Hear Our Voices

Essays and Reflections
From Literacy Volunteer Students

June 2017
As Literacy Volunteers of Greater New Haven approaches its 40th anniversary, I am pleased and proud to present to you our 2017 Hear Our Voices. I invite you to read and reflect upon every page of this annual writing project. In doing so, you will gain valuable insight regarding the remarkable diversity of our adult students and the importance of literacy in their lives.

I hope that you are as uplifted as I am when you read the contributions of each of these writers, whether it be haiku poetry or personal stories, favorite memories, or thoughts about their hopes, dreams and personal goals. Hear Our Voices also includes insightful writings about language and culture as well as expressions of gratitude for the volunteer tutors who give their time and talents so that lives may be improved through literacy. Finally, how heartwarming it is to read their words of appreciation for the opportunity to live in this great country and feel welcomed!

For forty years this organization has been empowering adult learners. That would never have happened without our wonderful volunteers, so unending thanks goes to them for making a positive difference in our communities by helping individuals advance their literacy skills – from reading and English conversation right on up to writing. Special thanks goes to the John G. Martin Foundation for, once again, generously funding Hear Our Voices, and to tutor Valerie Kilmartin and Program Manager Meghen Fitzgibbons for managing the editing and production. Finally, thanks to all our donors and community partners and to our Board of Directors and staff. I am grateful to each of you every day for your passion, commitment and support.

Sincerely,

Donna M. Violante

Executive Director

June 2017

www.lvagnh.org

4 Science Park, New Haven, CT 06511  •  phone: 203-776-5899  •  fax: 203-745-4629
Gateway Community College, 20 Church St., Room N112, New Haven, CT 06510  •  phone: 203-285-2621
14 West Main Street, Meriden, CT 06451  •  phone: 203-235-1714  •  fax: 203-440-3138
30 Elizabeth Street, Lower Level, Derby, CT 06418  •  phone: 203-736-5420 ext 267
These essays and reflections were written by adult students who attended Literacy Volunteer classes in Greater New Haven, Meriden, Wallingford and the Valley in 2016-2017.

Special thanks go to the dedicated volunteer tutors who worked with their students to create this fascinating collection of personal stories. The students lead us through cultural and personal experiences, sharing with us their struggles, their achievements, and the richness of their lives. We are grateful to all the students who have worked hard to communicate their unique perspectives through writing.

Because of the work done by volunteers, I think society is a warmer, friendlier, and better place.

— Literacy Volunteers
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Achieving My Goals

My name is Carolyn. When I started the literacy program I was a poor reader and writer. I've greatly improved both, thanks to my tutor, Cindy, who helped me overcome my handicaps. Without her it would have been impossible. I have a long way to go, but I'm not a quitter and I will continue until my reading and writing are excellent.

Student: Carolyn
Country: USA
Tutor: Cindy Ostroff
Literacy Resource Center
4 Science Park, New Haven

I Like to Learn

I like to learn how to read and write. I like to know how to say a word and pronounce it correctly. I like to understand the meaning of what I'm reading. I want to do better for myself in the future. And I want to learn more and different things in school. I want other people to do the same and help others to have confidence to do this.

Student: Pablo
Country: USA
Tutor: Joe Luca
14 West Main St., Meriden

ESL Classes – My Biggest Helper

I came to the USA in 2004 from the Democratic Republic of Congo. It was a big discovery for me facing a lot of new things: language, food, neighborhood, and habits. I didn't know how to communicate or share news with the people I met. Normally the people around me would be speaking French or Swahili, my primary languages. Fortunately, I heard about the ESL classes and they became my biggest helper.

There I found people from different countries who had the same problems as I did. It was a big comfort, we learned more and more and the teachers were wonderful and I created more friendships.

Think about what it is like when you are with people and they are talking and laughing but you don't understand what they are laughing about. It is very uncomfortable. I remember some classmates were in tears because they didn't understand what the teacher was talking about. But, God is good and now I can talk, and I understand more and more. I am confident, I speak more easily and frequently, and I am learning more pronunciation, vocabulary, and idioms.

Now my goal is to think more in English. I would like to be able to think in English as I go about my daily activities. This will help me to speak more spontaneously and allow my thoughts in English to be free of the interruption of translation. Then I will feel more open and connected to people.

Student: Kusima
Country: Democratic Republic of Congo
Tutor: Bob Martin
14 West Main St., Meriden
Achieving Personal Goals

Determined to Learn

HIGH SCHOOL WASN’T THE BEST time in my life. However I’m going to college now at Gateway and I’m going to Literacy Volunteers as well. When I first started, I was scared. But I was determined to learn. I feel it’s going okay, it’s helping me in all ways. Most of all I’m doing this for me and my son.

Student: Seikisha
Country: USA
Tutors: Karen Johnson, Carol Loehmann, Sandy Gardinier
Literacy Resource Center
4 Science Park, New Haven

Jamaica is Rich in Blessings and Poor in Wealth

I LOVE TO GO BACK TO JAMAICA AND VISIT MY HOMELAND. This country has many blessings. As you get off the plane you can feel the warm temperature year round. The people are friendly and love to party, dance and listen to music. They like to have fun.

Jamaica has beautiful beaches. They are impressive. The sand is white as snow and the water is as blue as the sky. The rainforest in Jamaica is another blessing. It is cool, wet and has many trees. You will see a lot of flowers and vendors selling fruit. People like to escape to Jamaica to have fun.

Jamaica is also poor in wealth. It has trickle down economics. The only time politicians distribute bushing jobs* is around election time. Jamaican people don’t stand up for their principles, only for their belly full. The cost of living gets higher and there are more sellers than buyers. Things in Jamaica are very expensive. Jamaicans need more jobs.

I came to America to seek prosperity, the American dream and get a good job and a better education.

I think America is already great!

* "Bushing jobs" refers to bush-clearing work in Jamaica.

Student: Samuel
Country: Jamaica
Tutor: Cheryl Weston
14 West Main St., Meriden

Student: Seikisha
Country: USA
Tutors: Karen Johnson, Carol Loehmann, Sandy Gardinier
Literacy Resource Center
4 Science Park, New Haven
Learning English Has Changed My Life

I CAME TO TUS. IN 2003 from Togo, West Africa. All my life I studied French so I was speaking only French before I moved to the United States. At the beginning I had trouble communicating with people. It was hard for me to get a job because I failed all the interviews. I didn’t have a job. One of my friends Tamira told me about Literacy Volunteers. When I started going to school, my life completely changed. As a result of Literacy Volunteers I got a good job and can easily communicate with people and can help my kids with their homework.

I am a good role model for my kids. I have to be good example. My desire for my children is for them to accomplish everything possible in life. I work at my job very hard so I can provide a better life for my children. With the money I earn I’m able to provide them with extra activities to improve their education and make them feel good about themselves.

Learning English gave me a way of finding a better place for my family to live. My friend Kady Toure told me about Habitat for Humanity. Then I called the office, because now I can speak English on a phone. I asked how to get into the Habitat program. They gave me an application and it went into a lottery, which I won. With my family I was able to meet all the financial obligations and put in the 400 hours of labor for habitat.

Learning English with Literacy Volunteers I accomplished all my goals. My children go to Magnet schools in New Haven and we live in a beautiful Habitat for Humanity home.

My Story: An Introduction

I BARELY MADE IT TO THE 9TH GRADE. When I got there the work was too hard for me, so I could not keep up with the classroom work. Every day I went to school, I felt that I was not learning anything. I was working as a security guard five days a week in a high school and three years go by, but I still felt the same. I saw people graduating and I was not.

My friend told me about the Army and I joined without graduating, so I could get a better life for myself. It was like going back to school. It was so hard, but I got around it some way. I knew I had to do something about school, but it was my biggest secret that I could not read or write too good. I had to ask people questions all the time. I knew I had ADHD all my life.

A friend told me about Literacy Volunteers. When I started going to school in 2015, I stopped in 2016 and came back in 2017. I felt different about school. I am working on the computer and improving my reading and writing. Thanks to Literacy Volunteers and to my tutor, I feel better about working on achieving my goals.
Achieving Goals

DEAR PRO LITERACY FRIENDS, My name is Holly and my tutor’s name is Mary.

Since I have been receiving Pro Literacy services, I believe I have achieved some of my goals.

I feel I am able to read better, spell and even do math. I am also able to keep up with current events. I truly feel that I can function better in my everyday life as I am more confident as a person.

Some of my accomplishments include:

- I have a small business selling Avon.
- I passed my test and received my Learner’s Permit. I hope to start driving lessons soon and then get my driver’s license.
- I have been accepted into a program to become a certified CNA.

I am very thankful to Pro Literacy and especially Mary for the positive influence they have had in my life.

THANK YOU.

Stories About Me

THE FIRST STORY ABOUT ME: I am a student and I am trying so hard to learn how to read much better. It’s so hard for me to learn how to read. But I will keep trying to get better one day, I will never give up. I will get better one day at reading. It is hard to learn how to read. But I enjoy trying. It is nice to know how to read. I study daily and keep reading and one day I would be able to read very well. I will like that. It will be good that I am learning how to read much better. That will be good that I can read much better. And I would like that it will be so good to know how to read. So I am trying so hard to learn how to read better. It will make me very happy so I will keep trying, but it is hard to learn. God be the glory we pray to God to bless his people and to be able to serve his father the savior. God be the glory I pray to him so he will bless me amen.

The Second Story: My name is Althea this is my story about how my children see me. My mom is a strong woman, she can do anything. She held our whole family together when we were falling apart. And she is a good listener. She asked me what do I want to do with my life, I said, “Mom I would like to able to become a good student and in reading, do math, spell and also be a good writer.” She said “That would be a nice thing to do. I would like that for you.” My son is a good listener. His name is George. He listens to me. He said “That will make me very happy for you Mom. I will like that Mom. That would be nice to know you can read very well. It will be much better for you Mom.”

Reaching My Goal

I have been going to Literacy classes for 8 months. One of my goals is to learn how to read and write. I hope to accomplish this goal so that I can improve my life.

Sometimes I get discouraged but my tutor motivates me. I want my kids to be proud of me and be happy for me. Even though it is sometimes difficult, I keep on trying until I get better. Thank you, everybody, for believing in me!
Living in a New Country, especially in a country that has a different culture and language, is like climbing an unknown mountain. Different tasks in life are steps leading me higher, and my goals in life are destinations along the mountain.

I can see several steps in front of me, and I know it’s easy to finish them and get to a destination not far away, like the destination of finding a place to study English from a native English speaker. Although I started to learn English when I was 12 years old, all my teachers were Chinese. As a result, I think that what I learned in the past was not English but Chinglish (Chinese English) and that’s why I was keen for a native English speaker as my teacher. This is not a goal that is hard to achieve in the U.S., and eight days after my arrival, I started to learn English at OISS (Office of International Students and Scholars) at Yale University.

Other tiny tasks in my life in this new country include learning how to open a bank account, how to apply for a credit card and how to pay utility bills. During the first month here, life was interesting, and it seemed that I could accomplish different tasks day by day. However, a month later, after I had solved all the tiny problems in a new country, I found real challenges in front of me. Such feeling would be like after the initial few steps of climbing a mountain, I would enjoy the beautiful views of the mountain and my heart would be filled with joy and pride, but if I raised my head abruptly, I would be shocked by the path to the sky and the unseen top. Suddenly, I would realize I was not far from the foot of the mountain and there would be a long way to go. A big challenge in my life in the U.S is how to find a job and make money.

This is not a challenge that I can conquer with ease. I started with finding a part-time job to accumulate experience and confidence. It took me three months to get my work permit in the U.S., another two months to connect with Chinese Schools in New Haven, and three more months to learn how to teach Chinese to foreign students. Finally, starting last September, I began to teach Chinese in two Sunday Chinese Schools. It was a long journey before I arrived at this destination, and during the time I strived to get the job, I envied people who were already there. But after I finally got the job and got used to preparing for my class every week and teaching every Sunday, it seemed that it was not as difficult as I had previously imagined. Also like climbing mountains, a pavilion far above was attractive to climbers below; however, after they finally got to the pavilion and looked back on the path they had climbed, they found that the previous journey was not a big deal.

Of course, I am not satisfied with part-time jobs, and now I am on my new journey to get a full-time job. I am preparing for the TOEFL test and am making a graduate program application in order to get a good job later. Although it will be a long and difficult journey, the destination is really attractive to me and I want to try my best to reach it.

Student: Huimin (Vivian)
Country: China
Tutors: Jerry Delamater, Desh Sharma
Yale Health Center
New Haven
My View of Colorado River’s Downstream

When I was driving along Highway 8 toward Arizona from southern California, a small river appeared, traversed under the road, and disappeared quickly. Under the mapping of the sun and against the background of golden earth, the river looked like a blue and curving strip.

Here is a desert area, and there is little plant everywhere no more than green grass. This scene of the blue river amazed excited and attracted me so deeply, which refreshed me from the fatigue feeling induced by long-time driving.

While the river appeared again, I decided to stop my car just as a parking lot located in the middle of two roads. I walked up to the side of the river, and scanned into the outside of the iron gauze, a guard bar. I found it just is an artificial channel from the Colorado River’s downstream to the direction of southeast California. I thought it would be an indispensable water resource for El Centro and other cities in the desert district.

The Channel is nice, and named wash in map. At that moment, I wanted to search the live-action of the Colorado River’s downstream. Hence, I bore off the highway and reached in Yuma city in southwest Arizona State. I found a desert oasis, a wet land, which are composed with four parks. I got off my car and walked into three parks respectively. Two parks located two sides of Colorado River with more vegetation. There is a simple wharf with several small wooden boats. Some water birds were swimming toward me for welcoming me, a visitor who came a long way from eastern of America. Another park is on a hill, which is a historic park above the river. In its exhibition, I knew a lot of history and knowledge about the river.

The Colorado River, 1,450 mile long (2,330 km,) is one of the principal rivers of North American. It starts in the Central Rocky Mountains, and flows generally southwest across the Colorado Plateau and through the Grand canyon before reaching Lake Mead. Then it forms the borders of Arizona - Nevada – and Arizona – California toward the international border.

A century ago, more cruel drought and flood happened almost every year in the district of its downstream, and much more vegetation disappeared, and many people died. In the past few decades, many water conservancy projects had been constructed, which improved the ecological environment observably. Now, we can see more birds, trees, fertile farmland, even wet land.

The Colorado River’s downstream, a previous catastrophic river, has been tamed by several generations, and now it become a vital source of water for 40 million people in southwestern North America.

Bye-bye the nice river, go on with my next trip.

Our First Visit to New York City

After arriving in the United States of the America, the city we wanted to visit was New York City. My children wanted to visit New York City very much. When we were in Turkey they watched a movie called “Home Alone 2”, so they wanted to see the Rockefeller Christmas tree, Central Park, and department store windows.

One day, between Christmas and New Year, my husband said to me, “if you want, I have time to go to NY”. One day later, we went to NY by car. We were so excited. When we arrived in NY, we went to Times Square first, and after that Fifth Avenue. We got so excited that we didn’t see each other. It was so crowded. The weather was so cold, but we went to see the Rockefeller Christmas tree, the Lego Center, and the Disney shop. We saw the Saks Fifth Avenue windows and Macy’s windows. They were spectacular, and we saw NY policemen on their horses. We ate hot dogs and my son said that “Now, we are New Yorkers”.

At the end of the day we were exhausted and we felt cold, but we will never forget our first visit to New York City.

Student: Ozlem
Country: Turkey
Tutors: Debbie Cook, Desh Sharma, Norma Barash, Nancy Ferraro, Vanessa Zuidema
La Casa, New Haven
A Mysterious Road Sign

While driving across a mountain, a large bridge appeared and came closer and closer. This was a busy bridge that connects Ohio to the state of West Virginia. After crossing the river, a wonderful city came into view. I decided to stay there a short time and learn something about it.

It turned out to be the city of Wheeling, West Virginia, a famous manufacturing center before the end of the 19th century located on the eastern side of the Ohio River. I had left the Ohio state and set foot in West Virginia. The district, which is in the shape of a triangle, is a small part of northwest West Virginia. It is a short distance, only 10 miles, to the state boundary of Pennsylvania. What novel story does this small district have to tell? I decided to drive down local roads to search for details about this region. Climbing one hill after another, and passing through many villages, I was driving on a rough and narrow road and looking at the surrounding country. This is a quiet, natural, fertile, and intermountain agricultural land which was now I the middle of a late autumn harvest.

A small town was approaching, and I wanted to visit it. When I got out of my car, I found a big sign on the roadside that said “Ohio” in large letters. Oh, I was surprised! Why is there another Ohio here, and where is the boundary of West Virginia? I looked around, and tried to discover the reason. I saw another sign that told me that this is the border line between the Pennsylvania and West Virginia. I was sure that Ohio State was located 10 miles behind me. This town was in Ohio. It was West Alexander in western Pennsylvania.

Suddenly, I found a hitching post with a manger on the side of the road which had been used for feeding horses in the past. Now I saw a special road sign that showed me that this road had been an important transportation route to Wheeling one century ago. When I looked back to West, it seemed like the pathway would have been noisy and full of activity as well as a scene of prosperity in those years.

When I investigated, I saw that this Ohio sign was facing to the East. I knew that Ohio State was to the West beyond the state of West Virginia. While looking more closely at the sign, I saw a small word, “County” under the big word “Ohio.” I finally understood. This was not a sign of Ohio County in West Virginia, but a place name in Pennsylvania.

It was a novel and mysterious road sign. It helped me to learn about Ohio County and a nice commercial pathway between Pennsylvania and West Virginia. This was an interesting experience of my western trip in America.

The Happiest Time in My Life!

Monday, August 24 at 11:09 pm was the happiest hour of my life.

My son Jonathan had been born and I heard the most beautiful melody, his weeping. The doctor asked Camilo if he wanted to cut the umbilical cord and he did not hesitate to do so.

I was happy to carry my baby in my arms, it is there where I met my sweetheart.

That little face that I yearned to see for so long, that little body that lived inside me. He was so small and helpless, and he filled me with the purest love I ever imagined I would feel.

He is now my reason for being. Since Jonathan was born, he made me feel many things and he taught me even more. And, since then he does it every day because I’m just learning to be a mom, the most beautiful profession and the greatest blessing.
**Rio Secreto**

I **WOULD LIKE TO SHARE** my experience with my trip to Rio Secreto in Cancun, Mexico. There is a historic spot, a kind of river flowing underground. The cave was hidden for millions of years in a huge and deep forest. People did not know it was there.

Explorers found it about 5 years ago. That is why it still looks primitive in nature. We travelled about two hours down into the cave with a guide who explained kindly and clearly that in this dark, cold and silent place, the fishes' color is only black or white, and surprisingly they have no eyes, because they have to live without any lights under the cave.

It was very hot outside, but inside it was the opposite temperature. We had to wear a wetsuit, and hold a stick into the water. The height of the water is up and down very much so we moved slowly and carefully, but a bit of danger was exciting to me.

When we arrived at the middle of the cave, the guide told us, “Turn off your headlamp and sit down into the shallow water.” We all did this together, at that moment, I felt time stopped. I had a weird feeling in the total darkness and silence. I could only hear the water dripping from the ceiling. It might be in the middle of the universe.

Now I think it was a beautiful and thrilling experience and absolutely breathtaking. If you enjoy an expedition, I totally recommend this place to you.

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**Spring Story**

**S**PRING IS MY FAVORITE time of year. I like the way the weather gets warmer. You can go outside without a jacket. You can start doing your gardening. It also rains a lot to grow the plants and grass. They turn a beautiful shade of green. The flowers come out in colors of green, purple, red and yellow. Spring is also time for a vacation. I went to Rhode Island, where I visited family. We had dinner together and talked about life and how things are going so far.

Spring is an enjoyable time. It is a time when I have a lot of fun.

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**At the Seaside**

**W**HEN I WAS A SMALL CHILD, my mother, father, brother, sister and I went on Holiday for two weeks at the seaside. That was my first vacation in Krynica Morska, Poland. The sun was shining, and the sky was blue. Every day I went to the beach with my family. We were tanning on the beach, swimming in the water, and building sand castles. In the evenings we went back to the beach to watch the sunsets and party. We stayed in a caravan park where I met new friends. One day I visited an aquarium where I saw exotic fish. We also visited an amusement park where we spent half a day having fun. I had a good time on my vacation and will never forget it. I remember we also went on a boat. I took a lot of fantastic pictures from it. I ate a lot of ice cream and fluffy thick waffles with fresh strawberries on them. I was sad when we had to leave. It was a very interesting experience for me because I had never been to the sea. It was the best place I went in my childhood.
Favorite Memories

My Favorite Job

When I was in high school in Puerto Rico I wanted to be a police officer. I took the test and did not pass. I was a security guard for two years. Then I took the test again and I passed. I took my police officer oath on September 1, 1998.

My first job as a police officer was Complaints. People called in to report emergencies or problems. There were fights, car accidents and robberies. There were many different problems. I took complaints for two years. I was Police Woman of the Year and I received plaques and certificates. After that I was a traffic officer for nine years.

Then I joined the riot squad. We had special helmets, clothes and shoes. We had tear gas and big sticks. It was quiet most of the time. But my heart raced when there was a riot. I liked the adrenalin rush and it was always interesting. The riot squad was my favorite job as a police officer. I had to leave the riot squad because I had trouble with both my knees and my back.

Big Confusion: Cheese Instead of Jesus

Hi, my name is Manuel, I'm working in a restaurant like a waiter. We do breakfast in the morning and this was my experience in a regular day in the restaurant.

There was Sunday and customers started to come in for breakfast and my side there were five girls and I started to say good morning to the girls and one of them told if I know about cheese and I said yes we have American, cheddar, Swiss, provolone, so everybody started to laugh at me, and my face was red, and I was scared because I didn't know what was happening. But there was a girl there who speak Spanish and she explain to me that they were speaking about Jesus Christ. Oh my God, never ever I thought that they would ask me that question. Always when I remember that day, it makes me laugh too.

That was my big and funny confusion.
Haikus and Poems

Fun Time

Brother plays with me
he does well...I push him
how fun time goes fast!

Student: Ling (Linda)
Country: China
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Halloween

Pumpkins on doorsteps
streets dressed in autumn colors
children in costumes

Student: Matina
Country: South Korea
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Could this be my new home?

January
street noise, rushing people
no familiar face

Missing my homeland
sunny, worry-free summers,
familiar faces

With each passing year
embracing my new refuge
I find I belong

Student: Anna
Country: Poland
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Life as a Dog

To be a dog is great you know.
You can run, jump, and play in the snow.
I keep a eye on the house night and day.
Then my humans are able to feel safe when they hit the hay.
I look after my master, and take her for a stroll.
Once I convince her to go, we’re on a roll.
Since I’m a good dog, and sweet I get what I want, a treat.
Yes, it’s good to be a dog,
Much better than being a frog.

Student: Sandra
Country: USA
Tutor: Diane Chandler
14 West Main St., Meriden

Nature

Lazy summer blooms
Nature washing my world
Field touches my face

Student: Tammy
Country: Armenia
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden
Haikus and Poems

The Moon

THE MOON IS MY NEIGHBOR
its light gives me hope
that one day
I will see my children

Student: Raouaa
Country: Syria
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Snow Scene

SNOWMAN STANDS OUTSIDE
bright light in cozy little house
happiness within

Student: Matina
Country: South Korea
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Spring

WHITE IRIDESCENT
faint scent along busy road
draw attention to spring

Student: Ling (Linda)
Country: China
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Onion

OLD ONION IN NET BAG
see its green shoot coming forth
joy hiding in small bulb

Student: Matina
Country: South Korea
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Night View

ICICLES CLING DOWN
cotton-like snow covers world
moon hides behind bare trees

Student: Matina
Country: South Korea
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Winter to Spring

JANUARY CHILLS
cold, crisp winds; blowing storms
thinking of spring

Student: Tammy
Country: Armenia
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden

Flag

I SEE FREEDOM’S FLAG
fifty stars flutter in the sky
my star...Connecticut

Student: Raouaa
Country: Syria
Tutors: Jane Bouvier, Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden
How School Changed My Life

When I first came back to school I was kind of nervous and kind of scared because it took a long time to get back to school. Somedays I don't feel like coming to class, but I do because when I get here I feel a part of the class and I feel I have learned a lot in these past 3 years. Someday I would like to go for my GED. I am very proud of myself because I am not going give up even when life gets tough.

I am worth it!

Life Free

Fourteen years ago I thought I was lucky because I had a car, money and a woman. I was the man! Then at 25 years old things changed. I had a stroke. The doctor said I would never be 100%. I couldn’t talk, read and couldn’t talk to my kids. I was shocked for 14 years. Two years later I had another stroke. This time I got to the hospital quick and got pills to help. After two days my speech came back. Doctors said I had a tumor inside my heart. I had to wait one and a half months to have open heart surgery. I was really scared.

I had an operation and I was supposed to be in the hospital for two weeks, but in three days I left. That’s when I started to believe in love. Now my life is bigger than that. So in my eyes, everybody believe you can do it. Just believe! For, I’m free.

My Story

I am an Egyptian woman. My jobs were sales manager in a clothing store and teacher in Sunday school. My friend introduced me to my future husband. We spoke on the phone for five months and then he came to Egypt and he proposed. He stayed two weeks before going back to the USA. I came to the USA in April, 2016. I stayed with my mother and brother until I got married in June. I began learning English in September in adult school.

There are many differences from my country and this country. My country is very religious but here, no. And the food is different. I miss food from my country. And in this country, I haven’t friends. But in my country I have many friends.

I love the USA because people are very helpful and help me with my English. My wish is to go to college and earn a degree. I will become a doctor. I want to spread the word of God to as many people as possible. I want to help my sister and her children come to the USA because Egypt is not safe for them.

Hear Our Voices | Essays and Reflections From Literacy Volunteer Students | June 2017
My Autobiography

MY LIFE HAS CHANGED since October 2013 when I came to the United States with my husband and my baby boy. We were living in Hamden, Connecticut. I was very nervous about everything. My husband was doing engineering work in an American company, and I was a homemaker. I had worked as an accountant in China for many years. But when I came to the United States I had no work and no friends.

I feel English is the most difficult language for me. When I order food or drink in a restaurant, the waiter doesn't understand me. So, I need to learn more English for my American life. I decided to begin classes with Literacy Volunteers to improve my English. In September 2015, I went to Literacy Volunteers to learn daily life English, focus on grammar, and experience a lot of different things. I also went to Gateway Community College to learn ESL. One year later, Gateway Community College and Literacy Volunteers have helped my reading, my writing, my listening and my pronunciation. I feel my English is much better. I have new friends and teachers who are very enthusiastic to support me in everything.

I want to get an accountant job. I choose accounting, because I love this occupation, but I still need to know English better. I will go to a university to take courses, such as Principles of Accounting, Managerial Accounting and Financial Accounting. I will get my bachelor's degree in Accounting.

Now, we have bought a new house. My husband and I, and our two children live in North Haven, Connecticut. My son is two years and three months old. Sometimes, he's a naughty boy at home. My daughter is two months old, and she’s very lovely girl. I love her and my son. We are a very happy family. I’m not as worried about my life in the United States as I was in the beginning. I have learned a lot of daily life English, and I feel very happy. I can understand American’s language. I can talk to people in English and I feel good. I really have accomplished a difficult thing. Thanks Gateway teachers and tutors in the Literacy Volunteers Program for helping my English.

I have a lot dreams in my heart. One day I hope I can speak English more fluently, and understand English better. I want to become an accountant, because I love this occupation. But now for me, my family is the most important thing. And to all my friends, I wish that each of your dreams will come true.

Such a Life!

WHEN I ARRIVED IN THE U.S. the first thing that surprised me was that most of the people were smiling at me, saying Hi, How you doing? Have a nice day, etc. which made me feel comfortable and melted the ice inside of me. Americans enjoy talking as they wait about general topics like the weather or the latest gossip. I’m so glad that I’m taking ESL classes because it let’s me meet different friends from around the world. I couldn’t imagine that I could meet them in a day. Life here is easy and organized; people are helpful and kind.

The last thing, but not the least important, is that the chances are equal for everyone from different cultures, religions, races and even sexuality. I’m happy here in the U.S. – thank you smiling people.
What I Would Like to Tell Others Who Are Struggling with Literacy!

FROM THE MOMENT I came to the United States I was confused. I can speak English, but not very well. I didn’t understand the spoken language and I wanted to be able to communicate so I could learn. I decided to join the Literacy Volunteers class at Gateway.

There I met an interesting group from different countries who also struggle with literacy. We share many things like our culture, our social life and family relations and marriage. We have increased our knowledge as we have time to speak freely with each other.

Our literacy tutors support our learning and that encourages us to prove ourselves.

We are happy that the United States has a constitution that protects our rights and we are happy to be free and independent here.

Student: Tatsiana
Country: Belarus
Tutors: Lee Stoltzman, Robert Glen, Don Desmond, Gloria DiMicco, Linda Davis, Marion Sachdeva, Sandra Caro
La Casa, New Haven

My Favorite Experience

MY NAME IS TATSIANA. I am from Belarus, and I want to tell you about my favorite experience. I married an American and changed my country of residence. Now I live in USA. At the beginning, I struggled every day because I am an immigrant. My first and very hard struggle was a challenge with myself. Have you ever tried to communicate with someone who just couldn’t understand you? It is difficult to live in another country when you don’t know the language.

My biggest support here is my husband. He “fights” alongside me every day. At first, he helped me go shopping or to fill the car with gas. Every day my husband practices English with me. We travel a lot. It was a very interesting experiencing to start life anew. But this experience gives me a lot of opportunities. I can get a good education or a high paying job, can socialize and meet interesting people. I can learn a new language. When you can speak, can explain, can understand, can read and write, you have more opportunities. It gives you a better and richer social life and helps you expand your horizons. I am happy to live in the United States, in the country of great opportunities with my loved one.

Student: Nawal
Country: Iraq
Tutors: Norma Barash, Nancy Ferraro, Vanessa Zuidema, Debbie Cook, Desh Sharma
Gateway Community College, New Haven

Student: Tatsiana
Country: Belarus
Tutors: Lee Stoltzman, Robert Glen, Don Desmond, Gloria DiMicco, Linda Davis, Marion Sachdeva, Sandra Caro
La Casa, New Haven
How My Life Has Changed

MY MANE IS FATUMATA and I’m from Liberia which is in West Africa. The topic I chose is how my life has changed since I’ve started taking classes with Literacy Volunteers. My life has changed since I’ve started taking classes with Literacy Volunteers by knowing how to read, write, and speak English better than before. Learning how to read and write are the most important things that everyone has to know. Because when I was in my country a lot of people in my family used to call me all kinds of bad names and ask me “Why are you going to school every day? And you don’t know how to read, write, or speak English?”

In my country, English is the official language but it’s broken English. So when I came to this country October 2014, I started taking EIL classes with Adult Education just for 5 months then in September 2015 I started taking GED classes without understanding American English but I kept fighting really hard just to know how to read and write. And here am I today expressing my feelings and thoughts to everyone to know what I have been through to make it to this stage. You have to stay focused for your dreams to come true. Never give up for anyone, no matter what they say about you. If I were to listen to them, what they were saying about me I would not make it to this stage but my hope was to stay focused and to trust myself and believe in God that I am going to be who I want to be. I’m not in that stage yet but I believe that someday I’m going to be.

I remember when I was in Africa my 8 year old niece came to our country from Cote d’Ivoire but she was not going to school there. When she came to Liberia in 2012, she started taking classes and I was on the one helping her out with her homework. Even though I didn’t know how to read, I acted like I knew everything. Sometimes I took her book and acted like I’m reading. While I tried to read by myself, I would tell her to read her book also, even though Aunty couldn’t read well. I was always there for my niece because I didn’t want for her to be like I was in school.

Sometimes I cried a lot because I saw myself unable to read. Not knowing how to read really hurts but I had patience for everything I was going through. I never gave up for everything and I will never give up. To have patience, belief, hope and trust are really hard for some people but as for me, I think I have these things in me. I believe someday everything is going to work out good. My first hope was to come to America and to improve my education for better opportunity. I have been hoping to come to the U.S. since I was a little girl and my hope has come true. I want to thank those people who have always been there to help me with my education, especially those who taught me English: Mr. Brian, Mr. Donald, Miss Henriette and Miss Kate. Those four people really helped me a lot and I appreciate their patience for teaching me. I would also like to thank my GED teachers for their time as well. Because of those people I’m able to express the little knowledge I have today. That’s why I’m here today sharing my story. No matter what you are going through, keep chasing your dreams.

Student: Fatumata
Country: Liberia
Tutor: Karen Reyes Benzi
Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven
My Experience in America

MY NAME IS NAIEMA and I am from Egypt. My husband was working at the Library of Congress Office at the American Embassy in Cairo. When he retired, they offered him an immigrant visa to the United States of America. Our relatives tried to convince us to stay in Egypt, and discussed with us about America, which is different in customs, traditions, culture and language. In addition, our kids were still young. But my husband and I had another opinion. We wanted to build the future with our kids in a great and developed country like America. Finally, we made the decision to emigrate to the USA.

In March 2001 I came to the United States of America with my husband, two daughters and one son. We came directly to New Haven and rented a small apartment, and my husband found a job in the same field at Sterling Memorial Library at Yale University. My youngest daughter entered an elementary school, and the other two went to high school. The days passed until the event of the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001.

I was scared after I heard that the attackers were Muslims as my religion is also Islam. Many Americans blamed all Muslims. We thought to return to our country, but our neighbors came to visit us and talked to us, trying to calm us down, telling us that the atmosphere is safe here. I was afraid to send our kids to school, but the school administration called and told us not to be scared and to send the kids back to school. They would take care of the kids. During that period, I was frightened when I went shopping, or when I visited our friends, and even when I walked in the streets because I was wearing the hijab.

One of our neighbors, who works at the Adult Education Center, helped me to enroll in some classes in English. I enrolled and started as a beginner, then moved up to intermediate level. After that I enrolled at Gateway Community College to continue learning English. My kids grew up and finished school and entered college. The oldest graduated from Albertus Magnus College with a major in Communication. My son studied political science at Southern Connecticut State University, and the youngest studied computer science at the same university. My two daughters now work at Yale University. My son works at Yale New Haven Hospital.

Every two or three years we travel to Egypt to visit our family. We have been living here for 15 years. Each one of the family has American citizenship.
WE DECIDED TO GO to the U.S.A. last year. I was a nursing professor in my country. I started my new life by retiring in April 2016. We arrived in Boston on July 9th. We first went to Amherst, MA because my son is living there. He is a Ph.D. student at UMASS. It is a very nice place. There are trees everywhere. It is a quiet place. The people in Amherst are very friendly. My son introduced a group of his friends to us, and we talked, walked on the trail and cooked. They are really a good group of friends.

The University of Massachusetts is very big, and there are people there from different countries, different educations, and different cultures. Everything good. I liked it and enjoyed it. As newcomers to the U.S.A., we did not have any credit history. Because most of the landlords wanted proof of our income and credit history, we could not find an apartment in Amherst. So, we decided to move to Hamden, CT. Our daughter lives there, and she helped us find an apartment. I was happy. I knew that I needed to learn English, so I went to Gateway Community College. There, I met with Kathleen. She has been a very important person in my life since I arrived in CT. She helped me register for the Literacy Volunteers class.

I first lived in the United States from 1988 – 1990, almost 20 years ago, it was good. Now I am older and I have some worries. Health insurance is important, if I get sick, I don’t know what I will do. However, I started feeling very happy because of living close to my family, going for walks and having dinner with my children. I like walking under the trees and looking at the different colors of the leaves, flowers, etc. I like colors. I am happy.

Thank you, my teachers: Marilia, Frances, Naomi, Kiki, Andrea, Eleanor, Charlotte, Jane and Michelle.
Different Culture in My Vision

My Family and I moved to the United States in 2014 almost two years ago. We are from Iran. I won the visa lottery and that is the reason why we moved to the U.S. Iran is a big country located in Asia. It is a very beautiful country with four seasons. It has mountains, seas, and forests. Iran has 32 states and we used to live in the capital, which was called Tehran.

We left lots of memories and belongings behind in our country to start a new life in the USA with enormous uncertainty in our future. It was so challenging for all of us, but eventually we found our way, and today I’m so proud of us for all of the achievements we have gained.

We still have a long way ahead of us. Moving to the United States was very challenging because of the language, income, and different laws. But the big problem for me was language. When we first moved to the U.S. I knew the language was going to be a problem. My daughter could talk fluently because she had taken English courses since she was little. She even became an English teacher in Iran and that was a really good experience for her. My husband could speak but he still needed help to understand sometimes. It was just a big deal for me. I hope that one day I can speak English very well.

Income was one of the big problems that my husband faced. It is hard to get a job especially for people who are new to this country. Also my husband had a certificate and license to work at his job.

In Iran one member of the family works and it’s usually enough for every one but in the U.S. almost every body works which is really good. My husband found a job after 6 months in the U.S.

Another thing that was very challenging was the laws and rules of the country. There is a lot of paper work for everything we do and sometimes that would get annoying but with the help of friends we did the basic stuff which was registering for new things, getting a new car, and finding a house. I admit some of them are strict but on the bright side we are getting used to it over time. We learned and helped each other to succeed and we never gave up.

And I want to thank whoever supported us in this endeavor.
A Comparison of the Parents Meeting between Two Countries

The Parents Meeting in America is so different from that in China, the country I came from. In Shanghai, many parents would attend the parents meeting, which is organized by their children’s individual school. At the meeting day all classrooms are full of the parents. The principal usually gives a main speech which urges parents to impose more pressure on their kids for studies, more time from the parents given to kids in homework tutoring, more severe discipline and tough restriction to supervise the behaviors of the students. The parents should make more efforts to support the school authorities and teachers in raising the academic level and improve the scores in competition with other schools. In one word, the main goal of the parents meeting in China is to instruct the parents to bear more responsibility in educating their children, more restriction to their kids’ proper behaviors, harsher attitude to supervise the homework assigned to students at off school hours. The teachers even warn the parents whose children are performing poorly in examination or studies and order them to take stronger measures to force their children to improve their studies. Of course, the school authorities definitely don’t forget to launch a political ideological propaganda to order the parents to carry out their kids’ education of Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought.

The impression of my first parents meeting in America makes me reflect over the issue so different with that in China. While the American parents meeting emphasizes the rights of the parents and their children, the Chinese stress the obligations of the parents and their kids’ obey to the rules of the authorities, be correct in political ideological direction, work hard in raising up the study quality of students. As the American parents esteem the values and personal character development of their children, and how to protect students from the mistreatment in school, the Chinese parents and schools always regard studying textbooks as the only credit for children’s success. On the one side the American parents try to impose measures to prevent any abuses in school education, on the other hand the Chinese parents meeting is used as the way to strengthen the school governance and teacher’s authority over the parents and their children. I can see the education in America is centered on students’ comprehensive development and maintains the rights of their parents, however, the education in China is rooted in the tradition of the totalitarian methods, and school teachers and headmasters are the rulers, the students and their parents are the subjects who should obey the orders from the rulers. In America the parents meeting is a gathering for mutual communication between parents and school, but in China, such a meeting is one direction from school authorities manipulating parents, as the principal and teacher talk lot of while parents sit in silence as audience and taking notes. So the political and educational cultures between America and China are so different and there surely is existence of a huge gap which is rooted in a very different political system of two sides.

I appreciate the ways of the American education and the social behaviors. That’s why the American schools, colleges and universities offer the best education which has attracted so many Chinese students coming to America for their high education. I know that it is so sad for Chinese children suffering from the un-human educational system which has caused damage physically and mentality for the body and mind of student.

Happy Learning English

When I first came to the United States from China, everything was so strange. I couldn’t speak English, and I didn’t have many friends. New Haven is a beautiful city, but I felt lonely.

Then one day, my friend Fan Fan and I went to Literacy Volunteers at La Casa to improve our English. I was very nervous. I was afraid that the teachers wouldn’t understand my poor English pronunciation and grammar, but teachers are really friendly and amazing. They helped me continue studying English. I also made a lot of friends from different countries at La Casa. We are all so happy to learn English together.
Cultural Differences

For many years, I have lived in the United States and have noticed that there are many cultural differences between my home country of South Korea and the U.S. In my opinion, these two countries have very different ideas and attitudes about job preference, privacy and independence.

For instance, in South Korea, my mom used to have good relationships with her neighbors and she often shared food with them. I would deliver the food without giving them a phone call that I was coming over. When I came to the U.S., I learned that people don’t like you to stop by without calling and Americans don’t like to have their privacy violated.

Then, one weekend, a religious group of people knocked on my door while I was cooking breakfast with my pajamas on and my hair was messy. I felt embarrassed and angry. I wondered why they were violating my privacy at this time of day. I realize that now I also feel uncomfortable when I am disturbed while I’m home!

In the U.S., teenagers drive and support themselves at an early age. Many young people live independently in the U.S. but most unmarried children in Korea live with their parents even when they are over thirty years old. Some unmarried children expect their parents to support them and deposit money for leasing a house when they move out.

As a result, many older people are not able to prepare for their retirement. Parents are in charge of teaching their kids until they grow up. But, when they are old enough, I think parents should let them move away to teach them independence because young people need to go through many trials and errors. I hope my son is able to stand on his own two-feet and become an independent grown-up like other American children.

All occupations are equally honorable in the U.S. But, in South Korea, people prefer jobs as office workers or white-collar jobs in major companies because people tend to make light of tradesmen, manufacturing and technical jobs, even though they make more money than people who have white collar jobs. I feel that, in the U.S., no one looks down on blue-collar jobs, waiters, small store employees, deliverymen or physical labor workers.

I prefer and like that in the U.S. all work is honorable, I can keep my life private and parents teach young people independence.
**Living in Another Country**

*While living in a foreign country* sounds exciting for many people, this can also cause a bit of fear of what is unknown and new. As a foreigner living in a completely different country it has been an adventure with the language, the culture, the food and the traditions. All of them for me have been the hardest parts of life abroad.

I was fortunate because I knew I wouldn’t feel alone or far from my family, because some of them have been residents for many years in the U.S. Perhaps that has been one of the reasons why, in spite of many challenges, everything works much better in terms of adaptation.

I had felt often the desire to share with other people around me but it was very difficult to express my ideas. Sometimes I couldn’t understand what they said or vice versa; the pronunciation and accent were often a problem. It was very frustrating not achieving my goals, especially with the language. Nobody else understood my hesitation to try new things. For example, sometimes when I went to a restaurant, I had to order something easy to say because I couldn’t pronounce what I really wanted to eat. However, in order to get the most out of my experiences here and to try to have an enjoyable life, I had to break out of my comfortable little bubble. I needed to stop making excuses and realize my plan to accomplish my goal.

I just knew that the first step would be to put aside my shyness and fears. I understood if I let go of the embarrassment, this could work. Now I feel more confident talking though I still have to improve my English. However taking this important step of learning the language has opened for me new opportunities. It has made me feel immersed in the culture of this country and allowed me to participate in all the activities that I couldn’t attend before.

I would encourage people who have the same difficulties to take the challenge to learn the language and be motivated to do it. It isn’t easy but it is not impossible.
Parents Meeting

I had participated in the parents meetings in Shanghai several times before I came to America two months ago. Now my daughter studies in a public school in Westville and I received a letter of invitation from New Haven Parents Committee which required me to attend the parents meeting at King-Robinson Inter-District Magnet School in an evening.

I arrived at the Dining Hall of the school. Unexpectedly, I found only about fifty to sixty parents came to the meeting, and I was told that New Haven has more than 20,000 students. It is unbelievable that not so many parents like to join the parents meeting and like to interact with school concerning the kid’s studies. In my country at least one of the parents of student certainly comes to listen to the instructions from the teachers and staffs of kid’s school. Sometimes both parents would come to the meeting since they have only one kid due to the population controlling program. The child’s education always is the priority.

The American parents who came to the meeting truly represent a very diverse social culture. I could figure it out from the clothing, dress, hair, race, language and behavior embodied by all participants. Although we didn’t know each other, many of us exchanged greetings, shook hands and started chatting. The parents and students ate food, drank beverage, and at the same time listened to the talks presented by parents, principal, social workers, psychologist, school volunteers, and others. Anyhow, everyone could make a speech at such a meeting. I noticed that the main topics focused on how to prevent children from sexual harassment, on mistreatment of students, and discrimination based on religious belief, gender, race, social and economic status and minorities etc. The principal, administrative officials and social workers emphasized the rights of the parents and students, repeatedly reminded the parents to report the cases of the mistreatment suffered by students at school to the parents meeting committee. The parents meeting also discussed how to take the measures to handle the cases of injustice, inequality, discrimination and all bad behaviors probably occurring in school. At the end the parents meeting made a statement requiring the attention from school authorities and concerned departments to enforce the law for children safety protection and exchange the information among the participants. Before the parents departed and went home, the principal of the school guided the participants to visit different parts and various facilities of the school and its campus.

The parents meeting in America is so different from that in China, the country I came from. In Shanghai many parents would attend the parents meeting, which is organized by their children's individual school. At the meeting day all classrooms are full of the parents. The principal usually gives a main speech which urges parents to impose more pressure on their kids for studies, more time from the parents given to kids in homework tutoring, more severe discipline and tough restriction to supervise the behaviors of the students. The parents should make more efforts to support the school authorities and teachers in raising the academic level and improve the scores in competition with other schools. In one word, the main goal of the parents meeting in China is to instruct the parents to bear more responsibility in educating their children, more restriction to their kids’ proper behaviors, harsher attitude to supervise the homework assigned to students at off school hours. The teachers even warn the parents whose children are performing poorly in examination or studies and order them to take stronger measures to force their children to improve their studies.

The impression of my first parents meeting in America makes me reflect over the issue so different with that in China. While the American parents meeting emphasizes the rights of the parents and their children, the Chinese stress the obligations of the parents and their kids’ obey to the rules of the authorities, to be correct in political ideological direction, work hard in raising up the study quality of students. As the American parents esteem the values and personal character development of their children, and how to protect students from the mistreatment in school, the Chinese parents and schools always regard studying textbooks as the only credit for children’s success. On the one hand the American parents try to impose measures to prevent any abuses in school education, on the other hand the Chinese parents meeting is used as the way to strengthen the school governance and teacher’s authority over the parents and their children. I can see the education in America is centered on students’ comprehensive development and maintains the rights of their parents, however, the education in China is rooted in the tradition of the totalitarian methods, and school teachers and headmasters are the rulers, the students and their parents are the subjects who should obey the orders from the rulers. In America the parents meeting is a gathering for mutual communication between parents and school, but in China, such a meeting is one direction from school authorities manipulating parents, as the principal and teacher talk lot of while parents sit in silence as audience and taking notes. So the political and educational cultures between America and China are so different and there surely is existence of a huge gap which is rooted in a very different political system of two sides.

Student: Jianping (Jimmy)
Country: China
Tutors: Elise Kigner, Julie Dowe
Mitchell Library, Hamden
I T IS A GREAT PLEASURE for me to study and work as a visiting scholar at Yale University and to have an opportunity to participate in the English class at La Casa. I want to write about how my feelings about Chinese medicine have changed during the two months I have been studying here.

As a young doctor of traditional medicine, I have always wanted to know how traditional Chinese medicine was regarded by western scholars. Do they like it or not? I discovered a seminar on “The Role of the herbalist in the Era of Climate Change.” It was raining outside when I saw this seminar in the calendar and decided to attend even though I did not have an umbrella. The speaker talked about research, education, and conservation of native medicinal plants. I acquired greater understanding from that seminar.

Why is there an increasing interest in traditional forms of plant-based healing? In my opinion, it is because we all want a fairer and more sustainable world. Why do so many people love herbal tea and alternative medicines in western countries? While this can be seen as a critique of the western model, it can also be used along with it. Do you know where the herbs in your herbal tea were grown? There is not a lot of talk about the crucial connections between whether herbs work and where those herbs are from. The Sustainable Herbs Project seeks to change that. Their interactive website will inform consumers and the media about the herb industry and empower individuals to act on this knowledge.

I am grateful to be an herbal doctor who can help to give more attention to movements for social and environmental justice in western countries.

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Reconnecting with Nature

IT IS INTERESTING TO SEE the seasons in the year. And now I want to write about my experience.

Three years ago, I lived in my country "Honduras". I only knew two seasons, two types of climate: rain and sunny (and very, very hot).

Now I live in Meriden, CT, in the north region of U.S.A. We have four seasons. Maybe you wonder, "what do you think about my experience?" Well, really, I am not sure about enjoying the winter season. The snow is very cold.

I thank you for listening to me.

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To Whom It May Concern:

I CERTIFY THAT I like being interrupted by your "WHAT did you say?" Especially I love the face you make with your "WHAT?".

Your “WHAT?” is painful!
Your “WHAT” is useful!
Your “WHAT?” Pushes me to make more effort to improve my English.

I promise you I will win this challenge.
Please keep interrupting me by “WHAT” but with your smiles.

---

Experience

INTERESTING TO SEE the seasons in the year. And now I want to write about my experience.

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I thank you for listening to me.

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Student: Xiaochen
Country: China
Tutors: Lee Stoltzman, Robert Glen, Don Desmond, Gloria DiMicco, Linda Davis, Marion Suchdeva, Sandra Caro
La Casa, New Haven

Student: Aziza
Country: Morocco
Tutor: Carol Clay Wiske
Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven

Student: Camilo
Country: Honduras
Tutor: Trudy Cotton
Meriden Hills Baptist Church, Meriden

Student: Xiaochen
Country: China
Tutors: Lee Stoltzman, Robert Glen, Don Desmond, Gloria DiMicco, Linda Davis, Marion Suchdeva, Sandra Caro
La Casa, New Haven
Cultures and Languages of India

I AM RAMAN, and I came from Mysore, Karnataka state, India, on Tuesday October 24, 2016, as a postdoc fellow at Yale. I would like to share the culture and languages practiced in India. The culture of India refers collectively to the thousands of distinct and unique cultures of all religions and communities present in India. India’s languages, religions, dance, music, architecture, food, and customs differ from place to place within the country. The Indian culture, often labeled as an amalgamation of several cultures, spans across the Indian subcontinent and has been influenced by a history that is several millennia old. Many elements of India’s diverse cultures, such as Indian religions, Indian philosophy and Indian cuisine, have had a profound impact across the world.

India is the birthplace of Hinduism, Buddhism, Jainism and Sikhism, collectively known as Indian religions. Today, Hinduism and Buddhism are the world’s third and fourth-largest religions respectively, with over 2 billion followers altogether, and possibly as many as 2.5 or 2.6 billion followers. Followers of Indian religions-Hindus, Sikhs, Jaina, Christians and Buddhists make up around 80-82% of the population of India. Although India is a secular Hindu-majority country, Hindus from the predominant population in all 29 states and 7 union territories, with large populations in Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra, Kerala, Telangana, West Bengal and Assam.

According to the 2011 census, 80% of the population of India practice Hinduism. Islam (14.2%), Christianity (2.3%), Sikhism (1.7%), Buddhism (0.7%) and Jainism (0.4%) are the other major religions followed by the people of India. Many tribal religions, such as Sarnaism, are found in India, though these have been affected by major religions such as Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity, Zoroastrianism, and Judaism. Atheism and agnostics also have visible influence in India, along with a self-ascribed tolerance to other faiths.

How the Chinese Celebrate the Festival

THE CHINESE NEW YEAR, also known as Spring Festival in China, is China's most important traditional festival. It is also the most important celebration for families and it is a week of national holiday.

In China people believe that a good start to the year will lead to a lucky year. In the past, when most people were farmers, they traditionally celebrated the start of a new year of farm work and wished for a good harvest. This has now evolved to celebrating the start of a new prosperous year in various vocations.

Chinese New Year is a time for families to be together. Wherever they are, domestic or abroad people will come back home and celebrate with their families.

When New Year’s Eve comes, people come together and have a “reunion dinner” which is believed to be the most important meal of the year. Big families of several generations sit around and enjoy the food and time together. Fish is a must for Chinese New Year’s dinner. In Chinese the word "fish" sounds like the word for surplus. So eating fish is believed to bring a surplus of money and good luck in the coming year. After dinner the elder will give red envelopes to the younger and the children put on new clothes and set off firecrackers. Now more modern celebrations include watching the CCTV (China Central TV) party instant message greetings.

There are also many traditional activities to welcome the New Year such as setting off firecrackers, ancestor worship, temple fairs and dragon dances. Setting off fireworks is common during the Spring Festival season all over China.

The Chinese New Year is the best time to experience and understand Chinese culture. If you have the opportunity to celebrate a traditional Chinese New Year with a local family, you’ll find it’s a happy, lovely and impressive occasion. And the Chinese people are so hospitable and enthusiastic!
Languages and Literature of India (Part 1)

The evolution of language within India may be distinguished over three periods: old, middle and modern Indo-Aryan. The classical form of old Indo-Aryan was Sanskrit meaning polished, cultivated and correct, in distinction to Prakrit—the practical language of migrating masses evolving without concern to proper pronunciation or grammar, the structure of language changing as those masses mingled, settled new lands and adopted words from people of other native languages. Prakrit became middle Indo-Aryan leading to Pali (the language of early Buddhists and Ashoka era in 200-300 BCE), Prakrit (the language of Jain philosophers) and Apabhramsa (the language blend at the final stage of middle Indo-Aryan). It is Apabhramsa, scholars claim, that flowered into Hindi, Gujarati, Bengali, Marathi, Punjabi and many other languages now in use in India's north, east and west. All of these Indian languages have roots and structure similar to Sanskrit, to each other and to other Indo-European languages. Thus we have in India three thousand years of continuous linguistic history recorded and preserved in literary documents. This enables scholars to follow language evolution and observe how, by changes hardly noticeable from generation to generation, an original language alters into descendant languages that are now barely recognizable as the same.

Sanskrit has had a profound impact on the languages and literature of India. Hindi, India's most spoken language, is a “Sanskritised register” of the Khariboli dialect. In addition, all modern Indo-Aryan languages, Munda languages and Dravidian languages, have borrowed many words either directly from Sanskrit (tatsama words), or indirectly via middle Indo-Aryan languages (tadbhava words). Words originating in Sanskrit are estimated to constitute roughly fifty percent of the vocabulary of modern Indo-Aryan languages, and the literacy forms of (Dravidian) Telugu, Malayalam and Kannada. Tamil, although to a slightly smaller extent, has also been significantly influenced by Sanskrit. Part of the Eastern Indo-Aryan languages, the Bengali language arose from the eastern Middle India languages and its roots are traced to the 5th-century BCE Ardhamagadhi language.

Languages and Literature in India (Part 2)

Tamil, one of India's major classical languages descends from Proto-Dravidian languages spoken around the third millennium BCE in peninsular India. The earliest inscriptions of Tamil have been found on pottery dating back to 500 BC. Tamil literature has existed for over two thousand years and the earliest epigraphic records found date from around the 3rd century BCE.

Another major Classical Dravidian language, Kannada is attested epigraphically from the mid-1st millennium AD, and literary Old Kannada flourished in the 9th- to 10th-century Rashtrakuta Dynasty. Pre-old Kannada (or Purava Hazhe-Gannada) was the language of Banavasi in the early Common Era, the Satavahana and Kadamba periods and hence has a history of over 2000 years. The Ashoka rock edict found at Brahmagiri (dated 230 BCE) has been suggested to contain a word in identifiable Kannada.

Oriya's importance to India culture, from ancient times, is evidenced by its presence in Ashoka's Rock Edict X, dated to be from 2nd century BC.

In addition to Indo-European and Dravidian languages, Austro-Asiatic and Tibeto-Burman languages are in use in India. The 2011 Linguistic Survey of India states that India has over 780 languages and 66 different scripts, with its state of Arunachal Pradesh with 90 languages. Article 343 of the Indian Constitution states that the official language of the Union government shall become Hindi and Devanagari script instead of the extant English, but is superseded by English subsequently too as mentioned in section 3 of the same constitutional article that is put into effect by The Official Languages Act, 1963. The form of numerals to be used for the official purposes of the Union were supposed to become international form of Indian numerals consequently apart from numerals in English language. The Constitution of India does not give any language the status of national language.

English was legislated to be reduced to the status of a “subsidiary official language” after fifteen years. But this provision of the constitution was negated by a provision in Section 3 of the same Article 343 that gave primacy to The Official Languages ACT, 1963. The Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution lists 22 languages, which have been referred to as scheduled languages and given recognition, status and official encouragement. In addition, the Government of India has awarded the distinction of classical language of Tamil, Sanskrit, Kannada, Telugu, Malayalam and Odia.
A Story From My Childhood

This is a story from my childhood. When I was a child I had a special ring. One day I wanted to wear my special ring when I was eight years old. My eleven year old brother also liked my ring and one day he asked me, “Can you please give me your ring?” And I said, “Okay, but only for one day. The next day you have to return my ring.” He agreed.

Then I gave him my ring. The next day I forgot about my ring. After a few days I saw my ring on my brother’s finger. I asked him why he didn’t return my ring. He said that because I didn’t say anything he thought I didn’t want the ring. Then I said “Okay but return my ring.” He refused to return it. I reminded him that I said he had to return my ring the next day and he had agreed. He he said that he changed his mind and didn’t want to return it so we started fighting over the ring. Finally my mom interfered and I got my ring back. My brother was angry and I was happy.

Now I think, “Why did I fight with him?” It wasn’t a big matter. If I could have my childhood days again I would give my brother my ring. I would never fight with him. Now I miss my childhood, my brother, my family, and everything.
I’ve always looked forward to my weekends - hoping that so many things would happen or might happen, planning to do something special, reaching out, socializing, and recharging to get my adrenaline going.

This weekend I stopped by Barnes and Noble and bought Robert Lee Frost’s book of poems. He was an American poet, considered by many the best American poet. "...Two roads diverged in a wood, and I, I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference," is a citation from his poem, "The Road Less Traveled." Beautiful poem. It makes us think about our own choices that we made in life. If a second chance is given to us, would we take the same road?

Beckett. The play portrayed the end of life and it put me in a somewhat reflective mood. It brought back memories of the people I lost, loved and depended on for a big part of my life. Next morning, while exercising in front of the computer, I was also listening to the radio. I heard plenty of new English words and phrases like "backlash," "clout," "fighting tooth and nail," "carnage" and what it means when "rhetoric is at odds with reality." Then, on this warm day in winter, I also took a walk in my neighborhood. I observed two small children sitting on a blanket in front of a house. With them on the blanket was a giant stuffed panda toy and a plate full of carrots and celery, which the children were munching on as if they were teaching the panda to like its vegetables. Ingenious!

As I need to wind up my writing for today, I will conclude with the thought that, when I take a look around my town, I see that there are endless ways to spend the weekend!

How God Will Bless America

If we say God bless America then we need to stand on that and that the people, homeless vets, whatever we call them, in America we cannot pay for someone else before you take care of your own. That is not how God blesses America. Human beings in America, that is who God blesses. The government needs to get their house in order before they help someone else, see what your people need. Charity begins at home. America needs to become like the Good Samaritan and show some mercy on the citizen of this country, especially those veterans. That’s how God blesses America, we trust in God and that’s how God will bless America.

Big Changes In My Life

When I was young, life in Iraq was very beautiful and easy. I thought at that time that I was on top of the world. Everything seemed perfect.

Then in 1980 everything changed from good to bad because my country entered a war with Iran. It was a very long war. It began in September of 1980 and continued until August 1988. Eight years of war caused much pain and damage and it destroyed the infrastructure and the economy. The biggest loss was in human lives! In all a million people were killed or injured. Everyone felt sad and angry from this nasty war that destroyed human existence and morals. It was a catastrophe! And there was no winner. After it was over the people felt happy and tried to forget the pain and suffering.

I think life is too short and we should live it as well as we can. Beauty comes from within the human soul. I am really happy to be here and have peace and freedom in America. Thank you for accepting us here!
My Childhood Story

THIS IS MY CHILDHOOD STORY. That time I was 7 to 9 years old. I was very naughty in my childhood. That time I had a very bad habit. If someone scolded me I would eat sugar. I remember every day I ate sugar. All my family members knew it. My mother was very upset for my habit. She was trying to make me quit my habit. Many times she warned me—If you do not leave your habit I will punish you. (But she never punished me) But I did not accept that I have this habit. I said, what are you saying? I do not eat sugar. Please do not bother me. Then my father said, why are you bothering my daughter? Now she is a little girl. When she will be mature, she will leave her habit. Now go and do your work.

One day my mom hid the sugar container. When I went in the kitchen I was looking for sugar. My mom came in the kitchen and asked me, what are you looking for? And I said, No nothing. She knew why I was there but she did not say anything. She was smiling and went away. After 10 minutes again my mom came in the kitchen. That time I was washing my hands and cleaning my mouth. She was surprised because I found sugar container.

If I was obstinate, my mom was more obstinate than me. And why not after all she is my mom. After some days one day my mom locked the kitchen. Then I went in the kitchen I saw it was locked. I was very upset. I did not think she could lock the kitchen. Then I said to my mom please unlock the kitchen. Any my mom was asking-Why? I said I need something. She said ok no problem you can tell me. I will arrange for you whatever you want. Then I said no, I can manage, please unlock the door. My mom said I know what you want. Today I will not unlock the door. If you want me to unlock the door you have to tell me the truth today. But I did not admit my habit. I thought if I will cry she will unlock the door. Then I was trying to cry. And my mom was smiling because she knew that it was not real. That was my gimmickry.

Now whenever we talk about that habit or mine, we both laugh.

What You Care About What You Wear?

YES I DO. I don’t work here. So, I wear what I want because I think it depends on your situation. Besides, if your dress is clean, neat, tidy, it’s enough for me. Also, colorful, because I like the color. But in my country, I work at a hospital and I should dress according to a certain rule.

I remembered one story when I thought about this topic. I want to share it with you. In my country, one famous, popular philosopher is Nasreddin Hoca. He had a lot of funny stories and anecdotes. One about this topic is “Eat my coat, eat”. One day Nasreddin Hoca was invited to an important family’s home. He wore basic clean clothes. When he arrived there, nobody paid any attention to him. The servants were passing him and forgetting his food. After a while, he returned to his home, wearing his best clothes and his fine fur coat. Then he went back to the same home. Everyone noticed Nasreddin Hoca. The servant gave him the best spot at the table and offered him food and drinks. He started to eat. However, he dunked the sleeve of his coat into the bowl and said, “Eat my coat, eat.” Everyone was surprised. Hoca explained, “When I arrived here wearing my other clothes, no one offered me anything to eat or drink. But when I returned wearing a fine fur coat, I was offered the best of everything, so I can only assume that it was the coat.”

Finally, I care about clothes. My main concerns are tidiness, cleanliness, and neatness. Also, if I wear nice clothes, I feel better and nice.

Student: Ozlem
Country: Turkey
Tutor: Carol Clay Wiske
Literacy Resource Center,
4 Science Park, New Haven
My Father

FATHER IS NOT A WORD FOR ME. My father is my ideal, my hope, my trust, my identity, my life. He is very special for me. He is a reason for my happiness. He is a very kind person. He is an honest man. He did everything for me. He gave me a good life. He fulfilled my demands, even my stupid demands also. He gave me a good education. He taught me to deal with wrong things. Every time he gave me moral support. Whenever I needed my father he was with me. He did not leave me alone. He fulfilled his every responsibility.

I have six siblings. My father is not a rich man. But he did everything for us. It was not easy for him. He did hard work in his life. He has a special space in my life. In my life nobody can replace my father. Earning money is not difficult but earning respect is very difficult. My father earned money and respect also. I respect my father.

In my country most of the people love boys more than girls. They want boys. I have only one brother. My father loves his daughters more than his son. It is a very big thing in my country. He never scolds me. I have a very deep relation with my father. I am glad I have a good father. This is my good luck he is my father. He did everything for me and at the end he gave me a very good life partner. Thank you “PAPA”. Thanks for everything. I miss you “PAPA”. And I love you. You are my real life “HERO”. I am sorry if I hurt you but that was not intentionally. Please forgive my all mistakes.

Student: Arti
Country: India
Tutor: Carol Clay Wiske
Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven

My Aunt Judy

MY STORY IS ABOUT MY AUNT JUDY. She is very special to me and makes me feel welcome in her home. She talks about her childhood and her husband, Uncle Ernie. Her house is historical and welcoming. She has a picture of George and Martha Washington. Aunt Judy loves church and volunteers there. She is an artist and teaches art classes.

I love Aunt Judy and she has helped me with many problems. She has Thanksgiving dinner at her home. It is fun and everyone enjoys it. My sister Denise, her boyfriend Ron and I come to the dinner. Everyone brings a dish and cleans up for her. She has turkey, homemade cranberry sauce, sweet potatoes, Rebecca’s green bean casserole and homemade pies.

Student: Rebecca
Country: USA
Tutor: Shirley Weinstein
Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven

Timing is Everything

EIGHT YEARS AGO, I was sad and worried about our life in Iraq and was waiting for the time I could join my children in the USA. Now I have the time to enjoy being with them in America, the freedom country. Life is happy and beautiful. What could be better?

Student: Nawal
Country: Iraq
Tutors: Debbie Cook, Desh Sharma, Norma Barash, Nancy Ferraro, Vanessa Zuidema
Gateway Community College, New Haven
Getting Fit and staying healthy have always been my priority. Last year, I made it a habit to go every other day to run outside on the trail. Whether it is a little bit cold or hot, I still go.

Last spring, early in the season, one day I checked on the weather before I went out to make sure it wasn’t going to rain while I was running. It was cloudy, but according to the weather forecaster it was supposed to clear up very soon. So, I told myself, by the time I get there maybe it will be fine. After I warmed up and stretched my body, I started running. It felt kind of cold and it was misty. I should have brought my jacket with me just in case I felt cold. It was doing good, and I just finished half way going toward my goal at that time. Then the mist started to change to light rain, but that did not stop me from continuing my exercise routine. The beginning of the steep hill was only a few steps ahead of me when I noticed that I forgot my water bottle in the car.

I kept on running but at a lot slower pace. It seems every time I reach this point I feel extremely tired. I was telling myself, no matter what, I should get all the way up. No rain or cold will make me stop and turn around. It seemed with every step I took the rain was getting stronger and it was colder than when I started. In the distance, I could see the top of the mountain. The road was wet and slippery and filled with debris, leaves, tree branches and small rocks. I had to avoid all these things so I wouldn’t trip and fall down. Sometimes I had to take a long jump to avoid this stuff. I guess no matter how careful you are, you still make mistakes. When I jumped trying to move away from a tree branch, I stepped on a big rock. I think I just twisted my ankle. It was a good thing I was only a few yards from the top and when I got there I could call my friend to come and get me.

Finally, I reached the top. The rain was coming down harder than ever. I went under a tree, reaching into my pocket and found that, oh my God, I forgot my phone and car key in the jacket.

After I took a short break, I started going down slowly and carefully. Halfway on the way I saw a friend from the gym I go to and he offered to help me go and get my other key. It is good to have lots of friends. Now, every time I go running, I make sure that I am with somebody.
Adventures with One of My Brothers

WHEN I WAS A KID I lived in a little and peaceful town called Silao. This is located geographically almost in the center of our country, México. In this town there were many agricultural and livestock activities. Its population was formed mainly by farmers. My family had a farm 3.5 miles from town. Normally we harvested alfalfa, sorghum, corn, vegetables and some fruits like strawberries and figs. Besides, there were cows, chickens and pigs.

My father who was an agricultural engineer taught to my brother Fernando and me, many activities in the farm, like planting, cut the fresh vegetables and harvest, milking cows, etc. After some years those farm activities were our duties every day.

One day my father decided to buy 80 laying hens for us. He wanted us to practice every day. My brother Fernando (we called him “Chino” because his hair was like the hair of a sheep) who was two year younger than me, always had some very original ideas. I will write one of them. One day at home, after returning from the farm and finishing our homework and also we had just finished feeding the hens, my brother told me, I want to show something. I will demonstrate to you how a hen can fly like a rocket, so he took one hen and tied from one leg with a rope and he tooked the other end. He said I will gave her many rounds and she will fly and landed like the rocket. I was his assistant to hold the hen and to count. He told me, you will start to count slowly until ten.

We need to remember it was a rocket. Then I started to count very slowly. When the counting was in the five, we heard mama voice, she was coming looking us, so I told my brother, mom is coming and he let go the hen. She flew to the upper rooftop. When my mom saw us she asked “what were you doing”, as like kids, we said, nothing we were just playing and talking.

After some weeks, we forgot the hen. Casually my father had to go up the roof to fix some water pipes. Surprise, he found the hen and took it down stairs. Immediately he called us: Roberto and Fernando come right now. He asked with an angry voice “who did this, ugly thing”, my brother and I looked at each other and told dad in a peaceful way it was Rafael. He was our little brother, six years old. Finally my dad gave us the order to clean twice a day the hen's space for one week.
I Used To Hate, Now I Like

IN MY CHILDHOOD I DIDN’T LIKE PLAYING HOLI. Holi is a very famous festival in my country. It’s a colorful festival. We play holi with colors. We put colors on each other. We apply color to each other. I was scared of colors. I hated holi. But now I like colors and I like holi. Now every year I play holi and I enjoy it.

When I ate cake for the first time it was very bad. I didn’t like it. I thought “I will never eat it again”. Now I like it. I don’t remember when I started to eat cake again. I don’t know why and how I liked it. But now I like it too much. My sister also didn’t like cake. She asked me—“How could you like it? I still hate it”. And I said—“I don’t know my sweet sister”. But I had a benefit just because my sister doesn’t like cake, I used to eat her part of the cake. Not only at home but at outside too.

When I was in my country I never wore jeans. I didn’t like them. But now almost every day I wear jeans. When for the first time I wore jeans it was uncomfortable for me. I was feeling awkward. But day by day I was feeling better. I had to wear them because winter is very cold here. Now I like jeans and I wear them more than my country clothes. I want to wear jeans.

First I didn’t like English because I didn’t know English. I didn’t understand English. I couldn’t talk in English. Now I can talk and understand English. Not very well but I can understand. Last Wednesday I watched my life’s first English movie. I didn’t understand properly but I liked it and I enjoyed. It happened just because of my teacher. If I would have not come here I don’t think that I could have thought about watching English movie. I was surprised I watched a full English movie in one go. I’m very happy. I’m thankful to my teacher. My teacher is very nice and polite. Thanks CAROL!

Student: Arti
Country: India
Tutor: Carol Clay Wiske
Literacy Resource Center,
4 Science Park, New Haven

Jenny’s Story

BEFORE STARTING MY ENGLISH classes everything was more difficult for me in this country. Listening to some people who told me something or maybe they asked me something or just greeted me was very frustrating for me. Because I did not understand what they said and much less I could not answer them. My beloved husband Julio always told me that it was important that I learn English and one day he decided to look for a place where I could receive English classes. And it is thanks to my beloved husband who always helps and supports me. And it is thanks to my teacher Trudy who with affection and patience teaches me English. And it is thanks to Literacy Volunteers for the support they offer to teach English to people of different languages that today I can understand, speak and read some English. I know that I need to keep learning and practicing more so that my English could be better. With the help of God and my effort I will accomplish my goals.

Student: Jenny
Country: Honduras
Tutor: Trudy Cotton
Meriden Hills Baptist Church, Meriden

A Letter

DEAR LITERACY VOLUNTEERS,
Thank you for teaching me how to read. I feel confident now to move on to college. I love the program. You are doing right for the people.

Student: Melvin
Country: USA
Tutor: Valerie Kilmartin
Literacy Resource Center,
4 Science Park, New Haven
For Shirley

SHIRLEY WAS A VERY SPECIAL TEACHER TO ME. We had a good time reading in class. Shirley loved ballerinas, it was fun for her. She loved to go to plays and walking on the beach. She loved to go to restaurants. She liked to go and sit on the shore. She would always smile. She loved to teach. She loved poems.

She was special to me.

Student: Rebecca
Country: USA
Tutor: Shirley Weinstein
Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven

Finally I am in the U.S.A.

I HAVE BEEN HERE 6 months. I came with my wife because my son and daughter have lived here since 2008. The United States of America is a very big country and also very beautiful. I found most of the people here very respectful, and they obey the rules and regulations. Also I think they are kind and friendly. Special thanks to my tutor of Literacy Volunteers.

Student: Saad
Country: Iraq
Tutors: Debbie Cook, Desh Sharma, Norma Barash, Nancy Ferraro, Vanessa Zuidema
Gateway Community College, New Haven

Thank You, and Now, Some Italian Advices

HI, I AM GIORGIA MANCIOPPI, I am 27. I come from a small city close to Genoa, Italy. I am a nurse. I work in an intensive care post heart surgery. I love sport. I have been doing judo since I was 5 years old and now I am also a judo teacher. Right now, I live in New Haven because my husband works in Yale and I stay here during my maternity leave. Leonardo, my son, was born here last September. Now I cannot work here because my Europe degree is not equal to USD degree. To become nurse here I have to do three exams: the first is only about English. I did this twice, and I did not pass; in June I will try again.

I began to have a new life some months ago, no friends, no job, no anything only me, my big belly and my husband; but he works all day. So this is my way to explain to the world who is Georgia! I started to go to La Casa last July for the English class conversation, 8 months ago! That place became my second home in New Haven. I did not speak at all, I was super embarrassed. I think that I am a successful person but I always hated foreign languages, particularly English! Thanks to Literacy Volunteers, I improved my English, I met a lot of people, I learned a lot of things about other cultures, but specially I started speaking, with a lot of mistakes, but now I can have a social life! Last summer I was always alone I went every day to the gym with my husband, I went to west Haven beaches by walking (3 hours,) I did twice a week an English class and the pregnancy class, but for all time I was alone, maybe not really alone, always with my big belly! Now me and my son are the Queen and Prince of English class conversation of New Haven. Usually we do 3 hours a day of courses! We have a lot of friends, babies, moms, people that want to improve their English like us and others!

I love my country, I love my Italian life. American culture is very different to the Italian! I miss a lot my family, my old friend and my routine in Italy. But after that period very far from home, I know that everywhere there are very good people who want to help you, who want to know about you and your background and for them it is not important that your English is not perfect, they want to “understand” you!

I believe in the sentence “If you want you can!” So I want to an advice to people like me who come here for the first time and they do not know English so much. Do not care about your English mistakes, the really important thing is speaking. With time, the mistakes will decrease, do not be embarrassed, nobody know who you are and who are in your country and what did you do! Now you are here, with another language and another culture do not be afraid, launch yourself and all will become easier!

Student: Giorgia
Country: Italy
Tutors: Linda Davis, Marion Sachdeva, Lee Stolzman, Robert Glen, Don Desmond, Gloria DiMico, Sandra Caro
La Casa, New Haven
**Education Brings Us Together**

I MOVED TO THE U.S. as a newly married wife. Being newly married in a totally new country has been exciting but also challenging. There are real hindrances to full participation in American culture, such as not being able to drive and being at school with people who already know one another. But the opportunities for education have been really helpful in figuring out what my interests are.

My story starts with English class. There are a lot of English classes at Yale that can help me both learn English and make friends. It amazes me every time my group mates, who are from different countries, introduce themselves. For example, there is a scholar from Syria, a Ph.D. student from Mexico, an engineer from Brazil, a filmmaker from France, and an astronomer from China. And I keep wondering what exactly brings us together in the same classroom. Some come from countries where war is going on and people are fighting for food or water or racial equality. I feel lucky not to have to worry about these things and enjoy peace and learning with classmates. The education that we already had brought us here, and the pursuit of higher education links us to each other. In this new country, I have started to be an independent thinker, to be creative. I have been thinking about what I can learn from this country, what I can contribute to this community.

I find some things interesting in this new country: Water is drinkable from the tap; taxis are never available when you want them; books are expensive; but cars are inexpensive. What I believe more and more is that education is essential for people from other countries to succeed.

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**Gracias, U.S.A.**

MY NAME IS ANTONIO, and I am from Mexico. When I first arrived in the United States, it was very difficult for me because I did not understand English. The first thing I had to do here was to learn the language. The teachers at La Casa have helped me to learn and understand English. I want to thank them very much. God bless America.

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**Student: Haijuan**
**Country: China**
**Tutors: Jerry Delamater, Desh Sharma**
**Yale Health Center, New Haven**

**MY TEAM**

I AM FROM NORTH CAROLINA, and my favorite basketball team is North Carolina. They won the championship this year. I watched the game by myself. There were other people in my house but they didn’t pay attention, they were on their phones. I have a 73” TV. I was very happy to see them win the championship. They won against Gonzaga, a good team.

End of the month, I’m going to Georgia to have a good time for my birthday. My wife’s sister’s birthday is at the end of the month, we’re taking her out for her birthday.

Valerie is my good teacher. I do better on the tests, but I don’t like to write. We got different people in class. Deborah boosts me up to try to write.

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**Student: Craig**
**Country: USA**
**Tutor: Valerie Kilmartin**
**Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven**

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**Student: Antonio**
**Country: Mexico**
**Tutors: Don Desmond, Robert Glen, Lee Stolzman, Gloria DiMicco, Linda Davis, Marion Sachdeva, Sandra Caro**
**La Casa, New Haven**
The Meaningful Activity—Volunteering

While living in New Haven, I have felt that one of the most impressive things is the volunteer culture. Many people do volunteer work in various places regardless of their age or experience. Some volunteers regularly talk with hospital patients, and others temporarily do voluntary work such as organizing events for students and kids. They do it not for getting credit or certification but spontaneously to help other people.

I have received help from volunteers since I came here. First of all, I have been taking ESL classes in a Literacy Volunteers program, and the tutors I’ve met are all volunteers. They have a job or are retired, and teach us English every week. Because of their great classes, I have improved my English and learned American culture. Also, I have met my conversation partner through the Yale Language Program. She is a volunteer as well, and has given me the opportunity to practice English, and has taken me to restaurants, theaters, and parks. So, I have come to know nice places in New Haven and adapt easily to an unfamiliar American way of life. While meeting with these volunteers almost every week over 3 years, I have come to think of them as good teachers and friends at the same time.

Also, I have become a volunteer. I have been doing volunteer work at the Peabody Museum since last summer. I enter reference data from articles about paleobotany. Although it’s simple computer work done once a week, I think my work is helpful. One day, I went to a meeting about explaining a new online system for volunteers. Before explaining it, the worker at the museum introduced the plan for renewing the museum and wanted to hear any ideas about it from volunteers. I was a little bit surprised that they shared the future plan with volunteers and asked us for feedback. It made me feel as if I had become their colleague.

As volunteers invest their time and talent, they can help other people and be an important person like a good teacher or friend. They also can create a virtuous circle, giving positive influences to encourage someone to become a volunteer. Through volunteer work, volunteers can feel good and make a community more prosperous and energetic, so volunteering is a meaningful activity for both an individual and a community.
Learning English in a New Country

When I was new here, everything is different between America and China. Everything is strange for me. I don’t know anything without my father and my cousins. I don’t know who I can play with, who I can talk to because I can’t understand what they said at all. Even though I learned a little English, when I was in China, it was not hard to talk about with others. Until I was here I knew I was wrong.

But I get help from Becky. She is a very nice teacher and she is very kind. She knows that I know some work and how to spell them. I just can’t say them with correct pronunciation. She has taught them to me. I think that I have become better and she thinks so. Sometimes the class is not a class. We put the book down and just talk. Talk about each other as friends. She knows that I like playing video games. After the class she also tries to understand it and talks about it with me in the next class. I also can learn some new words from the talks.

In a word, Becky’s teaching is very helpful to improve my English. She is very good. I still hope she can teach me after she is back.

Student: Ming He
Country: China
Tutor: Becky Laughlin
Plumb Library, Shelton

Now I Am Safe

My name is Massoma H. I am from Afghanistan. When I was in Afghanistan, it wasn’t safe because my husband worked with a U.S. company and we had been threatened many times by terrorists. Now I am in the United States and I am safe. When I came to the U.S. everything was new for me and I found my life better than in Afghanistan because of the security situation. The people are very kind and the culture is very good.

The big problem in my life is the English language. Now I study English in ESOL Literacy Volunteers school and I am so happy with this program because my teacher is very lovely and she helps me to learn English.

Student: Massoma
Country: Afghanistan
Tutor: Sandy Abrahams
14 West Main Street, Meriden

Volunteers Are Great

I have been in the U.S.A and lived in Connecticut for nearly two years. I have experienced the changes of the different seasons and found shopping to be a paradise. Also, the teachers here are so loving, patient and responsible. But the thing that has impressed me most is the volunteers.

In the USA, there are many volunteers. They work in fire stations, libraries, community centers and many other places. Some retired people work in community centers teaching English as a second language. I am a beneficiary of their teaching and I enjoy and appreciate the classes from the bottom of my heart.

Because of the work done by volunteers, I think that society is a warmer, friendlier and better place. Their work helps the country become better educated and, thus, more prosperous and affluent as well.

I admire these volunteers. They are great!

Student: Ya
Country: China
Tutors: Eleanor Weseloh, Charlotte Luzzi, Jane Bouvier, Michelle Adelman, Stephanie FitzGerald
Keefe Community Center, Hamden
**Thanking Volunteers**

**My Independent Life**

When I came to the US, I was afraid of going anywhere by myself. Even though I had studied English for many years in my country, I couldn’t speak fluently or understand people when they were talking. That’s the reason I avoided communicating with anybody. The public library was the first place where I went to alone. At the first time I tried to speak with somebody, it was a librarian. I asked whether they had an English conversation class. That was the beginning of my independent life. With the start of the class, I had the opportunity to improve my speaking and listening skills. As a result, I gained the courage again to start a conversation and talk to people. Additionally, I have met really kind, helpful people and made some friends. They have helped me a lot and I’m so grateful for giving me freedom in a new and strange country.

Students: Arzu  
Country: Turkey  
Tutors: Elise Kigner, Julie Dowe  
Mitchell Library, Hamden

**Changes after Taking Classes with Literacy Volunteers**

I am Raman, and I came from Mysore, Karnataka state, India, on Tuesday, October 24, 2016, as a post-doc fellow at Yale. My English was not good, and I found it very hard to understand other people. The accent and way of pronunciation is totally different. I was unable to understand and speak American English in the beginning. I wondered about how to lead my life here and thought about going back to India. How to learn at least manageable English was my main question. In India there are many languages, and we did not give much attention to English in India. This may be the major reason I had to face this language speaking problem.

In the beginning, apart from the language, loneliness was another problem. I was also not making any friends. I had no social communication or attachments here. I was bored, sitting alone in the house and office. Then I slowly started to go to different places. One day I went to the International Office and I expressed my difficulties. They told me that there were English classes starting in January 2017 and showed me where to find them: the public library, Yale Health Center, and La Casa. I decided that I wanted to attend the classes in English conversation, reading and writing. All the classes are very good and informative, and are helpful for students who come from different countries to America. Volunteers allow me to read, speak, and also write effective, meaningful sentences. I gained confidence, courage and enthusiasm to learn good spoken English. Personally I am very happy and thankful to those who motivated me and developed my English. Volunteers have helped me to recognize and identify when to use present, past and future tenses. I have become more confident to speak and understand English after attending the Literacy Volunteers classes.

Student: Venkataraman  
Country: India  
Tutors: Jerry Delamater, Desh Sharma  
Yale Health Center, New Haven

**Thank You for Helping Me**

Many years ago when I was in school in China, I read and wrote English for one or two hours every day, but never needed to speak English. I only realized how important speaking English was when I came to New Haven one year ago. Since I didn’t speak English well, I felt uncomfortable and stayed home every day. I was not happy.

After one month, I decided to improve myself by studying more English. I went to the New Haven Adult Education Center in the morning and also to La Casa in the evening. After half a year, I found that my spoken English was much better than before. I was very happy.

As a result, I got an opportunity to work at Yale University when I have learned much more about laboratory techniques. All of these changes came about because I was able to improve my English. My teachers at La Casa have helped me a lot. They are great big heroes to me. They have changed my life.

Students: Fan Fan  
Country: China  
Tutors: Don Desmond, Robert Glen, Lee Stolzman, Gloria DiMicco, Linda Davis, Marion Sachdeva, Sandra Caro  
La Casa, New Haven
**My Tutor**

**MY TUTOR IS A VERY GOOD TUTOR;** she also helps me with my homework assignment from college. When I first met her I was very shy. That was a long time ago, and she was respectful, patient and honest with me when I did not want to listen to her sometimes. She remembers birthdays for all her students at Literacy Volunteer and she communicates with us.

I did not like her at first; it was difficult for me to trust her because I have a problem getting to know new people. But it was good soon. In addition, she is there when you need to talk to her about anything.

She gave us difficult subjects to learn and told us that we can learn. We will be what we want to learn year after year. When if we have a problem, she also tells everything is all right and she also said we can do anything we want to do. She is an important person to me just like my mother and sister and niece and nephew too.

Although the beginning was hard, later we became really close. She is a very smart person and she tells me when am I am doing right and when I am doing something wrong. I am thankful for her, now that I am doing better at college than before.

**How My Life has Changed**

**WITHOUT A DOUBT, it is one of the best decisions I ever made when I decided to take the classes with Literacy Volunteers.**

The volunteers have impressed me deeply with their kindness and patience. The leader presented me and my friends with a warm welcome and a brief introduction to the classes. He made me feel like I was communicating with an old friend. I was also encouraged by the tutors to adopt a more active attitude toward learning English. A good attitude is half the battle. The tutors always teach us with great patience and careful instruction, and their enthusiasm has definitely enhanced our motivation for learning. Considering that the volunteers teach us wholeheartedly, there is no reason not to cherish the learning opportunities provided by the Literacy Volunteers.

The classes have helped me to strengthen my self-confidence when I interact with others in social activities. With my increasing language capacity and self-confidence, it is easier for me to make more friends with whom I can share my life experiences, hang out, and study together.

In conclusion, the classes at Literacy Volunteers have enabled me to make better use of my English and keep pace with the different lifestyle I found in America.

**I Want To Speak English Better**

I CAME TO LITERACY CENTER to speak English better. My kids, who are 9 and 7 years old, are growing up and they have some friends that speak English. I want to be able to have conversations with their friends. When they are teenagers, I want to understand what they are when they are with their friends. Right now most of their teachers are bilingual, but when they go to high school, the teachers will only speak Spanish and I want to able to talk to them about how my kids are doing.

Since coming to Literacy Center, I have more English vocabulary. I am more comfortable speaking English with English speaking people. I understand more English when people are talking to me. I like reading books, especially biographies, and learning about famous Americans.

I like having conversations with Judy and Arlene and I feel very comfortable talking with both of them about everything! Every time I come here, I feel happy because I’m coming to learn something new and speak with them. I feel my tutors are my friends not just teachers. I want to thank them for their time coming here.

Students: Takeya
Country: USA
Tutor: Valerie Kilmartin
Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven

Students: Ji
Country: China
Tutors: Lee Stolzman, Robert Glen, Don Desmond, Gloria DiMicco, Linda Davis, Marion Sachdeva, Sandra Caro
La Casa, New Haven

Students: Yesica
Country: El Salvador
Tutors: Judy Kaplan, Arlene Faiman
Literacy Resource Center, 4 Science Park, New Haven
Hear Our Voices | Essays and Reflections From Literacy Volunteer Students | June 2017
### MERIDEN / WALLINGFORD TUTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

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### GREATER NEW HAVEN TUTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

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### VALLEY TUTORS AND VOLUNTEERS

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Literacy Volunteer Tutoring Sites, 2016–2017

ANSONIA
Ansonia Library
BH Care
Starbucks
Target

BRANFORD
Branford ERACE

DERBY
Derby Library
Derby Neck Library
Panera Bread

EAST HAVEN
Hagaman Memorial Library

HAMDEN
Keefe Community Center
Miller Library
Quinnipiac University

MERIDEN
14 West Main Street
60 Hanover Street
College and Career Readiness
  Center-Meriden Adult Education
John Barry School-Meriden Adult Education
Meriden Hills Baptist Church
Meriden Public Library
MidState Medical Center
Women and Families Center

NEW HAVEN
4 Science Park
Gateway Community College
IRIS
Ives Public Library
Junta for Progressive Action
La Casa
Mitchell Public Library
Stetson Public Library
Wilson Public Library
Yale University Health Center

SEYMOUR
Norman Ray House
Seymour Library

SHELTON
Plumb Library
Starbucks

WALLINGFORD
Wallingford Public Library

WEST HAVEN
West Haven Public Library