5 years old. He was an asthmatic child. He had finished eating his lunch, and Mom told both of the twins, Victor and Roberto, to go play because the farmer needed to sit at the table to eat.

My little brothers played in the backyard, and around fifteen minutes later, Roberto had an asthma attack. He was coughing too much; he couldn't breathe. My other brother was screaming and crying. My mom tried to help him, but he was without rest, his face changed color, and my brother fainted for several minutes. He didn't have any pulse. One of the workers said to my family that Roberto was dead. Everybody in my family cried.

We couldn't find anyone with a car to take him to the hospital. It was a big surprise to us when our church Shepherd crossed near our house going to his job; he listened to us crying and screaming. He walked to our house and looked at my brother. He checked him and said to us, "Just God can help." He made a prayer with his hand on my brother's head and asked us to pray too. But there was no reaction. When the Shepherd finished, he told my dad and mom, "Your son is okay, but he has not waked up."

Finally, Robert waked up and asked why we were crying. We were so glad he was fine, like nothing happened, and the guys said it was a miracle because he had died already.

Roberto is 18 years old now. After that day he didn't have asthma anymore. He is a healthy young man. He is studying and a little crazy sometimes but a good son and a good brother. We all think it was a miracle that he is alive today, and we are saying, "Thanks to God for everything."

Lourdes Aragon
Panama
April 20, 2004

A BEAUTIFUL WATERFALL

This is a description of one of many beautiful waterfalls found in my home town. It is called "El Salto del Agua." The source of the river is a waterfall located in a big mountain approximately 196 feet high. This falls attracts the attention of many tourists who are interested in seeing how the waterfall is used to produce electricity.

Next to the waterfall is a hydro-electric plant which is under the control of the Mexican Army.

When the water from the falls reaches the bottom, it spreads out and forms many deep, small pools that people like to swim in. Most of the time, the water is turquoise color, and it is very cold. During the rainy season, the waterfall is so strong it creates a fog, and you cannot see the landscape.

The vegetation around that waterfall gives the air a clean, fresh and pleasant fragrance which makes the view more beautiful.

Juana Devillier

Mexico

03/26/04

BEFORE

My mom and sister washed our clothes on a big stone in the river while we entertained ourselves playing in the water. When it began to get dark, we went to my house to eat dinner and after, to go to bed. All my brothers and sisters and I have many memories of our childhood, and we never will forget growing up in that small house on the beautiful river.

There, we spent most of our childhood until one day the water from the river came close to the house. That day it rained all day and all night. That night, we slept at the house, but the water continued to rise. I remember that night very well. When we slept, we could hear the noise of the river and the loud thunder. The water was only 20 feet from the room where we were sleeping.

The next morning, my papa arrived and told us that we must move to another house that he was building for us. It was very exciting to move because that house had electricity and running water. We all had fun moving and living in the new house.

The next week, my mama registered us at the new school. I made new friends, and I played basketball with them on my time off. I played this sport from the time I was 8 years old until I was 19. I was always excited to play this sport. I received many acknowledgements from the school for being an outstanding basketball player.

I would have liked to have been a basketball player, but my parents told me that I have to continue studying.

Juana Devillier
Mexico
05/4/04

SOME MEMORIES of my CHILDHOOD

I would like to tell a story of my parents and my childhood. I came from a small town named El Naranjo, S.L.P., Mexico. My town is located between the eastern and the western Sierra Madre mountains; it is in the valley. The only way to visit my town is by car. The population of this town is about 9,000 people. Many of the houses are built from pieces of wood, and the roofs are made of sheet metal. Some buildings are made of cement blocks. The downtown has many stores such as grocery stores, clothing stores, butcher shops and candy stores.

Most people know each other and are very friendly. On Sunday morning people like to go to church. When the service is over, the people are accustomed to buying paletas made of fruit or ice cream. They like to go to dinner at the restaurant with their family.

My downtown has a factory where sugar is processed and transported to other states in that republic. The factory is in production for seven months of the year. This factory is good for the economy because it gives a lot of people jobs. People are very poor, but they are very peaceful and happy.

Every summer families take the week of Easter to spend time with their family. Many people come from different places to visit the river. Families bring the young children to swim and play in the river. In the summer, the temperature is very hot. People bring a lot of food, drinks and of course, music. Every weekend in my town there is a party, a wedding, or a dance. These parties are celebrations with a lot of food such as Mexican mole, rice, tamales and of course, beer. Then the party people like to dance all night.

My parents told me that when I was born, they were very poor. They didn't have money to buy clothing for us. My mom made our own clothes. We were poor, but my parents told me we had a house to live where I had a lot of memories. I remember my papa told me how he and my uncle built the house. The roof was made of palm and the walls were made of adobe. The room where we slept had two beds. Three children slept in each bed, and my parents had their own room.

This house was far from the town and the school. We used to walk two miles from the house to school every morning. We ate breakfast before we went to school. In the afternoon my older sister helped us to do homework and helped my mother to cook and get us ready for bed. My mom did most of the cooking on the chimenea my father built for her. Our favorite food was beans and rice and fresh corn tortillas.

My parent's house was built along the river. I remember we learned to swim at a very young age. My mother did her laundry in the river. Along the river there was a big stone she used as a washing board. The source of the river came from a beautiful waterfall high up in the mountains.

Juana Devillier

Mexico

03/26/04

ESCAPE from VIETNAM

At 12:00 p.m., May 1, 1981, my mom, two sisters and I escaped from Vietnam. The boat was made of wood and was only 53 feet long and 13 feet wide. They were prepared to carry 53 people for 3 days. We used three small boats to bring people to the big boat, but when we heard a gun shot, we knew something had gone wrong and soldiers may come at any minute. We have to hurry up to get on the big boat. My brother-in-law told my uncle that we needed to bring the big boat close to the dock to get the people on quicker. We don't have time to use the small boats any more. When the big boat got close to the dock, all people started to jump on the boat. It made the boat almost sink because one side of the boat had more people than the other side. Finally, we have 83 people – 30 more people than the boat could hold. My uncle had to cut the ropes to get away from the dock to stop more people from getting on. They left the captain, some of the crew, supplies, and the maps to Pulau Bidong Island on the dock. The weight of the extra people made the boat set even lower in water.

By the fourth day, nobody had any idea where we are, and we had run out of food and water. We think about turning around and going back, but most people in the boat were against it because they didn't want to go to jail. Everybody in the boat was praying and hoping that a miracle would happen. We prayed to God to give us a sign what we should do. After one of our prayers, rain began to fall. We caught the rain in plastic sheets and poured it into cans; we got a total of twelve 5-gallon cans of water to drink.

The rain gave water to drink to continue the trip, but it also filled the boat with water and made it sink down lower in the sea. At that time, we stopped catching the water to put into the cans and started scooping the water in the boat back into the sea. We don't have a water pump. We have to take turns to do it by hand with a bucket. We do it for about five hours. When we get the water out of the boat, it would fill back up again. We realize that we have small leak somewhere in the boat, so we had to continue scooping the water for five more days until we got help.

After the rain started, at the same time, the wind started. It made the sea rough, and even small waves made the small, overcrowded boat very dangerous. We were afraid the boat would sink. We prayed again for God to help us. We saw two big black things floating on each side of the boat. We didn't know what it was, but we all thought it looked like two whales; they swam on each side of the boat. It happened like that until sunset.

We started to see a bright light in front. We all thought that we almost got to the land. We followed that bright light, but it took four more days until we came close. We realized that it wasn't the city but a rig platform; we ask them for help. They would only show us how to get to Pulau Bidong Island. We told them that if they didn't help us, we would die right there. We have no food, no water, no oil. We can't continue our trip. They decided to help. They tied our boat to the platform. The rope was about 100 feet long because they didn't want the boat to hit against the platform. They give us life jackets. The next morning, the big rescue boat came to bring all of us to the island.

The trip was made with no captain, and we lost all of the maps to show us the way to get to Pulau Bidong, the island that belongs to Malaysia. Our 3 day trip took 9 days on the ocean without enough food or water or oil, but 83 people got to the island safely.

Loan Doan

Vietnam

March 5, 2004

A TOURISM PLACE

Recife is an old city in Brazil; it is excellent for tourism. One very old, traditional place to see is called Patio de Sao Pedro. Around it there are some small old houses that are now stores, typical snack bars, and tourism offices. One of them was Emetur tourism; later it became Empetur.

Well, the boss asked his secretary to stay at work late because they were expecting 200 Americans from Georgia at night. She said, "I can come, but I need to bring my brother and a friend. Since we will be late finishing, it will be dangerous going home."

At night she was supposed to do many things: dance typical dances, serve drinks, and be sociable with the visitors. There was a very tall lady. When she offered her some coke, the lady looked down so proud and said, "No!" with a very snobbish face. Then the secretary thought, "Well, she will be thirsty later, and it will be my time!"

Later, the same lady said, "Would you give me a coke?" Because the lady had been so snobbish, the secretary said, "Just a moment" and then attended others. The lady said, "A coke, please." The secretary said, "Oh, one second." The lady, for the third time, said,

“Can you give me a coke?” The secretary said, “Oh, yes” and let her wait a little more. Finally, she gave her the coke. That time the lady was in her hand.

Another time, a boy from Recife asked loudly, “Your address. Your address in USA, please. Please!” The secretary had on different clothes, blond hair but not blue eyes. She said, “You want my address?” The boy answered, “Yes! Yes!” The secretary said, “Okay.” And gave him the address from Recife, the same town they were in. “Come on! You are not American?” She said, “Yes, I am from here!”

When they were all together, drinking and dancing, a beautiful girl with blue eyes, blond hair and freckles looks like an American girl. One day, the secretary was talking with such a girl. When the secretary observed that the girl had some trouble in speaking, stopping and thinking, she thought, “Hey! How can an American stop to speak English?” Suddenly, the secretary asked her, “Are you an American?” “No, I am from Portugal.” “So, I am Brazilian! Why are we talking in English? Let’s speak in Portuguese.” “Oh, yes,” she said. “Cool.” What a funny night!

Cristina X. Dore

Brazil

May 4, 2004

DIVINE INTERVENTION

A long time ago, there were some friends in a big rich house. There were about 35 children who used to study together, and in their free time, they had a club and meetings. Ana and Cristina were good friends. One fun thing they used to play was to act out movies on TV like Batman, Lost in Space, and so on...

Ana was the boss. The big house belonged to her parents. They had some good snacks. The best one was when they got that delicious bread with condensed milk on it. One day in the doll's house, there were a lot of rolls of toilet paper – more than 50 packages. All of the children decided to play with them. As in the carnival, they would throw them one against the other. At the end of the evening, her dad arrived from work. Oh My!! They had to roll all of the papers back in the little roll.

Well, the time passed by. Ana and Cristina grew up. One day they stopped talking to each other for no good reason. But Cristina did not like to be in that situation for a long time. Because she missed her friend. One night, she asked Saint Fatima to help her to become friends again. “Tell me something or show me something as a sign so that I will be friends again with Ana. We are teenagers now so there is no more reason to be like this,” she said.

Well, she prayed before sleeping. At the middle of the night, she felt something different. The robe that she hung on the door – was disorganized, but at that time, it was not. She looked. There was a soft light around it. And the robe was in a Saint shape. Amazing!!

She touched her eyes to be sure she was not sleeping or dreaming. She looked again. The robe was in a perfect shape of a Saint – pressing her hands together, a lovely face looking down, in her light blue robe. Into the room that good sensation of peace, all light so soft as her shape. Well, the next day, she woke up and the first thing she looked at was her robe. Sure enough. It was in a complete mess on the door.

After that, she went to the beach. When she got there, she saw Ana with her boyfriend, very near her. She remembered Saint Fatima's message and went on and asked: "Ana, let's talk again. We are no more children. Come on. We are still good friends, yes?" She answered, "Yes. By the way this is my boyfriend." And they kept on being friends until now.

Cristina X. Dore

Brazil

May 4, 2004

MOTHER and FATHER

Usually all of us only think about how great our parents are after they die! I had a mother who taught me many things and how to be polite. Sometimes I asked her why? Now-a-days, some people do not recognize this as a good thing. So I feel bad.

After I grew up and had children, I could see how difficult it is to be a mother. Only now I can see so many responsibilities around. My mother even taught me how to educate my stomach, in front of a big meal or a small meal, in a rich house or in a poor one. I feel the same. "Accept them with education, dear," she said.

My mother and I had different thoughts, but we were friends. This was especially true one month before she died. She was older; she seemed more like my grandmother. She loved to see me dancing or playing my guitar. My mother told me she had some different dolls, like I had. She loved dolls! She was a very energetic person, just like me. She used to dance with all of her sons. She did not tell me so much about her family – only that I had a Chinese and a Portuguese grandparent. I wish she had told me more, but today I realize how great she was. She was a happy woman, a mother, with a good body for her age of 81! Oh, my! God bless her.

My father was so happy when I was born because I was a girl. He was a very important artist in my city, state, and country. For all people all over the world, it is important to

know about the culture. He had all in his pictures; some places that do not exist anymore!

My father was a very funny person too. He never showed his age; he seemed to be younger than he really was. He gave a good lesson in life: 'If you have a roof to live under, if you have dignity, if you pay your bills, if you respect a woman – I mean do not spank her – if you have enough to live on, you are rich! Even if your neighbor has more than you do, you are rich. I try to do the same.

My father gave me his artistic blood. I am the only one who got his talents, but I am realist, not neo classic like him.

My father was a normal person, but a great artist! He had his paintings all over the world like Europe, France, USA, Africa, Japan and Australia. I am really trying to maintain him in the media. I wish one day to get a beautiful exhibit for his work with people who appreciate the arts as I promised him, the last day I saw him in the box! I will do it for sure. My father can die in body, but not in the World of Art.

Cristina X. Dore
Brazil
May 4, 2004

CHILDHOOD MEMORIES

How many times have I recalled these childhood situations? I can laugh about it now, but at the time, I was unhappy, surprised, distracted, awed, afraid, and sometimes, scared to death. I don't remember dates, but I remember places, words, and actions. The memories written on this paper do not have an order in time, but they happened as they are described.

One of the rules at home was "Eat only three times a day." One day I would like to eat something sweet. I didn't have money, and the only foods in the house were powdered milk, sugar and coffee. The other foods were bought every day. It was in the afternoon when my stepmother usually took a nap, and I saw the opportunity to eat something I liked so much – powdered milk mixed with sugar. I decided to mix it and eat it. I took the food and hid behind the door. I ate as fast as I could; my mouth was full, like a balloon. Unexpectedly, my stepmother caught me; she was very angry. I screamed loud and the powdered milk and sugar spewed out of my mouth onto my stepmother's face. In trying to deny what I was doing, it kept spewing everywhere. I could not drink milk in my coffee for two weeks.

Every Sunday we had to take the garbage from the house to the beach. In the place where we lived, all nights were dark nights. One of my brothers used to play jokes. He stayed behind us and when we were about four blocks from our home, he screamed loudly and said, "It is somebody dead." Nobody saw nothing. My brothers and sisters and I dropped the garbage on the street and ran like athletes and got home in a few minutes breathing heavily. My heart was beating and we couldn't sleep well thinking about how to tell it to our stepmother because we couldn't come back to carry the garbage to the beach.

In the morning before school, we had to go with shovels and brooms to pick up the garbage in cans and go to drop it on the beach. When we share this memory, we laugh a lot, remembering how we ran, who came first, how we were afraid, what each one showed on his/her face and so on.

In 1958, when the dictator's government finished, the Venezuelan people were so excited, especially in the prisons. Two blocks from home, it was the Model Prison. My oldest sister wanted to know what was happening there and had me go with her. About ten minutes after we arrived to the street in front of the prison, we heard a gust of shooting. My sister's reaction was to tell me and drop me into a big can of trash. I was there a short time, but I felt it was a long time. I said to myself, "I am dead, I am dead." For a long time, I did not pass close to that prison.

Carmen Ferrer
Venezuela
March 16, 2004

MY FAMILY IS REALLY LARGE

The word “family” in my country includes parents, children, grandparents, aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, cousins, brothers and sisters-in-law. Families in Venezuela are usually large. But my family is really large. I can say that the main part of the family (parents and children) is already large. We are one father, about 5 mothers and twenty-five children. Seventeen of us know each other. My father married twice. There were five children in the first marriage and 12 in the second.

We lived together for about fourteen years, sharing home and rules. Time after time, the first five children changed stepmothers as my father changed his mind, but we always came back to his second wife. We did not live in opulence; however, we had food, clothes, and a home (with very strict limitations, but we had them). Naturally, some differences were evident. My stepmother treated us like girl servants. By the time we were four or five years old, we learned to clean the house, cook, wash and iron clothes, and take care of her children like a mother would. The boys had to do the men’s work of cleaning the yard, taking out the garbage, and taking care of my father’s business.

As time passed, there were a lot of cultural differences. They used to enjoy parties, festivities, jokes, entertainment, just being happy and not going to school. We preferred to study and think about our future. We liked to hear how they talked using the regional language but not to talk like them. We never liked to participate in political situations as they did. They prefer the country; we prefer cities. They don’t care about rules in families; we do. But one thing is true, we love each other, and we accept how each of us is and behave. They are very nice, and a day with them is a really, really enjoyable time.

Carmen Ferrer
Venezuela
March 16, 2004

WITH REVOLUTIONARY BLOOD

In November 1910, the Mexican Revolution started. It was a civil war between the federal government, controlled by Venustiano Carranza who was president of Mexico, and the civil army, with its leader Emiliano Zapata. Zapata won the combat finally overthrowing the president in this way.

I have chosen this theme because independently this was a victory to change the history of my country. I wanted to share with you the near experiences in this event. I shall talk about my grandfather and my grandmother, so I'm going to start with my grandfather. He was 12 years old when the revolution began. One day someone knocked at the door. Immediately, when his father opened the door, he saw Emiliano Zapata. Coming in, Zapata told them that he was taking away to the war all those who were from 12 years old up. Of course, my grandfather had to go. He received a shotgun and a little training. He never told us how many people he killed. Surely there were too many. He had to kill to live.

He never drank beer because he remembered, in the revolutionary times, when the horses urinated, he had to put his hat under them to catch their urine to drink.

For my grandmother, it was similar. She told us that one day someone knocked at the door, but her father knew the situation so he hid his sons. He was the only one to go with Zapata in the civil army. After, someone else knocked at the door for getting boys to go to the war. But it wasn't Zapata this time; it was the federal army. The mother had to deliver her sons. My grandmother had her father in the civil army and her brothers in the federal army. She never saw her family again. My grandmother said that when she moved to another place, she used to see the dead and the blood everywhere.

I think it was very hard for the children to live in those times. I can't imagine what they felt if their fathers or brothers died.

Ulises Flores
Mexico
April 23, 2004

FIRST FLIGHT to AMERICA

I want to tell you the story about my first flight to America 25 years ago. My husband and I were in the airplane about 10 hours. We flew from Moscow to New York. We were very excited to see new country! My husband knew English very well, but it was British English, and he didn't have practice in English with Americans. I didn't know English at all because in my school and in the University, I studied German. We were sitting and enjoying the beautiful sunrise through the window of the airplane and then we saw a man who asked, "Can I take a picture?" My husband didn't answer him because he didn't understand the question. I didn't understand the question because I didn't know English, but I understood the body language. I saw the man who held a camera, looked at the window, and said something. I shook my head up and down which was the answer "Yes," and he took a picture. We laughed because I answered the question without knowing a word of English!

Albina Kaydash
Russia
March 08, 2004

I WILL BE HAPPY

I want to tell the story which I heard from my friend.

An elderly lady is moving to the Nursing Home. She is waiting for her room. The nurse tells her that she will like her room because it looks cozy with the peach colored walls, the beautiful furniture, and the nice window view. Mrs. John says, "Oh! I love it!" Another lady asks her, "How do you know you will love the room if you don't see it?" Mrs. John answers, "I can choose to love it or to hate it. It is not about how the furniture is arranged in the room. It is how I arrange my mind."

I like this story and try to arrange my mind to love many things in my life.

Albina Kaydash
Russia
March 08, 2004

OVERCOMING ILLNESS

I want to tell the story about my overcoming illness. Around 5 years ago, I felt a terrible pain in my abdomen when I was ready to go to bed. I decided to go to bed and sleep and hope that the pain would go away. I couldn't sleep; the pain grew stronger and stronger. Finally, I couldn't stay in bed, and I called Emergency. I suspected that I had appendicitis and understood it was serious. When the doctor came in my house to examine me, she said I had to go to the hospital because I needed surgery. It was night time and my son slept. I decided to wait until morning because I didn't want my son to stay alone at home. I signed a piece of paper that I stayed at home because it was my choice. I was wrong. The pain was so strong I called my mother-in-law and asked her to come and stay with my son and called Emergency again.

When I came to the hospital, the doctor said that I need the surgery immediately. They put me on the table; I was so exhausted because of the pain I wanted this surgery, but before they gave me anesthetic, the nurse came to the room and said, "Stop." She explained to the surgeon that another woman had heavy bleeding and may die if they didn't take her on the table immediately. "Oh, no!" I screamed inside, "Why me?" But I am a doctor, and I know how dangerous it is to hesitate with bleeding. They asked me to wait, and they didn't give me the pain killer injection because the pain was a symptom of my condition.

I waited in another room laying on the table hearing the o'clock. The pain was terrible and I counted every minute I waited. I prayed all the time asking God to help me not to be angry with the woman with bleeding. I was so happy when I saw her after surgery and I didn't hate her. I asked God to help her recover. It was a difficult time in my life, but thanks to God I went through this.

Albina Kaydash
Russia
March 12, 2004

The PASSION of the CHRIST

Last Sunday I watched a Mel Gibson film, The Passion of the Christ. Everyone told me that it is a powerful film which must be seen. This movie showed the final excruciating hours of Jesus' life.

When I watched the movie, I cried all the time. Sometimes I closed my eyes because the big suffering of Jesus made me feel overwhelmed emotionally. It was so deep the silence in the theatre. Nobody ate popcorn; nobody spoke. Suddenly, I understood that I needed to change my point of view.

I needed to think about the unconditional love which God showed us through Jesus Christ' life and resurrection. It helped me to watch the movie to the end. After watching The Passion of the Christ, I feel as if I have actually been there.

I recommend everyone, not only Christians, watch this movie.

Albina Kaydash
Russia
March 19, 2004

ANGRY SQUIRREL

We moved to a new house last summer. Our bedroom is on the second floor, and through the windows, I can see a big, sweet, green-olive tree with small, white flowers and a beautiful smell. Birds love this tree very much. Every morning when I wake up, I enjoy the different melodies of the birds.

One day I woke up and heard a strange, loud noise. I saw a squirrel on the sill of my window. The squirrel jumped from the window to the tree and continued to make a sound like it is angry or something. It was a pretty long time when the squirrel jumped from the tree to the window and looked like she was 'speaking' to me. It was funny and strange at the same time. I spoke with my neighbor and she said the man who lived in this house had a bird feeder on the second floor, and the squirrel came to him too. I decided to buy a bird feeder too, but I was so busy and day by day I postponed shopping for it until I heard the squirrel again. I was ashamed because she asked me to feed her, but I didn't have time to buy the bird feeder.

I bought the bird feeder the next day, and now I enjoy seeing how the birds eat. Small birds are so busy, so fragile, so afraid of everything; cardinals (the red bird) are very proud and beautifully bright. The birds sing very heartily. Sometimes the squirrel comes and eats from my birdfeeder too and doesn't make angry sounds anymore.

Albina Kaydash
Russia
May14, 2004

FAMOUS RUSSIAN SINGER

Just after the Russian revolution in the 1920s, the famous Russian singer Feodor Shalyapin spent some years abroad and sang in different theaters all over the world. His unique bass voice attracted people; they enjoyed his voice and his demeanor on the stage.

Feodor Shalyapin missed Russia very much. He was very excited when he came from the train in Moscow and saw Moscow with all of the people swirling around. He had many pieces of luggage around him. First, he held up his arms and said: "O, Mother Russia, your son came back!" Then he looked down and didn't see his luggage.

He said, "O, Mother Russia, I recognize you right now."

Albina Kaydash
Russia
May 21, 2004

THE ESCAPE from KINDERGARTEN

I remember one story from my childhood. I was 4 years old and went to kindergarten. My house was located near the kindergarten and every morning on the way to kindergarten, I was thinking how to escape from there and play at home with my friends. One day my friend and I found the time after breakfast and ran. I remember how I was afraid and how big were the cars on the road which we needed to cross and how dangerous every adult looked. We decided to go to my house and hide behind the wardrobe which was setting across the corner of the room.

Someone called from kindergarten to our parents and told them of our escape from kindergarten. Our parents gathered together in my house in the same room where we hid. They discussed what they needed to do and our mothers started to cry. We were so afraid, and we started to cry also. They found us and were so happy! We smiled and cried at the same time. We were not punished and felt a big relief and the happiness because it was the end of the story.

Albina Kaydash
Russia
March 26, 2004

FUNNY STORY

This story I heard from a friend of mine. I think it is so fine that I wanted to share the words with someone.

The story is about an English study class in Houston, Texas. Everybody in the group is learning English. One day, the class went on a trip to have lunch at MacDonalds to improve their English.

Everyone ordered the food as usual, and one student had so much confidence that he could do it well, he couldn't wait for his turn to order. Finally, his turn came; he was ready and started by saying, "I want a hamburger with no meat, no mayo, and no cheese." The cashier asked him, "Are you a vegetarian?" He replied, "No, I am Korean."

Tiffany Kim
Korea
May 04, 2004

A FUNNY STORY about ENGLISH and SPANISH

Always, you can find funny stories about the English. This happens a lot of the time when the immigrants come to the United States and they no speak English.

I remember one time we went to the Albertsons, and my friend asked for stamps, but he didn't speak in English. He asked the clerk for 'sellos.' But the clerk, she does not understand. She say, "What?" One more time, he repeated in Spanish and he say very slowly 'sellos,' but the clerk never understand. When I come, I saw what was going on, and I told him the clerk will never understand, no matter how slow you say word in Spanish. You must say word in English. I said to clerk in English what he wanted and finally he went home happy with the stamps.

Carlos Menendez
Cuba
March 5, 2004

MY STUDENT LIFE

In my student life, I had many experiences, but the best experience was when I gave classes to an 8th grade group, during my practice teaching in chemistry. I had the opportunity to share with many teenagers, know their problems and how they think.

In every class, they showed interest in each experiment that I made for the class. They liked the chemistry class and always paid attention. Sometimes when I didn't want to give class, that day we would talk about the society problems and their opinions. We laughed a lot and passed some funny moments during those 45 minutes of class. They were good students, always obtained high scores on the tests, and participated in all classes.

I think that this was a good experience that I will never forget.

Carlos Menendez
Cuba
March 26, 2004

POLITICAL CONFLICTS

From 1960, the United States kept a repressive political blockade against Cuba with the objective of putting an end to the Castro dictatorship. For more than 40 years the politics are the same and Castro is still in power. The Americans cannot visit Cuba, and they cannot spend money in Cuba. It is illegal and the penalties are high if they find any American traveling in Cuba without a Treasury Department License.

Therefore, many Americans travel to Cuba across another country. The situation with Cuba is the same. Castro is still there, and the conflicts between these two countries increase every year. With each new president of the United States, the Americans' travel freedoms are violated and the Cuban people's freedoms too. It looks like nothing will change between these countries that in the past were good friends.

Carlos Menendez
Cuba
March 12, 2004

DON'T FORGET THEIR FACES

Do you remember clearly the face of the person that was sitting next to you the last time you flew or took a ride on a bus or a train? I don't, and most of the people I surveyed did not. The following story occurred a week ago

After a hectic two-day visit to Denver, Mary boarded a Continental flight en route to Houston. Everything was business as usual at 39,000 feet; beverages and snacks had been served; some passengers napped while others watched the featured movie or did some work on their laptops. Two hours had passed into the flight when the captain's chime sounded on the plane's public announcement system. "That was fast; time ran quickly this morning," thought Mary, cheerfully anticipating the final approach and landing. But she was wrong.

"Ladies and gentlemen, I want your undivided attention!" The captain proceeded to describe an arising emergency situation and urged the passengers to remain calm and follow the special instructions. It turned out that one of the front, landing gear tires shredded off at take off in Denver. Although an unusual situation, most planes and this 737 in particular have two wheels attached to the front landing gear; that was something Mary knew since her father is a pilot. She was worried but in some way confident the plane would touch down safely relying on the remaining one. However, things were worse than she thought.

The captain let everybody know that presumably a fraction of rubber stemming from the wrecked tire was flung forcefully hitting the adjacent tire and caused it to burst. Bottom line: the plane did not have front wheels, and it would have to land soon. As the rest of the 133 passengers, Mary was instructed to assume crash position and remove her high heel shoes. The flight attendants swept off purses, handbags and electronics that could harm an eventual evacuation.

One last command before hitting the ground came from the cockpit: look at the passengers on both sides of your seat, memorize their faces in the unlikely situation your help would be needed to identify other bodies should this impasse result in a tragic situation. Mary says that's the last thing she remembers until several minutes elapsed, and the plane landed stopping in the middle of the tarmac among humming ambulances and firefighting units. In the end, there was no fire, no injuries or fatalities, but for sure, Mary will never forget the faces of those people in the next seats.

Gustavo Pena
Columbia
May 7, 2004

WHEN CURIOSITY PAYS OFF

I am a 'last name' buff, I must confess. Every time I am introduced to new people, if they meet my standards of coolness, the question pops up right after 'the names' exchange: "I guess O'Hara is Irish, isn't it?" Or "Pinski, ah, that sounds Polish and Jewish or maybe it's Polish Catholic, isn't it?" In many cases people corroborate my suspicions, yet occasionally someone, puzzled or stunned by the question, just says, "I certainly don't know." Socially correct or not, the truth is this mania helped me get my first professional job in the U.S.

It was the end of another day working as a waiter at an Italian restaurant in Miami; it was almost 10 p.m. I was exhausted and just counting the minutes to close down and run home to bed. But in came a couple of middle-aged people, a man and a woman, very business-type looking. I took their order; they ate, drank a bottle of wine, and asked for the check close to midnight. After swiping their credit card on the reader, I pulled the voucher and tucked it into the jacket, but a detail caught my attention.

Back at the table, I was just about to begin the habitual, smiling, thank-you-come-back-soon dance, but before that, the question almost stormed out of my mouth:

"Goytisolo...are you by any chance family of the writer?"

"Sure, he is my cousin," the woman said, "do you know about him?"

"Of course, he is very popular in Latin America," I replied.

"Where are you from?"

“I’m from Colombia; I’m a journalist and had the chance of knowing a couple of things about your cousin.”

“Well, since you’re a journalist, I guess you write in Spanish...”

“Yes, I do. Actually my last job in Colombia before moving here was at a newspaper.”

“Look, my name is Joisie. I’m the Chairman and CEO of a new Internet Portal called Divina.com, which will be oriented to women, Latino women specifically, and we’re looking for writers in Spanish...” She continued talking, but I wasn’t listening because my heartbeat was so loud and strong that it blew me off. I couldn’t believe that my long-sought chance was finally arriving at the most unsuspected place.

Joisie gave me her assistant’s phone number and prompted me to call her, which I did; I met her for lunch, and two weeks later, I had quit the restaurant and found me working as a writer with a much better salary, benefits and a wide-open world of contacts and possibilities ahead.

Gustavo Pena
Colombia
May 14, 2004

OVERCOMING ADVERSITY

My journey to the U.S. began in September 2003 with a sad farewell, warm memories and tears in my mother's eyes. The first country I arrived was Paraguay. I remember that cold night. My first experience and most upsetting moment was coming up. The customs officer asked for my passport and told me that my visa was fake. I stayed at the airport until the next day until they could find out everything about it. They finally released me with no excuses – not even an “I'm sorry.”

Someone was supposed to be expecting me and pick me up at the airport. He finally showed up late and to make matters worse, he told me he could not help me with my plans. But fortunately someone else did. I overcame so many terrible situations: homesickness, nightmares, sleeping on the floor, living and dealing with strange people.

I continued my journey to Guatemala. I was welcomed by a beautiful and lovely family. After that my new country was Mexico; I traveled all over Mexico by car and bus. My dreams to get to the U.S. were about to come true. When I crossed the International Bridge, I entered on U.S. immigrant authority. I was so happy when I requested and was granted Political Asylum. I am so grateful as well even though I miss my family and friends.

Living in a new country is like seeing the world through a wrong pair of glasses: new culture, new customs, new friends, new job and a great chance to have the experience to still grow up as a person, a soul. Not to mention how well you can be prepared to face life and its challenges.

Ernesto Quevedo
Cuba
March 15, 2004

THE FIRE

It was at the end of the year 1992 – exactly December 31st. My family was preparing dinner to celebrate and give a warm welcome to the New Year. My brother-in-law was in charge of cooking, but when he lighted the kerosene cooker, he didn't notice there was a leak with kerosene dripping out. All of a sudden, the cooker exploded causing a big fire. I was at work, and on my way home, I could see the smoke, all the people, and hear the fire truck's noise.

When I got home, the fire was over. My mother told me that some people had helped and others took things on the way out and never put them back. To make matters worse, the walls, the roof, and a lot of things were destroyed.

I remember the annoying smell of the fire all around the house, the way my mother's face looked, and suddenly, everything was gone with the wind. We had to start all over again.

It was rough at the beginning, but we finally overcame this situation by working harder to replace and provide what the house required.

You must be wondering if the house had insurance, but the funny thing is that we don't have house insurance in Cuba. Indeed, it was a terrible experience for all of the family members.

Ernesto Quevedo
Cuba
March 19, 2004

INTROSPECTION

Becoming a writer was the biggest surprise life has given me. A lot of hard events made this happen and a desperate need to understand what was taking place inside myself.

‘The purpose of life’ is like a riddle that most of the time we can’t figure out the answer to. Reading what I’ve written makes me awake and alive to believe there is a life out there waiting for us. There are opportunities, challenges, experiences. There is also pain and sorrow. But I think this is just part of it, and sometimes it helps our soul to become stronger and full of experience. There’s more than flesh and blood in our bodies; there is something that you can’t touch, but you can feel it no matter what you call it. Let’s join our hearts together in one prayer for life and say hello to our souls.

Ernesto Quevedo
Cuba
April 30, 2004

RANDOM THOUGHTS

I'm having a rough time trying to find the right adjectives to provide the best words to describe my parents and other parents around the world. They brought us into this beautiful world and take care of us until we can manage to make our own way. Parents are the light and the leaders of the path. They tell us that we have wings and how to use them; we really can fly. Not to mention, they are the best friends we ever have.

Their job is to support us, to feed us and to lead us. It's priceless. All the love, compassion, tenderness they give us is something that we carry with us for the rest of our life. It's a memory that is always with us and never fades away. There is no more pleasant or deeper feeling than a hug from a mother or father. I worship them as much as I worship God. God bless all parents around the world.

Ernesto Quevedo
Cuba
March 15, 2004

THE ENTRANCE EXAMINATION for COLLEGE

In China, it is said 'hard in easy out' to express how difficult to enter higher education, but if you once get in to college, that means you will have good future. Only one of ten students can go to college to continue his education. It is a dream for every student to get higher education.

My parents knew that their daughter was a little smart girl but not diligent. They always say: if you study hard a little bit, you would have totally different life. Much study would have much stress, but I think my parents had more stress than me. Actually they didn't say too much word to me, and just let me do my best.

The day of publish a list of successful applicants is about a month after the entrance examination for college. In the company of my parents, I returned to my senior high school to see how many total scores I got. I was afraid to know I didn't reach the line to enter college, so I didn't like to see the list. My father went to the office building by himself and left my mother and me outside to wait the news. After a few minutes, my father come out of building with a smile, I knew I must be above the line. I rushed into the building excited and searched for my name on the list on the board. After found my name, I shout out in crazy sound: I got it, I got it. When my mom saw me come out building running to her, she said nothing just smile that her daughter already grew up and will leave her to go to other city independently.

Nobody like person have a good life more than his parents. My parents just want me do my best for everything that I have to do, but never give me too much stress. In China, the entrance examination for college is one of biggest stresses to the family that have growing-up children. The stress of entering college is not only to parents but also to student. There are students who commit suicide before the entrance examination every year; they can't stand the stress come from family and school. They not know how to do if they don't enter college. I appreciate my parent's give me the opportunity of getting more education and not any stress.

Songfeng Yang
China
March 5, 2004

I AM A MAP

When we talked about the map in our class last week, a song floated out of my mind, "I'm a map. I'm a map", that was sung by a map in the "Dora the explorer"---a cartoon series.

Sure, I am a map, a live map that can direct the way in real-time for my husband. He is short the sense of direction. If we need to go somewhere, we have to locate the place on the map or use the yahoo maps to search it on the Internet and print it out at first. It is very strange to me that every street's name look like even can't get its pronunciation sometime. Once we went to San Antonio to visit my friend; the streets almost made me crazy with those names so long and odd. Finally my friend told me those are German.

Then, when my husband drives, I must tell him make left or right turn at the point where we need to make the turn. When we came back, I have to tell him again how to go that he can't remember how he came ten minutes before. Sometime, in our familiar street, we missed the right road we should take. I need check the map as quickly as possible and tell him how to go so we can return to right way, a few turns may make him faint.

My husband is a good driver except no sense of direction, and I am a good director except can't drive. I got my training driver's license more than two years ago but did not get formal license yet. I don't know why I am scared to drive; maybe my husband is too severe for the mistakes I make when I drive.

Therefore, we are a couple that matches each other. We take our son and drive our second-hand car to go everywhere. Pensacola beach is the farthest place we have been to. We have visited the Alabama ship, the navy museum and so on, on the way back. Houston, San Antonio, Austin give us not only the beautiful view of city, but also the landscape of the traveling way.

We love to travel. Our car is our courser, my husband is our chauffeur and I am a map.

Songfeng Yang
China
03/11/04

COOKING NOODLES FOR DINNER

Noodle is the most popular kind of food in China because of its easy cooking. Depending on the degree of your industry, you can make many kinds of sauce. The easy way is just putting ready serve sauce in your noodle and eating it. According to your flavor, you can choose from the supermarket, but it is not healthy. If you like fresh and healthy food to serve, then cook the sauce by yourself.

Green bean sauce is my favorite. While the water boils in the pan, I pick, clean and cut/chop green beans into little cubes. Pour a half-cup of vegetable oil into a clean fry pan heated in the oven. When the oil is heated enough, put ground pork in the pot and stir it. After the meat is brown, add green onion and green bean to meat, stir it continually. After a while, add salt, soybean sauce, water and put the lid on the fry pan, boiling a few minutes. When the water disappears and the green bean is tender, turn off the oven, add a little bit of chicken powder, stir it, and it is done. At the same time, the noodles should be done in the boiling water of another pan. After putting the noodles in the bowl, ladle some green bean sauce over it, and serve it. It is yummy.

After a long time cooking and quickly eating, it is time for work nobody likes but have to do--clean dishes. Luckily, sometimes my husband may help me. He wash, scrub, rinse dishes and put them in the dish rack where the water drains away. And I clean the table, put the leftovers into containers that are put into the refrigerator. Put the cleaned pans into the counter and boil a pot of water to make tea. Time for relaxation.

Songfeng Yang

China

03/19/04

PRONUNCIATION

Every language has its rules about pronunciation. In Chinese, it doesn't matter how long the pronunciation of the character is, in a certain sentence it has the same meaning. But in English, the word will have a different meaning if it is pronounced with a long vowel or a short vowel. For example, "I have a ship" means I have a kind of boat. But if I say "I have a sheep," it means I have an animal.

Once I had a chat with my American friend. After I said she had beautiful eyes, she told me never to say that again. I asked why? I thought she should thank me for my praiseful words. She said she knew what I want to express, but I had wrong pronunciation. "Eyes" sounds like "ass," not good word for polite person to say. How shamed I am.

When I speak English, I always like speaking quickly, even forget the rule of its pronunciation. Some words, when I speak them, should be pronounced as a long vowel, others should be short, and that can be confusing. If the words are pronounced in the wrong way, not only do we express wrong meaning, but also may let another misunderstand and be insulted.

Songfeng Yang
China
03/15/04

THE MEMORY of CHILDHOOD

I can't remember the actual age I was, maybe 4 or 5, maybe 6 or 7, but it was when I knew how to use scissors perfectly.

That was a busy age for the adults in what was called the Cultural Revolution. When I was a child, my parents went to work in the daytime and had to go to meetings for instructing proletariat thought every night except Saturday every week. Nobody took care of my little sister and me every night, although we were not more than 7 years old. My parents just left us at home or sometime sent us in the neighborhood to play with another girl who was of similar age with me.

Once, on a summer evening, we three girls played at her home without adult care. After a long playtime, we felt scared but I forget why when I try to remember today. We really wanted to go outside and were afraid to stay in the house one more minute. At that time, we felt outside was safer than inside of house. The door was locked by that girl's parents when they left; the window was opened but there was a window screen made of iron on the window so that fresh air can pass through but mosquitoes can not. No way was provided for us to go outside. I was the oldest one, and I should find an avenue to save us. I found a big pair of scissors in the toolbox and tried to snip the iron window screen. It was not an easy job for a little girl. It took a long time for me to get a small slit in the window screen. The slit was too small and narrow to let us get outside. The only thing left to do was cry. Nobody knew how much time passed; we heard the door unlock, and the parents came back. The savior came and no more fear. After a long time passed, my neighbor laughed at my timidness still and said that it was me who let the mosquitoes go into her house to bit her.

In China, we leave the child at home and nobody cares how old he (she) is. Even today somebody might leave her 4-year-old girl at home. Because in summer vacation there is no school or childcare, and the parents have to go to work. It is normal to leave the children at home alone in China. After we came here, my friends often tell us, don't leave David at home alone; it is illegal in America.

Songfeng Yang
China
03/26/04

ALL-NIGHT-SLEEP is a KIND of HAPPINESS

It is very normal for a person to be awaked by certain noises in the night. It is heard frequently that somebody complained the racket woke him up from a dream.

When I just had a baby, I felt terribly tired every day even though I got help from my mother. Every night, when I laid down on the bed, I could feel the sore and aches fill my body, and I'd rather not move any more. But it is impossible. I need to change my baby's diaper and nurse him when he cries in the night. We rarely use one-off (throw-away) diapers. We used cloth diapers instead because one-off diapers are too expensive for us, unless we were in a situation where it was not easy to change diapers often. For example, we went shopping. When my baby felt cold or hungry, he would cry. The pee-pee made his diaper wet, and his stomach was empty. He needed a diaper change and to be fed. The sound of crying was the signal that he wanted me. Until he was grown up to almost one year old, he may be awake 6 or 7 times a night. I complained to my mom that I had no good sleep through the night and no energy for the day work. Which day would be end? But my mom didn't think my baby cried so many times because the sound too low to be heard by others who slept next door.

One morning, my family talked about the loud thunder and rain of last night that lasted such a long time and made them wake up and not go back to sleep immediately. I was surprised that I never heard any sound of thunder or rain, but I only remembered I woke up many times because of my baby crying even far lower than the thunder. I was so tired that I couldn't hear anything when I slept, but the sound the baby made, even so low that it couldn't be heard by others, would be another kind of thunder for me that made me worry about whether he felt comfortable or not when he slept.

The days I can't sleep well at night have finished. Although sometimes my boy may ask me to go to the bathroom with him in the night. It is good for me that I can sleep almost all night.

Songfeng Yang
China
04-05-04

IS CAKE FOR BREAKFAST?

Once I babysat a three-year-old boy; I fed him cake for breakfast. When I told his mom about his breakfast, she was wonder-struck. She said cake wasn't for breakfast; it had too much sugar. After that, she talked to her friends about me, and everybody laughed at me. I wondered why cake can't be eaten at breakfast; is it only because of too much sugar? I know many foods have much sugar but are eaten at breakfast: doughnuts with icing, pancakes with syrup, muffins and waffles and so on. Why can these foods be eaten at breakfast; nobody can answer me.

In China, of course, we can eat cake at breakfast. On the other hand, there isn't so much sugar in any food. I never ate so sweet foods before I came to America. The year before last, my mom came here to visit us, and her first sentence was not a greeting but "you have to go on a diet." When I was a little girl, I was too skinny, and my mom wished me to become a little bit stout. But when she saw me, I exceeded her imagination. It is sugar's fault.

After a long time, I figured out why American people don't eat cake at breakfast. The reason is that cake is a kind of dessert only eaten after meals. Maybe yes, maybe not.

Songfeng Yang
China
04/19/04

THE MEMORY of NEW YEAR

Many pleasant childhood memories still remain in my mind and give me a warm sense till today. My hometown is a new industry city located in northeast of China that has half-year winter. One hour by train, far away from the city I lived in, is a town where my grandparents lived. My sister and I were willing to be there every vacation and holiday. The happiest time of all year was the Chinese New Year.

The white snow around the house, the food smell filled the air, the red firework pieces on the ground and the red lanterns twinkled in the shades of night, all of these gave me warm memory although in the chill winter.

At the New Year's Eve, the whole family sat around the big table. That meant a banquet for me. At that time, all kinds of delicious foods were brought from kitchen filled by vapor. The sound of fireworks came from outside with children laughing, the red money grandparents and relatives gave to children meant wishing little children never grow-up. All of these memories only live in my heart, but never come again.

Songfeng Yang
China
March 2, 2004

A PATRIOT -- MY FATHER

In 1930, the Japanese invaded and occupied northeast China and spread forward into southwest China. At the time, my father belonged to a resistance group. Their targets were to assassinate the Japanese high-level officials, bomb the Japanese gunpowder storehouses, bomb the Japanese headquarters, and spread leaflets from the top of the highest building in the city. The leaflets will awaken the people to unite and resist the Japanese. The Japanese were very frightened of this patriotic group. They looked for the group everywhere.

In 1943, my father was arrested by the Japanese. They sent him to Beijing from Tenjing and put him in Beijing's military jail. In jail, they beat his whole body with a leather belt. After the beating, they bound him on a board. They covered his nose and mouth with a wet towel. Then they poured chilly water until he couldn't breath. He died.

Next day, my mom went to the military jail to see my dad. The Japanese told her my dad had died already and been sent to the Police Hospital. My mom hurried to the hospital. The hospital's leader – a Chinese – told her, “He died last night. Now put in the corpse storage. You can see.” My mom entered the corpse storage and found my dad. She cried and called his name. She couldn't believe he was dead. So in her grief, she called his name over and over again.

Then, a miracle appeared. My father's finger started to move; his eyes gradually opened! He is alive!! Thank God! He is alive! Then the hospital's leader ordered my dad sent into a special sickroom – a single room for political criminals. Three days later, my dad told me, when the Japanese poured the chilly water on him, he couldn't breathe and his lung felt broken. He lost feeling like sleeping; he fainted. Little by little, he felt he was walking in a dark place. He walked and walked and walked. Suddenly he heard someone call his name. It sounded very familiar – my mom. So he followed the sound and turned back. He is awakened.

About one year later, he is released. Before he leave the police hospital, the hospital's leader told my dad, "I send you a gift. This is a friendship's symbol between you and me! This is a little bottle of very powerful poison. The Japanese official gave it to me to put in your medicine, but I didn't. Now I give it to you to make a souvenir."

In 1945, World War II ended. Japan surrendered. My father represented North China's Government and signed on the surrender document. It was also signed by America's representative, General MacArthur.

In the winter of 1951, my father he leave us. He died from lung disease.

Xusen Yang
China
March 9, 2004

QI GONG

About 20 years ago, my friend told me a story. He had a friend who was suffering from intestinal cancer. He had gone to the hospital to be inspected, and the doctor told him his cancer had spread and entered the late period already. His friend is a very optimistic person. He asked the doctor how long his life can be. The doctor said about 6 months. He said, “So you ought to travel to places you like; you ought to eat things you like.” He received the doctor’s opinion. He started his route.

Three months later, he arrived at Yun-Nan province. He had a schoolmate in Yun-Nan. He found him, and told his story to him. His schoolmate said, “You came to see me just at the right time because a magical doctor has appeared in my village. I’ll bring you to see him tomorrow. The magical doctor can cure every disease. You can try.”

Next day he met the magical doctor. He told his case history to him. The doctor let him lay down on a bed and let him keep breathing normally, not nervous. Then the doctor took a tub of clean water and put it beside the bed. Then the doctor closed his eyes and took deep breaths three times. He stood up and his two hands started to move. It looked like mixing the flour and water, but his action was just in the air – just about one foot from the patient’s belly. The doctor continued his action for about 3 minutes. The doctor said, “It’s very dirty,” and his action became slower and slower. It looked like mixing a very heavy water and flour. The doctor was soaked through with sweat, and then the doctor’s two hands looked like they were digging something and then like they found

something, and then like they got something and threw it away. This throwing away action happened three times. Each time, he would wash his hands and say, "Very dirty." When he finished the third time, he let the patient stand up and told him to come again the next day. The cure continued for 3 days. The patient felt very nice, like a healthy person.

On the fourth day, he couldn't find the doctor. The doctor had disappeared. No one knew where he came from or where he had gone. He just disappeared. The patient said when the doctor cured him, it felt like a warm water turned over inside his belly. But very comfortable.

Four months later, he came back to Beijing to go to the hospital to be re-inspected. All doctors wondered. His cancer cells had disappeared. He had become a healthy man. It's unbelievable, but it's true. This is Chinese "Qi Gong!"

Xusen Yang
China
March 26, 2004

CHINESE ACUPUNCTURE

In 1953's winter vacation, I stayed in the conservatory of music and practiced my flute nine hours every day. It made my flute techniques advance very fast. Then everything was successful and normal. One morning, when I started to play my flute, a strange thing happened. My right hand's fingers lost control. I wanted my third finger to move; it moved my fourth finger. I wanted my fourth finger to move; it moved my second finger. My cerebrum couldn't control my right hand's fingers.

I went to see my school's doctor immediately. After the doctor's inspection, he said, "Your finger is no problem. Everything is normal." He told me to go to another hospital for inspection, but the result was the same. "No problem." The "no problem" means I'll have to abandon my flute. This is very big, bad news for me. So I am desperate. I go to see a Chinese Acupuncturist.

He inspects me just to see my right hand's nails and to see my tongue. The whole inspection process lasted just three minutes. The result was the same. "No problem." But this "no problem" means can be recovered. I ask him how to cure; he said prick with the needle. I ask, "Prick where?" And he said, "Neck."

Then a nurse pushed a pushcart in; above the cart is a plate. The plate is full of different sized needles. The length is from 2 to 14 inches, but they are so thin, like hair. He takes the longest needle and puts the end in his mouth, and with his tongue, he rolled the needle

into his mouth. He pushed my right hand's pulse for about one minute. Suddenly, he drew out the needle from his mouth and pricked it into my cotton-padded jacket and entered my neck. Then, I'm very nervous. When the needle entered my neck, it felt just like an ant bite - just a little pain. The doctor turned his needle and continued into my neck about eight inches.

Suddenly, I shouted. The doctor asked me what happened and what I was feeling. I told him I felt like I got an electric shock from my neck to my right arm. He said, "If you're healthy, this feeling ought to go out from your neck through your finger. Now your disease is in your right arm. So he continued to prick my arm and the back of my hand about eight places. But I'm not feeling anything; I am numbed already. Through three times cured, I'm fully recovered until present. I'm playing my flute everyday. "No problem."

Xusen Yang
China
April 13, 2004

MOM'S LOVE

When my parents married, my dad was a movie company's general manager. The whole family's economic circumstances were very good. When my father joined a Japanese-resistance group, my family's economic circumstances went from bad to worse, and my father got tuberculosis from a Japanese jail. Our whole family's economic load came down on my mom's shoulders.

At the time, my family's members were my grandmother, my parents, two brothers, two sisters and me – a total of eight persons. My mom is an expert cook. To support the family, she became a cook in a restaurant. She worked 10 hours every day to support the family. She used to travel between city to city to buy things, to earn more money. Sometimes she would go to another city, need two days and two nights by train, buy meat or cooking oil, take back to sell. Once, she didn't sleep for 28 hours.

On the train, she relied on the train's window to go to sleep. Suddenly, she heard a very loud song from a dream. She awakened, at once raised her head. At the same time, a Japanese fighter plane's machine gun bullets broke the train's window glass. A bullet entered near my mom's mouth and continued on to hit the person beside my mom. He died. The bullet entered the window's position just where my mom usually laid her head to sleep. God saved her life!

Although my family's economic circumstances grew worse, my mom insisted her children must stay in school to learn and must finish school. Because she insisted our brothers and sisters finished school. One is a solar energy scientist, one is a musician, one is an automobile engineer, one is a university professor, one is a photographer/reporter.

In 1970, my mom died of apoplexy. The morning of that day, she felt dizzy and went to the hospital. The doctor checked her status and refused her care. The doctor said, "She is the counter-revolutionary's family member; refuse to cure!" By noon, she was gone.

One week later, when my sister arranged her clothes, she found five receipts for sold blood. She never complained. She offered everything for her children. Her children grew up in her blood! Thank God for giving us so great a mother! This is a Great Mother's love!

Xusen Yang
China
March 9, 2004

MY SON

My son Xinhao is eight years old. He is very active, and he has many friends. Now I find that he is always against us. When I tell him to do something, he says, “No!” He doesn’t like sleeping. When I say, “Xinhao, go to bed”, he always says, “Wait, I need to draw a picture first.” The time is 9 p.m. In the morning he needs to get up at 6:40 a.m. I have a good idea. I tell him if he doesn’t go to bed at once, I will call the police. He is afraid of the police. But yesterday evening, when I did this as usual, my son said, “If you speak Chinese, American police can not understand. The police don’t catch children.”

One day I told him when he is eighteen years old, he will be independent and might leave us. He said, “No, I don’t want to grow up, so I will always stay with you.” Next day after school, he told me his teacher said, “If you want to stay with your parents, you can live with them.” Then he said he will buy a house near mine when he gets married. I find he grows up a little every day. He often has some problem with his growing up. When he makes a mistake and is punished, he always says, crying, “I’m sorry, mom.” Then he puts his books in order on the table and packs his toys away. He becomes obedient. He hopes that I am not angry any more. But several days later, he has forgotten everything.

Wen Zhao
China
March 30, 2004

FINISHING WORK

When I lived in Singapore, I found a job in accounting. Before that I had worked at university in China. I always finished my work quickly, then I had a rest. I began to work in Singapore. I worked hard and finished quickly. When I finished my work, my boss always gave me other work and hoped me work overtime. So I didn't have a rest. I was very tired. When I came home, I didn't want to do anything. After a few months, my colleague told me, the boss would like you to sweep the floor rather than have a rest. I found the manager stood behind me, and checked me working. I felt bad. I resigned from my job. I know many people were treated like me, but they have to keep their jobs because only one person works in his family.

Wen Zhao
China
March 19, 2004

MY PARENTS

My mother was born in 1936. She was an engineer. When she was young, she joined the Chinese Communist Party. She was proud of becoming a member of the Chinese Communist Party because the purpose of CCP is to serve people. She was always ready to help others. She worked very hard and did a very good job. All people whom she worked with liked her. She loves us very much. She is very good at cooking, so we always enjoy her delicious food. Unfortunately, she died of cancer in 1993. We miss her very much.

My father was a chemistry professor in a northeastern university. He is a very good teacher. All his students like him. He retired ten years ago. Now he lives with my brother's family. He has many hobbies. He likes music, painting, and handwriting, so he isn't lonely. He sent his painting and drawing of some animals such as a tiger, a lion and a dragon to my son two months ago. My son likes these pictures and began to copy them. My father misses us very much and hopes we will come back to China this summer. We look forward to meeting him soon.

Wen Zhao
China
March 9, 2004

MY CHILDHOOD

My childhood was spent in ShenYang. It's the biggest city in the northeast of China. ShenYang's season is very clear. Winter is cold outside about half a year. Because there is central heating at home, I felt warm like spring. It is a white world outside. It's really beautiful. When I was a child, I liked ShenYang's winter. I could go to ski and skate with my friends. I liked snow so I could make snowmen.

My aunt lived near a mountain area in the south of China so I had a chance to live there for one year. In summer my aunt's daughter and I went to the mountain area. It's a beautiful place. Green mountains and a limpid mountain stream surround the village. After the farmers finished their work, they washed their bodies in the stream. I saw fish swimming in the limpid mountain stream. I caught small fish using a plastic box. Those wonderful memories make me unforgettable forever.

Wen Zhao
China
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