

The Power of International Stories

Coming of Age in the Global Village

*Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program
& International Leaders in Education Program
Spring 2010, Winter 2011*

Editors

**Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska, Mamta Kanti Kumar, Julia Perłowski
Vadodara 2013**



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Vadodara, India - 2013

Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA)
& International Leaders in Education Program (ILEP)
ALUMNI SMALL GRANTS 2013

Book Title: The Power of International Stories : Coming of Age in the Global Village.

Project Title: The Power of Culture.

Cultural Appreciation and Awareness: Student Case Studies in Poland, USA, and India.

Revised by: Lawrence J. McNulty, Ph.D.

Special Contributions:

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"This project was made possible by an award from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State, through a program administered by IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board). None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed herein."

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The power of culture is in its stories.

- Unknown

Each one of us has an innate desire to seek happiness and overcome suffering...Great stories mirror this reality. Seeking happiness is our motivation. Overcoming suffering is doing battle with our internal and external self. Instinctively, humans are interested in how others deal with their problems. Funneling this curiosity into the narrative is what actually releases the emotions that wrap around the facts and create the story.

- The Dalai Lama

Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. They are the currency of human contact.

- Robert McKee

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NOTE TO THE READER

Dear Representatives,

The Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State,

International Review and Exchanges Board (IREX),

Host Universities and their great educators & American embassies in collaborating countries,

You have made the change you wanted to see in teachers' lives. This second collaborative grant and book could never have come into existence without the influence of open-minded and generous people. We are enormously grateful for your collective and positive presence. Thank you for having faith in us. As ever, it has been an education and a comfort to have most of the world in one place. This time we have invited teachers and students to collaborate towards this, once-in-a-lifetime chance to articulate pride in their national heritage, roots and culture.

On behalf of thankful TEA teachers and their students

Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska, Mamta Kanti Kumar & Julia Perłowski

NOTE FROM - LAWRENCE J.MCNULTY, PH.D.

The Power of International Stories: Coming of Age in the Global Village Book is a sequel to the 2010 book "Images of International TEA Teachers and their Students" edited by Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska. Whereas the first book shared the experiences of TEA international and American teachers in the program, the sequel provides a collection of short stories written by ESL students of the TEA teachers from their respective classrooms.

The book is fascinating because it not only demonstrates the international students' ability to communicate very well in written English, but also the high degree of creative talent demonstrated by them. The stories are captivating, some happy and some sad, but all are great reads.

Special thanks to the teachers and students who created this wonderful book and to Anna, who won the IREX Small Grant, motivated participation in its production, and finally edited it.

¹ Dr Lawrence J.McNulty represented University of Nebraska, Lincoln and conducted TEA Programs for many years.

INTRODUCTION

The Power of International Stories: Coming of Age in the Global Village. The story book was made possible by an award from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State, through a program administered by IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board). None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed herein."

What is the Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA)?

The Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA), a program of Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the US Department of State provides secondary school teachers of English as a Foreign Language (EFL), social studies, mathematics, and science with unique opportunities to develop expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills, and increase their knowledge about the United States. TEA brings outstanding secondary school teachers from around the globe to the United States to further develop expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills, and increase their knowledge about the United States. The program also brings US secondary school teachers to the home schools of international alumni to collaboratively develop workshops and share best practices. International alumni are eligible to apply for small grants to implement self-designed projects that benefit their home schools and communities (www.irex.org).

Who is who in the project?

- **Recipient of the Small IREX Grant 2013, Coordinator of the Power of Culture Project & Editor:** Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska (Poland)
- **Project collaborators & Editors:** Mamta Kanti Kumar (India), Julia Perlowski (USA)
- **The book is revised by:** Lawrence J. McNulty, PhD; Allyson Daly, MA
- **Authors of the articles:** TEA Teachers, school colleagues of TEA teachers and their students.

What was the aim of the collaborative project?

To publish a story book which presents the countries` identity and uniqueness.

Why is a Story book and creative writing important?

We the alumni of TEA 2010, 2011 explored this idea of story writing because we felt that creative writing plays an important role in a child's development. Most children have an inherent need to express themselves in words. Intellectually stimulating creative writing program help the students develop this art.

The reasons for creative writing are many

- to foster artistic expression.
- to explore the functions and values of writing
- to stimulate imagination
- to clarify thinking
- to search for identity
- to entertain the reader

With these compelling reasons in mind we thought that a platform in the form of a book of international short stories could be published. This provides an opportunity to the children across the globe to explore and develop sensitivity to cultures across the world.

Target audience: For current and future TEA teachers the students and their community.

How will the book be available to current and future TEA international teachers?

- Through the website of INTERNATIONAL CONSORTIUM FOR DEVELOPMENT OF YOUTH which includes the projects of cooperating TEA teachers from various parts of the world. <http://blazelearn.com./index.html>
- Some hard copies will be sent to IREX, to the embassies of the collaborating countries and will also be given to participating schools and local libraries. The story book will be an inspiration for future TEA awardees and will reflect international ethos.
- In the future, the editors are planning to take part in the Teachers' Summit at Pompano Beach High School in Miami.
- Each contributing TEA member will receive a hard copy of the book.
- PDF version of the book can be accessed at www.stories.annakrzeminska.pl

Conceiving the title:

Coming of Age in the Global Village, the subtitle of *The Power of Culture* project, was inspired by a combination of phrases and ideas. A "coming of age" story in literature is a story that describes a main character's transition from childhood to adulthood; it is marked by greater responsibility, some loss of innocence, and the gaining of wisdom. As I was reading some of the students' stories, I was struck by the way they captured their imagination, their hope to connect to other young people around the world, and their innovative ways of playing "host" to their nation and region. As they became good hosts, they created personal points of entry to their nations, their regions, and their hearts. Their stories and essays will inspire readers not only to travel to their cities and towns, but also to see these places through their eyes. How could we read that the Siberian winter is the soul of Russia, and not see its splendor? How could we read the simple lyric beauty of a story like "Frozen" and not wish to meet the Estonian student who created such an elegant balance of loss and struggle for forgiveness? Through this project, our students have become our teachers.

The phrase "global village" comes from a Nigerian proverb from the Igbo and Yoruba people, "it takes a whole village to raise a child" as well as the idea that the whole world is now linked, making it both large and small. Through this proverb, the community is upholding the concept that children are a blessing, and because they are so valued, the community collectively tends to and invests in guiding young people to adulthood. These organizers and contributing teachers are cultivating a shared place, a village, where we can nurture our students together, reflecting a shared vision that values our own cultural identities, welcomes those different than our own, and hopes that the seeds planted through this project will lead to greater understanding and peace within that global village. - Allyson Daly



Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska

DEAR CONTRIBUTORS AND ALL TEA TEACHERS AND STUDENTS:

I have had the honor of working with open-minded teachers and students who have deep roots in their national cultures and who feel pride in their national heritage. You all have felt a desire and need to communicate to others your way of thinking and national values through the pieces of literature you have created. Those who read this book will get acquainted with Armenian, Bangladeshi, Estonian, Colombian, Georgian, Indian, Russian, American and Polish national values, heritage and even stereotypes and problems we are facing on a regular basis. The pages you are going to read will take you into personal and undiscovered worlds of young people's minds. This young generation has the ability to bring hope and desire to new generations to live fully and valuably. In today's shrinking world, young people preserve and disseminate inherited ideas, values, beliefs and knowledge for the generations that follow. I am convinced that culture is very crucial in interpreting and making sense of the world. It gives each person a sense of identity through language, customs, beliefs, music, food, technology, dress and images. This is what the reader finds in these STORIES! Thank you for being great ambassadors of your homelands!

My journey toward appreciating Polish culture started when I became fascinated by the numerous global pilgrimages of our Pope John Paul II. During his 104 foreign travels, the Pope emphasized how proud he was to be a Pole. No matter where he was, Honduras, Lourdes, Seychelles or the Ivory Coast, he stayed connected to his Polish roots. Many journalists, scientists and researchers have claimed that "to understand this Pope, you must go back to his Polish roots." Ultimately, everything we have learned about him proved the deep truth of these words. All of the major themes of John Paul II's papacy can be traced to the shaping events of his life--a life whose roots are planted in Polish soil. Thanks to HIM I understood that being a Pole has a deep meaning and Poles bring a good message to the world.

On my life path I have had the honor to meet GREAT people who made me conscious about the value of their cultures, too.

Through the *Teaching Excellence Achievement Program* I have become a global citizen and have had the life-changing opportunity to meet my dearest friend and collaborator, Mamta Kanti Kumar. Her openness, through stories, helped me understand Indian culture. This understanding was enhanced through an unforgettable study visit to Vadodara in 2011. This was also the time when the idea of *Power of Culture* was formed. Great hospitality and immersion in Indian culture made my daily life richer – Thank you, Mamta Ma'am. I would also like to express my deepest gratitude to you for making the effort to come to

Kraków to spread Indian culture among the teachers and students of VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące, my family and friends. We have proven that promises might be kept once one has a real desire to make them come true!

At this point, I would like to express my sincere appreciation to Julia Perłowski, my second collaborator. Julia is an American teacher who was working with teachers and students in the field of English literature and theatre when I was in Vadodara. At that time she promised to contribute to *Power of Culture Project*. When such a chance presented itself, Julia, without thinking twice, decided to make the journey and run workshops in my school in Kraków and be an important part of our project! Thank you for your heart and enthusiasm!

I cannot forget to mention Allyson Daly whose father's unbelievable story came as one great example of the rewards that we have unexpectedly received. What is more, Allyson eagerly and voluntarily helped in editing the stories so I could meet the deadlines of this challenging project.

The next person I wish to thank is Lawrence J. McNulty, Ph.D. from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln who is a great leader of teachers. Dr. McNulty encouraged me to grow as an educator and motivates me and other TEA Alumni to go further and further. Thank you, Sir!

I would like to thank the Principal of Navrachana International School, Vadodara - Mr Theo D'Souza, the Principal of Navrachana School - Sama, Vadodara - Ms Bijoya Baksi and CBSE Coordinator at Navrachana International School – my dear friend, Anagha Pathak for being great hosts and educators for me and my students! I would also like to thank the Principal of VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące, Mr Jerzy Waligóra for having faith in my projects and activities and for eagerly supporting collaborators in our school.

I also offer my great gratitude to Karine Dillaqyan (Armenia), Md. Mutahar Hussain (Bangladesh), Guillermo López Ossa (Colombia), Piret Bossack (Estonia), Margit Timakov (Estonia), Nana Tatiashvili (Georgia), Nino Sekhniashvili (Georgia), Rita Banerjee (India), Kashmeera Jaiswal (India), Jolanta Jedzok (Poland), Żaneta Dylağ (Poland), Oksana Petrova (Russia), Denise Ghiloni (USA) Catherine Mein (USA) for the constant willingness to cooperate with me; to my mother, Jolanta Krzemińska, for professional teaching and life support, and especially to my husband Łukasz Kaczyński and my daughter Apolonia for giving me a helping hand and motivation to conduct educational projects.

I believe that *The Power of Culture* project has been and continues to be, as Lawrence J. McNulty once said, "The gift that keeps on giving."

Best regards,

Anna

PERSONAL OBSERVATIONS BY THE COLLABORATORS



Mamta Kanti Kumar

AN IDEA IS BORN.....

As this book is ready to be published many thoughts flit across my mind as I go down memory lane... In July, 2011, we got international visitors, Anna from Poland and Julia from USA, both Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA) alumni. Wonderful, open-minded women, with a wealth of knowledge and immense experience in education; ready to take on all kinds of challenges. The binding factor for the three of us was the TEA Programme, Spring 2010. Anna and Julia were interested in knowing about India, its culture and its women. They were excited to be working at Navrachana School Sama, open to making new friends, enthusiastic about getting to know the students and teachers and understanding different teaching methodologies as well as exploring unfamiliar territory.

The fourteen days spent in close proximity and association brought forth the realization that although we come from different parts of this world and have different cultural perspectives, we all are open and willing to know, learn and understand the diverse perspectives of each other. And, we all agree that it is our responsibility to provide such platforms and mediums for our students to engage in cross-cultural associations.

Thus, the idea of assimilating stories written by students from different countries and parts of the world was explored by us. This became another reason to strengthen the ties with the TEA alumni because they would be our evident collaborators from across the seas.

Story writing was chosen as a medium for collaboration because today, in a media aware environment, story writing and reading has its own intrinsic and unique significance. Stories are an inherent and ubiquitous part of everyday life, especially for children. Stories educate, inspire and build rapport. They are a means of communicating, recreating, and helping preserve cultures by translating memories and representing them in a more concrete manner, defying all boundaries.

The young authors, who have written stories for this book, have learned to organize their thoughts and use the medium of stories to communicate their experience of life. The readers will glean their life's experiences, dilemmas and hardships.

Every one of the authors who have written stories for this book, have an inimitable story to tell unlike any other. These stories have helped us explore the feelings, thinking and behavior pattern of people in different cultures.

My visit to Poland in May 2013 as one of the collaborators of the 'The Power of Culture' project added varied hues to my experience. Interacting with the Polish parent community, teachers and students gave me an insight into Polish culture. The ten days spent in Poland strengthened the belief that though cultures may differ they are all intrinsically the same across the globe and must share common platforms such as these.

The power of culture project and the collections of, The Power of International Stories: Coming of Age in a Global Village was made possible by an award from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department Of State through a programme administered by the International Research and Exchange Board (IREX).

This book showcases the efforts of the teacher collaborators from the nine countries who encouraged and excited their students to write these wonderful stories.

I take this opportunity to thank Anna who wrote the grant and provided complete guidance and support in the publishing of this book. The varied cultural activities at Krakow arranged by her gave me a glimpse of the rich Polish culture and heritage. Julia's generous support in providing help and guidance in carrying out the project within the time frame; Allyson, Joe and Kashmeera for editing the stories; Deepak Mahakul, who designed the beautiful cover; Kruti and Kapil for helping with the illustration, Preeti Dhobi for creating the coloured inner pages; my principal Ms. Bijoya Baksi, who has complete faith in me, that if I take up a task it will be well completed; Shruti, Vinay and Maa for believing in me and giving me space to work.

Happy reading!

Mamta Kanti Kumar



Julia Perlowski

AN IDEA GROWS...

I landed in Vadadora, India in July 2011. Until this time, I had never been outside the western world. This trip was the result of having received the TEA Award from the U.S. State Department. In January of that same year I traveled to Lincoln, Nebraska for an orientation. In that small mid-western city, wind wild and snow swept, a congregation of people met from all over the world for their final formal gathering in the U.S. after three months of having lived and studied at several American universities with the aim to learn something of U.S. teaching and pedagogies. Among the colorful garments and melodious accents moved one woman...quiet, centered, pleasant, strong. Mamta Kanti Kumar and I were somehow seated at the same table amidst Indian teachers from many regions. She had a pleasant smile and the moving of her head from left to right could be construed as nothing other than an agreement, a concurrence...an expression of appreciation. We talked...and discovered that we had similar roles in our respective schools. In addition to teaching in the social science department, Mamta was also project coordinator at her school making sure that students enjoyed many activities as well as partnerships with teachers from all over the world. At Pompano Beach High School I am a theatre, reading and English teacher as well as sponsor of many clubs and coordinator of many school activities. This was a woman after my own heart. We spent an edifying weekend together in each other's company and on Sunday, said goodbye. None of the Americans knew with whom they would be paired in summer. We were told that we were not to choose or even request. We would be matched as the State Department saw fit. And, so, two months later, I opened a letter to find out that my host would be the incomparable Mamta who had made such an impression on me just a couple of months before. I felt blessed. On the first day, in Mamta's kitchen I had the extreme pleasure of also meeting Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska, a Polish teacher who came to offer workshops in the town's IB school. Thus, over pakoras, a partnership was formed. The State Department hoped that after a two-week stay in India, teachers would keep up collaborations for at least two years. This triumvirate would prove to be the start of a life-long collaboration. Anna obtained the grant for the power of culture project. Mamta was to be her main collaborator helping to choose the theme and publisher for *The Power of International Stories: Coming of Age in a Global Village*. From so far away in

the U.S. I was asked to contribute stories. I wanted to be closer to the project...closer to these wonderful women with whom I spent a short amount of time, once upon a time, in a small town in Gujarat, India. I would go to Poland in June 2013. Now that I am here...I am proud to also be instrumental in editing this volume and honored that Anna and Mamta invited me to be a part of volume that attempts to define who we are in light of our cultures and how we articulate this.

For students living in South Florida, as, indeed, for many Americans, the question about American identity and what it means to be an American, is tricky. At Pompano Beach High School alone, 47 counties and as many languages are represented in the student and parent population. Students have immigrated to us from South American, the Carribbean, Asia and the Middle East. Americans usually identify themselves first with their heritage from these primary places of residence. When, in America, I am asked where I am from, I say, POLAND. My family tried to preserve our Polish heritage in America throughout my childhood. I tried to get away from it. Not until much later in life, did I see the value of those early years. And, now, in the summer of 2013, at age 45, my time with Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska in Poland, enabled me to somehow gently pull my roots from the soil to see their textures and directions. I wish to thank Mamta Kanti Kumar for expanding my world view and Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska for returning a part of my lost self to me. As different as Poland and India seem culturally, the women from both of these places are imbued with monumental generosity and love. I am truly blessed to know and be loved by them.

Special thanks goes to IREX for putting me in contact with these women...and the projects that we do and will continue to do together.

Finally, thank you to the young people who fuel all of our desires to bring our worlds closer together while remaining firm in our individuality.

Enjoy the joy!

Julia Perlowski

POWER OF CULTURE IS IN ITS PEOPLE

India - Bijoya Baksi



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Comments from the Navrachana School - Sama Principal, about international cooperation in education:

Today's young people are crucial for the shaping of our future, it is therefore imperative that they are enabled to develop to their fullest potential. Throughout the world people have gradually come to accept the idea that a new spirit of international cooperation might well be formed by better communication and understanding among nations. This can only happen if they are empowered to understand culture as a homogenizing force; it also engenders and supports diversity and differentiation. Thus this idea, of providing a platform for young people to share their ideas through the medium of stories and to provide a kaleidoscope of the different cultures that becomes the basis of the vibrant diversity among humankind.

What a wonderful thought! Nine countries and numerous stories written by young people will give the readers a glimpse of the thought process, creativity and the interconnectivity, which children across the globe can enjoy through such innovative endeavors. I appreciate Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program (TEA) & International Leaders in Education Program (ILEP) ALUMNI SMALL GRANTS for supporting the project. 'THE POWER OF CULTURE' for giving the children across the globe this platform to write stories.

I congratulate Anna, Mamta and Julia for conceiving such a brilliant idea and assimilating the pool of talent, coordinating with the teachers of the identified countries and getting the book printed. Kudos to the wonderful threesome!

I wish the venture great success.

Bijoya Baksi

Principal

Poland - Jerzy Waligóra



COMMENTS FROM VIII PRYWATNE AKADEMICKIE LICEUM OGÓLNOKSZTAŁCĄCE PRINCIPAL, JERZY WALIGÓRA, PH.D, ABOUT INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION IN EDUCATION:

But trample not the altars of the past,
Although you shall much finer domes erect.
Adam Asnyk, *To The Young*

Dear International Teachers and Students,

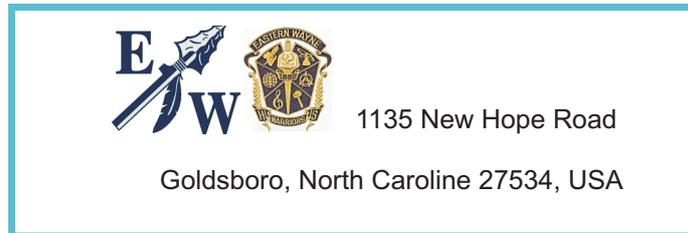
The past is a world beset with divisions, a world where countries and regions separated from one another are used to safeguard their identities, thus creating their individual traditions and customs. The present and the future are much more familiar; they represent a globalised world that has become increasingly more unified, a world in which knocking down barriers might gradually lead to the loss of identity and tradition. This is why, as nations are brought closer and closer together, it is so vital to recognise the value of one's roots, cultural heritage, and traditions and to share this treasure with others. This process of intercultural dialogue is cultivated at VIII PALO (Private Academic High School) in Krakow thanks to the efforts of Ms Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska, MA; of Julia Perłowski, Master Teacher, at Pompano Beach High School in the USA; and of Mamta Kanti Kumar, Master Teacher, at the Navrachana School, Vadodara, India. I would like to express my heartfelt gratitude to the teachers and students involved in *The Power of International Stories: Coming of Age in the Global Village* project. I hope that they will continue to pursue their goals with equal consistency and resolve.

Best Regards,

Jerzy Waligóra, Ph.D.

Principal

USA - Gene Byrd



Comments from the Eastern Wayne High School Principal, Gene Byrd, about international cooperation in education:

Dear International Teachers and Students,

We are very happy and excited to be a part of an international educational team, working together in understanding and cooperation. Teachers, thank you for inspiring and collecting your students' imagination. Students, thank you for showing us what you are curious about, what you are puzzling over, and what you dream about. We are proud to contribute and are looking forward to reading and sharing your work with our school. By working together, all of us are pointing to a future where all people have a voice, where we can learn from each other, and where we can meet in a spirit of peace.

Best Regards,

Gene Byrd

Principal

Eastern Wayne High School

COLOMBIA



Guillermo LopezOssa



Wilson Henao Arias



Danier Anderson
Perdomo Carmona



Daniel Felipe
Castañeda Ramirez

POLAND



Anna Krzemińska-
Kaczyńska



Nikola Boroń



Bartek Jaromin



Martyna Kulak



Marysia Ślusarczyk
with Mamta Kumar



Aleksandra Nikoniuk



Natalia Maruta



Tomasz Ślusarczyk

ESTONIA



Piret Bossack



Mari-Liis Duglas



Anneli Kuldkepp



Katrin Kirsikka
Janelle Koskela



Merlin Kasesalu



Lisa-Marie Nüüd



Margit Timakow



Kenneth Tominga



Kerli Kalk



Sille-Liis Männik



Oliver Vinkel



Sander Rõuk



Keidi Suursaar



Katrin Repetskaja



LiisaSalin



Ann Rehema



Henri Mart Pihl



Marge - Merit Pass

GEORGIA



Nino Sekhniashvili



NanaTatiashvili



Bela Danelia



Gvantsa Kobakhidze



Leri Kokilashvili



Sopho Liparteliani



Eka Tsiviladze



Natia Jiqurashvili

ARMENIA



Karine Dillaqyan



Kimal Arakelyan



Karin Dilakyan



Arakelyan Satenik

INDIA



Rita Banerjee



Kashmira Jaiswal



Mamta Kanti Kumar



Jason



Anagha Pathak



Sunit



shaishtah



Niyor



Sarjan



Umang



Meghana



Vishvambhari Parmar



Lahari Dam



Muskan



Antara



Vedehi



Riya



Rythm



Yogansh Prasad



Anjali



Alowkika



Indrani

RUSSIA



Oksana Petrova



Elena Shevchenko



Tatyana Bilan



Dina Dmitrieva



Valentina Kovalenko



Liza Kardash



Dar'ya Kuznetsova



Olga Kachesova



Polina Tretyakova



Sofia Valova

BANGLADESH



Md. Mutahar Hussain



Muhammad Jabir Ibn Hossen



Sumit Roy Pronoy

USA



Allyson Daly



Catherine Mein



Denise Ghiloni



Julia Perlowski



Mary Thornton



Emma Rosentrater



Minyi He



Tomeeka Spruill



Phelan Kenyon



Emily Soley



Catherine Giacalone



Claire Noonan

ARMENIA



Karine Dillaqyan
High School In Spitak
Spitak, Armenia

Karine was one of the TEA fellows at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln (UNL) Spring 2010 under the same programme as both Anna and me. She was quick to make friends and willing to help.

She comes from the beautiful mountainous country of Armenia with a rich cultural heritage. High School in Spitak is the only High School in her city with strength of 500 students. Karine teaches English in this school.

Two of the stories written by the young authors of her school reflect strong family bonding, love and affection for the extended family. If these young people are putting their thoughts into words, they must be practicing it also.

Story telling is inherent in most cultures. Life experiences are documented told and retold and they become stories. It is for the reader to glean information get a glimpse of the country's culture which may be valuable and life changing.

Thank you, Karine for giving us this opportunity to include these stories in the book.

Anna & Mamta

It has been rightly said; Stories are the creative conversion of life itself into a more powerful, clearer, more meaningful experience. — Robert McKee

PARENTS

Araqelyan Satenik
High School in Spitak
Teacher: Karine Dillaqyan
Spitak, Armenia

Armen lived in a town where everybody knew each other. His family was an average Armenian family consisting of grandparents, parents and two children. Armen's house was not very far from his school. His friends visited him very often after the classes. Every time Armen's grandparents met them, it was with pleasure. They had a fruit garden around their house full of apples, pears, apricots, peaches, plums and cherries. In autumn, Armen and his friends were fond of playing in the garden enjoying the delicious fruits there. While watching them, Armen's grandparents smiled with fond memories of their own childhoods.

After leaving the school Armen went to study in the Capitol. His parents wanted him to become a lawyer but Armen did not like the idea. He decided to become a doctor as he thought that he would feel more comfortable in the medical sphere. It had also been his dream since childhood. Little by little, it seemed as if his dream was being realized.

It was spring... a nice and sunny day. Nature was changing its colours. So, Armen and his friends decided to spend a day with nature. They remembered their adventures during the school years, played like children enjoying every minute. The next day Armen felt that he caught a cold as his body temperature was higher than usual. At first, he did not take this seriously. He paid no attention to it. The next day he had very high temperature. When his mother called him he tried to hide it from her as he didn't want her to get worried about him. But his mother understood from his voice that he was ill. After the phone call she hurried to her son and in an hour she was with him.



She was very worried and was doing her best to cure him very quickly by giving him tea and pills. She stayed next to him the whole night. Armen was trying to calm her down all the time ensuring her that he felt better. He didn't like that his mother was treating him like a child. He was already a medical student! At the same time, his mother's caring attitude made him feel like a child again! Armen's mother kept joking by asking him how the future doctor could get so ill! She was constantly patting his head, covering him with kisses and repeating, "Oh! my baby... my child!" Armen smiled and said, "Mummy I am not a child anymore." But his mother interrupted him and said, "You will remain a child for me even when you become sixty years old." Then she added, "You can understand me only when you become a parent. And haven't you heard about an eighty year old mother who asks her sixty year old son whether he is hungry and advises him to put on warmer clothes in order not to get ill? So my son, children always remain children for

their parents.” Armen began to laugh loudly remembering his grandmother who used to ask exactly the same questions to his father. His grandfather was the same.

In a few years Armen graduated from the university. He became a specialist. He received an offer to continue his education abroad. He decided to go home and talk it over with his parents. On the way, he was anticipating his parents' reaction. What if they did not like the idea?

There it was...his native town, the streets, the little alleys; he could see the roof of his house. His grandfather met him with open arms. He was smiling as usual but it was evident that he was worried. Armen hugged him and asked immediately what had happened. Without getting a reply, his grandfather hurried him indoors. His mother was waiting for him at the entrance. She hugged and kissed him heartily.

Armen asked worriedly, “Mummy what's the matter?” “Don't worry my dear, nothing serious,” she replied, “Grandma is a little ill.” “Why? What happened? Where is she?” asked Armen.

“In her room... she is waiting for you.”

Armen ran to his grandmother's room. He found her in her bed. He bowed before her and hugged her. She smiled and silently patted his head with her thin and shaky hands. He was enjoying the moment...the lovely familiar smell of his grandmother.

“Mum, did you call the doctor? And why didn't you tell me that grandmother is ill?” asked Armen as soon as he noticed the presence of his mother. “Of course, we did my dear. Your father went to call him again. We did not wish to worry you,” said his mother.

Armen asked several questions one after another. Instead of answering his questions, both, his grandmother and mother asked him to have something to eat and to take a little rest.

“Grandma! Mum... stop it, please! Do you think it's the right time for eating?” said Armen worriedly.

At that moment the doctor entered the room accompanied by his father. The doctor began to examine the patient at once. Soon he smiled and said, “You feel better, much better today. There is no need to worry. You can attend your grandson's wedding party and even bring up your great-grandson.”

Grandmother smiled with tears in her eyes. Armen and the doctor went to the next room to have a talk. Being a doctor he wanted to know everything in detail. Father looked at his son from the corner of his eye; he was very proud that his son was a doctor.

Armen seemed nervous after the doctor left. He was deep in thought, trying to concentrate. Now he will soon be a doctor himself and it was his duty to cure the patient, especially when it was his grandmother. But, his grandmother was old and in a few days she passed away...

It was very difficult for Armen to overcome his sorrow. He felt very guilty for not being able to help his grandmother whom he loved so much. All his classmates were present at her funeral. They all loved her and remembered her tasty dishes and her blessings. His friends from the university were also there. It's great when at the time of need you are surrounded by caring people.

The death was hardest for Armen's father. He had lost his mother who tried to take care of her son till her last breath. Only mothers can be devoted to their children entirely. Grandfather suffered in silence. He had lived with his wife for a lifetime. How could he go on?

In a few days Armen told his parents about his plan to go abroad and become a specialist in his field. The parents did not reply at once. Armen was surprised. There were so many parents who would be happy for this chance for their son and would even help him get there. But not his parents... why?

The next day he got the answer. His father explained to him that they were very happy for his success but they did not want their son to live so far from them. His mother began to cry saying that she would miss him very much. Armen tried to explain to them that he was going there only to study for a short while. He would be back. He would never like to live abroad. After all the deliberations, he could convince them.

After some time, Armen went abroad. New country, new people, new customs and traditions, new life... The first few days were both interesting and difficult. Every evening he talked to his parents and told them about his impressions. He had great success in his studies and got another offer – a job with a high salary and nice living conditions. Armen started considering whether to stay in this foreign land or to return home.

He was living in a room alone. From time to time he visited his foreign friends in the neighborhood. Even friendships were different here. Once Armen got ill with a high temperature. As usual he did not pay much attention to it. Later, he understood that he was seriously ill. He was alone. He was in a lovely country, in a nice room, but so lonely. His mother's face appeared in front of his eyes and he felt her hand on her forehead. In the morning he got better. But, still, he was thinking about his crying mother, thoughtful father, sick grandfather and lonely little sister. In his mind he was not here, he was in his native home. He suddenly understood what the name of his illness was; it was homesickness!

He was missing his family and his native country. When he had a call from his parents his mother understood immediately that he was ill though he was trying to ensure that she shouldn't make out from his voice that he was ill.

Soon Armen recovered. However, his heart and thoughts were still at home. His colleagues were surprised when they learned about his decision to return home. He told his parents about his decision. At the airport it seemed to him that time stopped. He looked forward to meeting his family again. In a matter of a few hours, he was home. His sister met him first. She ran and hugged him. Then he met his mother who looked much older. And his father was there, too. "And where is grandfather?" he asked his father. Looking at his father's face he understood everything. "When?" he asked. "Two weeks ago," answered his father sadly. "He could not live without your grandmother. It was too hard for him."

Now, Armen was at home surrounded by his family. How good he felt with them! He understood that he would never change his house with any palace, and his country with any other country. Most of all he was sure he would never leave his family again.

All of a sudden he realized that he was feeling like a child next to his parents. Looking at his mother he smiled remembering her words, "It doesn't matter how old you are, you will always remain my child my dear..."



MY MYSTERY

Karin Dilakyan
High School in Spitak
Teacher: Karine Dillaqyan
Spitak, Armenia

It was very cold and the frost was awful. Everybody was at home. There wasn't even a car in the street. There was nobody and nothing outside. Everything was silent. Only nature was alive. Nature was admiring the interesting and beautiful moments of youth.

My dear reader, I think that just like nature, today's youth adapts to life's difficulties. The Crazy March wind had begun its cruel actions. The wind was blowing harshly, frightening the surrounding people. Nevertheless, it was heralding spring, full of newness and beauty.

Young people were running after adventure trying to overcome all the difficulties they had in the winters of their own lives. I wasn't an exception either. When I finished drinking my tea I went out to find adventure but adventure found me. The silence in the house was interrupted by the bell at the door. It was repeated several times. I opened the door. His face was awful and pale. He asked for shelter and wanted to stay for a day. I invited him in. I asked his name, but he didn't answer me. He sat down and asked for some tea. I didn't refuse. He was drinking and I was trying to find out what had happened. He didn't speak and asked me where he could sleep. I accompanied him into the bedroom for the guests. I went to my room, but I couldn't sleep. I sat down and began to think about what was going on. He was in my mind. I was thinking of him. Only the wall was between us. He was cold like the wall. His eyes were beautiful and there was a special expression in them. I thought, he is a cold person. My dear reader, why was I thinking about him?

Children feel, but they can't analyze their feelings. And, even if they can analyze their feelings partially they can't express them in their own words.

What was this feeling? Love? Respect? Curiosity? Infatuation? Maybe it was love at first sight. I decided to sleep.

In the morning my servant, Ann, told me that he had gone. I was alone again; a few minutes ago thinking about him I was happy. I thought that I was a crazy person. Why everything was ruined, why was everything to end so... the door bell rang again. Ann opened the door.

"Come in, sir, come in. Miss Jane was worrying about you. You know, sir that..." trailed Ann.

"Ann, please leave me alone." said I.

I was waiting for him but he didn't come. He went up to his room. The following night was very hard. I felt very lonely. I was walking in the dark and empty room. Suddenly I heard some footsteps.

“Oh, I caught you. Hey! You thief...” I exclaimed. “Ann?”

“Miss...is that you? Oh, forgive me; I thought you were a robber.” said Ann.

I asked immediately, “What are you doing here? Why aren't you sleeping?”

She replied, “Mr. John wanted some water. I came here for it and I heard some noise and...”

“Ann, how is Mr. John?” I asked urgently.

“He looks like a mad person. He is talking to himself.” said she.

“I shall take the water myself. Good night Ann.” I said dismissing her.

“Good night, madam.” She responded.

I went upstairs to his bedroom.

I heard him speaking in his delirium behind the door. He was talking to himself. When I went in, he didn't notice me.

He was repeating continuously, “I'll kill you..., I'll kill you..., go away, go away. Don't come near me. I'll kill you.”

“Mister, your water...” I said, extending the glass of water to him.

“Oh, sorry, I didn't notice you. Thanks.” said he, startled by my presence.

“Mr. John, whom do you want to kill?” I questioned

He replied immediately, “The wolf. You know it is a big, grey wolf. I'm afraid of it. It will hurt me. I had to kill it. I wanted to kill it but...”

I interrupted, “Mister there aren't any wolves here.”

“She is the only one,” said he, sternly

“You had better take rest and sleep.” I advised.

“I'll try.”

“Good night.”

“Good night, Mister.”

That was a terrible night. I was waiting for him at breakfast. He didn't come. This time I didn't wait and went up to his bedroom.

“Ann, where are you? Ann...” I went looking for her.

“I'm here Miss Jane. What can I do for you?” she shouted from a distance.

“Where is Mr. John?” I asked.

“He went out. He didn't even have breakfast.” She said. “He was so pale, miss. He was so...”

“Where did he go? Didn't he tell you anything?” I exclaimed.

“Nothing... not even a word.” was her reply.



I was worried for him but I was sure that he would come back. And he did come back. At mid-night the door bell rang again. Ann was asleep and I opened the door.

"The wolf, the wolf has died and she will not hurt me anymore." He mumbled.

"Where were you?" I asked.

"I was in the forest. I took a cake for my grandmother and suddenly met a wolf there." He replied.

"Why did you come in so late?" was my next question.

"I was walking. Would you like me to play the piano for you?" said he.

"No it will be better for you to take rest. You can play for me tomorrow. Good night." I interjected.

"Good night," he said and went upstairs singing. I had not seen him like this. He came for breakfast the next morning. I tried to find out what had happened the night before when, suddenly, the door bell rang.

Ann opened the door.

"Who is there?" I asked.

"The police," Ann answered.

"Please come in." said I.

Mr. John left the room immediately.

"Good morning, Miss Jane." said the policeman.

"Good morning." I greeted him.

"Somebody was killed last night...the wife of the man who is staying at your house now." he informed.

"Wife? I don't understand you." I exclaimed.

"Miss, we have found out that the killer stays at your house." repeated the policeman.

"What? In my house? So yesterday... so the wolf...the black and gray wolf..." I trailed.

"We have to arrest him." said the policeman sternly.

Suddenly we heard a noise upstairs. Somebody had fired a gun. It was repeated.

We all hurried upstairs. What a sight!

"Oh, my God! He is dead. But he was so young! He could have lived many, many years," said Ann.

"Not so long ... he was mad," interrupted the policeman. I was surprised.

"You know it is very hard to see a person whom you have loved die ..." I thought.

My dear reader, many years have passed since then and I have understood that sometimes we mix infatuation with love. I didn't love him...

Now I know I really love someone. And the love I feel for the person currently in my life is very different from that what I called love in the past. No, I didn't love the man from earlier. I was just very sorry for him. So, my story is going to end. I got married. Now I know what real love is. Love is a powerful thing and we must fight for it. I could never forget the man. I visit his grave with flowers and tell him about my feelings. I think he listens to me and understands. Only, I don't know why he killed his wife. Let that be the mystery of my story.

THE MAGIC POWER OF ART

Kimal Arakelyan
High School in Spitak
Teacher: Karine Dillaqyan
Spitak, Armenia

A bright smile appeared on Nora's wrinkled face when after hard day's work she straightened her curved back and glanced at her son painting selflessly in the corner. Nora's life was very hard. She lost her husband when she was still very young and she had brought up her only son cleaning others' places, doing the washing, working on the land. She could hardly earn her living but she felt wonderful when she could save up some money to buy her son colourful pencils and paper for painting. It was a great feeling of joy that Nora had while hurrying home with the pencils and paper in her hands and imagining the expression on the face of her son looking at her with his eyes filled with joy.

Levon was 10 years old, a serious and thoughtful child, who could understand the sufferings of his mother and tried not to add to her trouble. He used to return from school, eat the small amount of food prepared for him, recede to his corner of the room, very often half-hungry, and forget about everything... . He painted selflessly, he painted until he ran out of paper, sometimes forgetting even his mother's request: "Draw a bit less, my son, so that you don't run out of paper very quickly." As soon as he ran out of paper, he remembered this request period One day, something terrible happened. Two women had brought his mother home with great difficulty. They helped her lie on the bed, gave her some water and left without a single word. She looked at Levon, but this time his eyes were round with horror and she said with difficulty, "Don't be scared, my son, everything will be fine."

In the morning his mother could not get up from her bed. Levon was terrified. "How am I going to feed my sick mother?"

He had given some tea and leftover bread to his mother for several days but one day he stiffened when he took the last piece of bread out of the cupboard and his mother's state was not changing for the better.

Levon thought for a long time. Though it was very difficult, he collected all his pencils - long and short,



Paintings by the artist



closed the door carefully, and directed his steps to the market.

People passed by without paying attention to the pencils arranged on the ground - such important pencils to him - the passers-by first were surprised, and then grinned mockingly and went away.

Levon's weak body shook a little with the autumn evening wind. Levon stiffened - his mother was waiting for him. What was he going to do? His little body also could not bear hunger any more.

He raised his eyes slowly and he saw a gentleman, neatly-dressed and with stern face, and he could not help uttering: "Please buy these pencils, Mister, my mother is ill."

The gentleman bent down, picked the pencils up and said jokingly, "Have you spoilt these pencils yourself? Why are they so short?"

Levon couldn't help but smile.

Months passed. Levon's name was often heard in art exhibitions in the capital city. He had won an important national prize. Standing in a corner, his mother smiled tearfully. Levon's eyes alighted on the gentleman from that autumn night. There he was - standing next to Levon's prize painting. Goodness, that gentleman had the same look on his face as the day that he had inquired and bought the pencils. This time, the gentleman looked through all the paintings and selected that very one.



Note : _____

BANGLADESH



Md. Mutahar Hussain
Assistant Teacher
Anjuman Adarsha Govt. High School,
Netrokona, Bangladesh

Bangladesh became independent in 1971 after a liberation war. Many people died for Bangladesh's freedom. This conflict is very clearly emphasized in one of the student's writing. Bangladesh family involvement is strong. The people of our country have strong family ties. As such, another student focused on family matters and friendship as well as on our language movement which was held on the 21st February 1952.

Teachers enter their profession because they wish for their students to be successful in life through learning effective ways of communicating. I strive to teach these skills every day. I believe that investing in students brings great benefits not only to learners but, to our entire community. Teachers should work collaboratively with their students and other teachers in order to open minds. I am extremely delighted to know there are such teachers out there such as Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska, Mamta Kanti Kumar and Julia Perłowski who are working hard to publish a book comprising of stories written by students from countries across the world assisted by educators. Though these women are extremely busy in their respective schools, they work hard to create a platform for students to showcase their creative writing and English language skills.

I appreciate their dedication and wish them much success.

LIGHT YEARS AHEAD

Muhammad Jabir Ibn Hossen
17 years
Shahid Syed Nazrul Islam College
Teacher: Md. Mutahar Hussain
Mymensingh, Bangladesh

It is a morning of spring. I am sitting with a book and trying to read it, but don't know why I am thinking about some other things. It isn't so important but I really don't know why I am thinking about it again. It is about the war for our liberation which happened in 1971. At that time I was a young boy. I read in class ten. Now I live in Dhaka, at that time I also lived in Dhaka, but there is a great difference between then and now. Now it is 2012. Anyway, I am trying to read this book again because I never want to think about those days of 1971. 1971 is the darkest time of my whole life.

What are you thinking about?

I turn back to see who is the speaker. Oh, it's Naima my wife.

I say,-Nothing, I was just trying to read this book.

Oh..... really? But I saw you were thinking about something.

Then I give up I think I will never win in dialectics with her.

I say -Hmm, I was thinking about something. I was thinking about 1971.

Why don't you try to forget all those things?

I always try, but fail.

Ok, share an experience. If you share your hardship then you will feel good.

Hmm. Ok, I will tell you a short story. Sorry, this isn't a story, it's a real one.

Ok, please tell me.

It was the 18th of June 1971. The war had already started. I and my family, namely my father, mother and younger brother were in our village. We went there on the 18th of April. Staying in Dhaka wasn't so safe; everyday many people were attacked, arrested and killed by the Pakistani army. The village was far from the town and we heard the Pakistani army would never reach the village. That's why we went there. The first two months there was no important event or mishap but on 15th June the Pakistani army entered our village. We were scared because we heard that they were very cruel.

One day my father asked me,-Hey, how are you?

I was totally surprised, what kind of questions is this?

But I answered,-Fine. Nothing important to tell.

Ok. That's really fine. I have to tell you something. Never go out, have you got this? I am saying again, never go out because now the time isn't good.



Ok.

Now, you can go.

I went out from there. But I was thinking why I couldn't go out? When my father forbade me to go out, my desire to go out increased. If anyone prevents you from doing something, you will start to find way for doing it. Anyway, I went out the next day to see what was going on in our village. I heard that the Pakistani army had made their camp in the primary school of our village. I thought I should go there to watch what was happening. When I reached near the school, I saw two Pakistani soldiers. I took cover behind a tree. After some time I saw they were coming towards me. I really didn't know how they saw me. I thought to run but then I thought again, if I ran, they would shoot me.

They came to me and shouted, -Freeze, don't move. If you move we will shoot you.

At that time I felt I hadn't strength to move even a step. They caught me and took me to their camp.

I lost the strength of thinking anything.

I said to myself, -What will I do now? They will kill me and I can do nothing.

They took me in a room. The room was filled with darkness. When they left me, I saw I wasn't the only person in the room. There were some other people also. I sat down and started to cry. An old man came to me and said, -Please don't cry. Now it is all in God's hand. What is your name? I stopped crying and answered him, -Anim...Anim Zabir.

Are you a Muslim?

Yes.

Then you don't have to worry. I have heard that the Pakistani army doesn't kill the Muslims. Oh, I haven't told you my name, my name is Ashraf Ali.

How did they catch you?

Then he started to laugh as if I had said something funny. After this conversation, we stopped talking. I sat on the floor and tried to think of some means of escape. Two or three hours passed, but nothing happened. Abruptly the door opened and a soldier came and caught my hand. I got scared, I told myself, -What the hell is going on?

Then the soldier forced me to go with him. I didn't have any choice other than going with him.

He took me to the room of their commander and shouted, -Sit on the chair and don't try to do anything wrong. If I see any kind of movement I will shoot you.

Then I saw their commander. He was a handsome middle-aged person. But he was looking angry. He said to the soldier, -You can go now. I will talk with this boy.

The soldier left the room. The commander looked at me and asked me, -What is your name? I was scared and very thirsty. That's why accidentally I said, -Please, give a glass of water.

The commander started to laugh and said, -Really? Is that your name? What are you afraid of? I will not kill you. I will just talk with you.

Then he gave a glass of water. I took the glass and finished drinking the water in a few seconds.

Then he said to me,

Now, tell your name.

Anim Zabir .

Are you Muslim?

Yes.

That's good. Are you a student?

Yes, I read in class ten.

Oh. That is really fine. Will you tell me one thing truly? If you tell the truth I will let you go.

What were you doing behind the school building?

Nothing. I just came to see your camp.

On hearing this he looked very angry and asked me, -Why are you not telling the truth? Are you a freedom fighter?

I was so scared that I started to cry. Then he asked me again,

Why are you crying? Just answer my question. Are you a freedom fighter?

I said -No..... I am not a freedom fighter. I am just a simple boy. Please let me go.

Then he called a soldier and said to him, -This boy isn't telling the truth. Kill him.

I was just speechless. I said to him- What have I done? Why do you want to kill me?

The soldier took me to the bank of the river with some other people whose eyes were tied with black clothes. But fortunately my eyes were open. He told us, -Stand in line.

We all stood in line. The soldier was about to shoot us. At the time of shooting I quickly and cleverly lay down on the ground. Yet I was wounded and lost my sense.

After a long time I regained sense and opened my eyes. I saw I was still on the bank of the river. I tried to stand up but I couldn't. I saw there were so many dead bodies around me. It was night and there was only the moon light. I asked myself, -Am I dead?

No, I realized then I wasn't dead, I was alive. Then I tried with my full strength to stand up and I was successful. I felt a lot of pain in my left arm and the shoulder. Then I remembered everything, when the soldier had shot at me the bullet hit my left shoulder and I fell down. That's why he thought I was dead. I used my strength and will power to go home. When I reached home my mother saw me first. On seeing me she started to cry and asked me -Where did you go?

I narrated the incident. We left the village at once and went to another village. My father took me to a doctor. He treated me but I lost the feelings of my left hand forever. I cannot do anything with this hand till now.

We won our freedom at last. But we lost three million Bangladeshi citizens. The Pakistani army killed them. But the important thing is we had got our freedom.

After finishing my story I look at Naima. Now I am watching the lachrymal face of her. It reflects her feelings of sadness and then the joy of winning and attaining freedom..

I love my country and I will love my country forever. Then I passionately say to myself, "I love Bangladesh..."

Illustration: Masuma Islam Khan

Assistant Teacher (Fine Arts)

Anjuman Adarsha Govt. High School, Netrakona,
Bangladesh.



WALKING ON THE WAY OF LIFE

Sumit Roy Pronoy

16 years

Anjuman Adarsha Govt. High School

Teacher: Md. Mutahar Hussain

Netrokona, Bangladesh.

Life is like a tough equation of Mathematics. All of us need to be prepared to overcome all the obstacles we face. Many a times, we can achieve this with the cooperation and support of our friends.

Surjo studied in class 10 in a small school in his tiny village. His uncle lived in Dhaka. He often went there. The last time when he went there his cousin had asked him, "Which college do you choose to study in?" Surjo said "I want to study in Notre Dame College, Dhaka." On hearing this, his cousin had laughed. Surjo understood the reason of his laughter. He knew that he was a student of a village school and it is quite impossible for him to study in the best college of the country. He regretted naming the college of his choice because he was under the impression that where poverty is a constant companion, 'ambition' remains a distant dream.

In the month of May, the result of the S.S.C Examination was declared. Surjo, with one of his friends, Nizam, had gone to school. They saw that 15 students of their school had got G.P.A-5, and Surjo was one of them. Surjo met his Headmaster and other teachers who were very happy and congratulated him.

After some time he went to his friend's house that had an internet connection. From the internet he knew that he was the only student of his school who had got A+ in all subjects. The news spread everywhere in his locality. On hearing this, the chairman of their Union Parishad, who was one of his father's friends, came with sweets. He knew that Surjo's father did not have enough money to buy sweets. Then Surjo and his friends distributed the sweets among the villagers.



The next year on 15th of February, Surjo and Kiron were eating snacks in the canteen of Notre Dame College. Kiron is one of the best friends of Surjo. He lived in Uttora, Dhaka. Suddenly Kiron asked Surjo "Will you go to the Book Fair?" Every year in February a book fair is held in the compounds of Bangla Academy, Dhaka. Surjo feebly said, "I will try." Kiron knew that Surjo's life was not easy like his own. His father is a business man; they have a flat, cars and other luxuries. But Surjo passes his days with much hardship. After finishing his class he goes to some students' home to teach them. He earns some money by these tuitions, but it is not enough for him. He not only spends the money for himself but he also sends some for his father and keeps money in his bank account too. So he never thought of buying books from

the book fair, although the price of books was cheap there. Promptly, Kiron dropped the topic of the book fair. In the mean time the bell rang and they had to go.

On the dawn of 21st February, Surjo asked his friend Rifat if he would go to “Provat Fari” with him to offer flowers to the martyrs of the language movement. He had saved some money and he bought two bunches of flowers. “21st February is not only our “Martyrs Day” but also the International Mother Language Day. It is a very important day for all people of the country”. Surjo explained to Rifat.

On their way back from the “Shahid Minar” they went to a function which was organized by a club. The club held a competition. One of Surjo's friends had participated in this competition. He had been unable to reach the final round and had become disheartened. He went to the judges to request them to give him one more chance. But they became angry and insulted him. On seeing this Surjo and his friend went to the judges, and politely said, “Excuse me sir, can you tell me why are you doing this?” One of the judges said, “He has no basic knowledge about this matter. How can he get another chance? He doesn't have the spirit of competition.” Surjo replied, “Is competition everything? How do you say that he has no basic knowledge about this matter? No great thinkers or scientists have come so far on the basis of some competition. They became great for their knowledge, talent, hard work and dedication.”

“Yes, we know, but we want a prosperous nation. You see, all prosperous nations nowadays are competing with each other to become more prosperous,” said another judge. “Yes, that's right. But how do you visualize a prosperous nation without a great man? Now-a-days prosperous nations have started competing, but, it is not right because it is harming the world. They don't see each other in a friendly way. But please remember, a nation does not stand strong without friends.” said Surjo. “Mark my word. No nation can go ahead without competition”. The first judge said angrily. “Really? If competition is the only way of going ahead, I'm afraid that we won't go ahead at all.” Surjo said. “What?” retorted the judge. “Yes, because, if your two legs start competing with each other how will you go ahead? When a man can't go ahead for a simple competition how can a nation go ahead? I think you should reconsider. Good bye Sir.” On saying this Surjo left the place with his friends. The judges sat with great wonder.

14th April is “Pohela Baishakh”, the first day of the Bangla year. The festival of 'Romna Botomul' starts at the time of sunrise, on that day, Surjo and his friend Rifat celebrated the festival. They saw that not only Bangladeshi but also foreigners wore the traditional dress that day. After sometime, Kiron also joined them. The three friends sat at a food stall. When they were taking there breakfast suddenly Surjo saw that not far from them, a rich man was eating food and beside him a little, poor boy, wearing dirty clothes, was crying for food and pulling his mother's torn sari.



Surjo thought to himself, “The boy is crying for food and the rich man is eating food happily. Although the rich man can see the boy, yet, he has not given the boy anything to eat. It is not only a poor sight for this country but also a poor reflection of this world. There are many countries which are full of riches and their citizens get the best opportunities in life. On the other hand, there are many countries who are poor, whose citizens do not get the opportunities to live a comfortable life even. If the rich people of the

rich countries helped the poor people of the poor countries, their life would not be so hard.” Surjo understood that here he was only a silent viewer, he could do nothing. But he knew that if the rich people came ahead to help the poor people, the problem could be solved.

Soon time passed. Eid was knocking at the door. It was the biggest religious festival of the Muslims. After this would come the “Durga Puja”, the biggest religious festival of the Hindus. Anticipating this Surjo's heart became full with joy. Suddenly he remembered an incident, when he was in his village during puja time. Once there was a Puja near his house and he stole the fruits from the “Puja” premises. But he was unlucky because he was caught by his mother. His mother beat him a lot. After this he did not do this ever again. He laughed to himself remembering this.

A day before Eid, Rifat left his hostel and went home leaving a lonely Surjo behind. He went out from the hostel. He went near the Baitul Mokarrom Mosque. He saw that thousands of people offered their prayers together. After sometime he came back. Suddenly Rifat came to Surjo and took him to his house. Surjo was surprised to see that all members of Rifat's family were waiting for dinner with him. Then he enjoyed the meal with all members of Rifat's family. Surjo went back to the hostel at 8 p.m. That day he went to bed early.

Two days later the Puja would be held and Surjo was ready to go to his village. He had collected enough money teaching some students. He planned that when he would go home he would buy clothes for his father, mother and younger sister. But before going home he went to the private hospital. One of his cousins worked there. His cousin wanted to send something to his father. So Surjo met his cousin. When he was returning from the hospital, he heard a loud cry from the nearest cabin. On reaching there, Surjo saw that a middle aged woman was lying on the bed and some people were crying. When Surjo wanted to know the reason of their crying, one of them said that the condition of the patient was very bad but they did not have enough money for her operation. In the mean time a little girl caught his hand and said, “Please, brother, save my mother's life.”

Surjo didn't understand what to do then. He put his hand into his pocket. He gave all his money for the operation. The little girl was immensely happy when the doctor said, “The operation is successful”. After seeing the cheerful smile on the little girl's face, Surjo was ready for his journey towards home. He pondered, “This time I can't give my mother anything. But I've got a delightful smile of a little sister to cherish. In this Puja, I will give my mother this lovely smile as a gift.” With this pleasant thought Surjo started for his home.



Note : _____

COLOMBIA



Guillermo LopezOssa
El Pital School
Pereira, Colombia

WHY is storytelling important for EL PITAL School students in PEREIRA, COLOMBIA?

When I started to introduce the concept of storytelling to my 11th grade students at El Pital School, they, immediately, understood its importance and showed enthusiasm for it. At that time, I could not understand why. Now, I do. Reading their excellent stories, I know how they enjoyed the process of writing a first draft in Spanish, and then translating it into English, correcting syntax and vocabulary. They shared their stories and felt proud of their work. The sharing motivated them to read aloud in English, which most of them were afraid to do before. Also, I saw how elated they were for a chance to see their stories printed in a book with an international youth audience from countries far from their own.

In Colombia, storytelling is very important. Our realities are magical for people from other countries. Our stories exceed imagination. Nowadays, the Colombian youth have started to write in English as well. As a language teacher, I wish I could have more opportunities, like this, to help my students enhance their writing and reading skills, not only in their mother language, but also in a English.

The Colombian writer, Gabriel García Márquez has written: "*It always amuses me that the biggest praise for my work comes for the imagination, while the truth is that there's not a single line in all my work that does not have a basis in reality. The problem is that Caribbean reality resembles the wildest imagination.*" EL Pital student's stories can guide you to that Colombian magical reality. We hope you all will enjoy them!

THE DREAM OF EVERY MAN

Wilson Henao Arias

15 years

El Pital School

Teacher: Guillermo LopezOssa

Pereira, Colombia

Yearning to communicate the following has prompted me to embark on this journey: "The dream of every man."

Hi, I'm like you! I am a student in a school. But unlike you, I live in Colombia, one of the richest countries in biodiversity and a large exporter of coffee, its main economic commodity.

I live in a family just like you, with difficulties just like you. The Colombian desire to move forward and make better lives for ourselves is very strong. We will not stop until we get what we want.

I am in the 11th grade, with a deep desire to graduate and pursue a successful path. As I move forward I must tread cautiously. Come with me.

In this life we must be Ok with and learn from mistakes. We should not approach life only to succeed and acquire things. We must leave a positive mark on the world.

It is human to want to be the best especially when circumstances are desperate. In this case the impulse to have it all is much greater than when circumstances are good.

Most of the time we think about traveling to other countries. And, why not? Perhaps the only thing that prevents us from doing so is the language. But, this should not be an impediment to travel.

Currently, the majority of people study so they can get better jobs.

We do this in Pereira in Colombia so that it will be easier for us to get ahead.

Sometimes we want to do other things, but studying and working are very important. We know our effort can benefit our families. If we do not focus now... things would be much harder in the future.

We always want things to go as well as possible. To achieve this, we must spend time now, to enjoy what we do in the future.

After school, we want to become professionals and, also, to communicate effectively.

I would like to see the community around me focused on learning new methods of communicating... learning more languages. People come to Colombia from all over the world, but very few people understand these people because some Colombians did not want or have not had the opportunity to learn about these cultures and languages.

There is a push in Colombia to educate people about other cultures and languages so that our world can expand.

THE FUTURE OF A CHILD

Danier Anderson Perdomo Carmona

18 years

El Pital School

Teacher: Guillermo LopezOssa
Pereira, Colombia.

Below is a story of a child who could not be happy in his childhood.

As an grown-up, what I want out of life is to have a profession that can enable me to develop into a goal oriented individual and have quality time with my family and also to enrich my personal development. I also want to show my community and country that each person can decide his future and it CAN come true. We just have to have courage to deliver what we offer and be strong willed to follow our dreams. Whenever we witness a difficulty sometimes we have to sacrifice the things we want immediately. If we commit to these few actions, we can each take our rightful place as a responsible resident of our home, our country, Colombia.

A friend once told me a tragic story about losing half his family when he was only twelve. A fierce rain came and leveled many houses, one of which was his. After this, my friend and the remainder of his loved ones moved to a safe place so that a tragedy like this would not repeat itself. Although the tragedy passed, my friend continued to be haunted with the memories of that night. All the people who came into contact with my friend believed he would never get over the time that had traumatized him so much. For this reason, he was isolated in school; and, everywhere he went, he was treated differently.

The wonderful thing I noticed is that after an accident people are usually kind to the victim as they were with my friend. It is important to allow someone who has been through trauma to remain silent until he is ready to talk and express himself.

My friend decided to prove to the world that no matter what that trauma had done to him...he would move forward just the same. This boy moved forward for his family and also set an example for people who have been through difficult times. The learning was that if you approach life with enthusiasm any difficulty can be overcome.

Today, my friend is meeting his goals, graduating from high school and starting a career in which he can grow and spend time with his family and enrich his personal development. His example helps realize that dreams can come true. This drive, this strength is truly Colombian.



AWARENESS

Carlos Alberto Herrera Parra

18 years

El Pital School

Teacher: Guillermo LopezOssa

Pereira, Colombia

Today our societies and communities have no remorse for the evil that they are doing to the earth: deforestation, animal slaughter, mining, pollution and war. Our elders tell us, "We do this for our children. This is done for our good and also to meet our basic needs so we can show the world that we have something that no one can take, such as things made of ivory."

But the truth is that our actions are evil? I think there will come a time when we will no longer be able to take clean water, or have animals for affection, or eat nutritious food for our health. We need to be aware of these things and to do something about it.

But how can we save the world and our society all alone. Fighting the government would be hard, too. The government is where the problem starts. Governments often allow companies to spoil the land for profit which benefits a few people but not society in general.

It is said that the voice of the people is the voice of God. Then, why do only the few who climb the ladder of power destroy land for money and win while the people who want to preserve their homeland lose. Why are there two kinds of thinking about this?

But I will tell you something very important which I feel deeply. I believe that no matter how many different races and beliefs in the world...no matter what our difference are, we all walk the same land and breathe the same air. The big problem is that we are destroying ourselves more and more everyday. A the population increases so does the demand for food and many products the manufacturing of which release large amounts of greenhouse gases into the atmosphere creating heat build-up. These gases also come factories and our cars. The purity of water is affected by toxic spills from those factories causing death in some cities.

We all want to continue to enjoy the world and its spectacular beauty; we all want to enjoy our families and friends. In order for this to happen, we must all work together to do something for our world. Just planting one tree would be helpful. I know that one day the government will take steps to get involved in environmental problems. I just hope that day is not too late for people and animals.

The earth is our home. Just as we take care of the homes in which we live, we must take care of the earth. If we do not take care of the earth, there might come a day when there is nothing left to eat or drink. We can not eat and drink money. Besides, money comes and goes. Money cannot buy the love and health of family.

Many times in life, we get a second chance. The earth has already given us many chances. We are all to blame for the earth's destruction. But, we can learn from our mistakes and fix it.

We can improve our way of life, take care of our planet, preserve our ecosystem so that there will be a wonderful environment for generations to come.

And, as a wise woman once said "Pray that, man does not realize that there might another habitable planet, because they might arrive there and destroys that place, too."

A DREAM FOR THE FUTURE

Daniel Felipe Castañeda Ramirez

16 years

El Pital School

Teacher: Guillermo LopezOssa

Pereira, Colombia

In a place far, far away from the one in which I now reside is a country called Colombia. There, I dreamt of my future. My dreams of the future began when I was young. I wondered what would become of my life when I began to move away from home...far away from my familiar nationality?

With these thoughts, I began to forge my own destiny, my own identity. I wanted to ensure a better future for my family since I know we are responsible for the creating the lives that we live.

I wanted to know new frontiers but this journey would not be easy. Even as it enriched me, it would also be the biggest obstacle to my progress as a person.

I wanted to find the same amenities as I had at home when I began to move away from where I was born. Russia is where my problems started, as I was unable to speak the language the treatment I received was not very suitable. In Russia, there were not so many opportunities to work. My family knew very little about me and my state of affairs.

But, I moved forward despite these difficulties. I focused my thoughts on my family and thus I was able to hold on to the dream of a better future.

I kept in mind that we are not alone...Someone in a shop reminded me that life is hard at times for most people...and that everyone must experience growing pains.

These words changed my life. This person unknowingly became came an angel with her words of support and sensitivity. I and this person were different and far from home but the one thing we had in common was our nation, Colombia. We passed through the same difficulties and we both needed help.

Thanks to this brief experience of friendship my time in Russia became a little more pleasant and comfortable. I felt as if I was in my home, even with the absence of my family. There was hardly any communication with them.

I began to study in order to have a more fulfilling personal life and to be able to communicate easily with people of Russia. After a while, I reconnected with my angel, with that woman who filled my life with happiness and hope...who taught me not to get carried away by difficulties and to move forward in life without looking back and to learn from errors.



Inadvertently I began to see this time as very important in my development. Without this learning it would have been difficult to stay in Russia.

I decided to make the angel my wife and to thank her for she all she had done for me.

After a long period of time I was able to communicate once again with my family in Colombia. I did so with overwhelming emotions and a little, broken voice. I could hear beautiful words from my mother, the woman who not only gave me life but helped me to grow in an environment of peace and joy. To hear her touched my heart and made me think of having my family with me. Now I have to have my mother staying with me. After my professional studies I sent for her in Colombia to be with me.

Now, with my family by my side, it is much easier to be in a place that was not mine from the start. After a while, in Russia, I started earning a salary and also started savings. I wanted a better life for my family than the one I had. I am sure I did the right thing.

To succeed in life we just have to look for opportunities where most people believe there are none.



Note : _____

ESTONIA



PIRET BOSSACK
Tallinn English College
Tallinn, Estonia

It is mostly cold and dark in Estonia, hungry wolves and wild boars prowl around the house. For many a millennia people have sat around a candle and told stories. To stay alive. ~ Jürgen Rooste

It has been said that stories connect time, space and people. Can this be true of today's Estonia? Storytelling and literature in general are important for our survival in Estonia. They have been for centuries, as stories have transmitted the values of our ancestors to us. In an oral storytelling culture, when stories are told, they take on a life of their own incorporating a part of the storyteller. In a similar way the values passed on in written stories morph and change, making our society into what it is today. In addition to culture and values, stories also keep our small language alive. Without our own literature we would be reading other people's thoughts and be influenced by the culture of others. While the literary connection to others is important as it enriches a person's worldview, it is vital for both the reader and the writer to know themselves first – to become complete, to create a healthy community, and a nation. I hope the following stories will stimulate your imagination and will provide a bridge between Estonia and your country.



MARGIT TIMAKOV
Tallinna Ühisgümnaasium (Tallinn Co-Educational School)
Tallinna, Estonia

Everybody has a story to tell. Sometimes we are just too busy to write it down or too shy to share our ideas, dreams, and worries. Using story writing in class is a wonderful opportunity not only to check students ability to learn the required vocabulary, use correct sentence formation or expected structure for a piece of writing with an introduction, body and conclusion, but to help them practice creativity.

Creativity is a valued characteristic in the world with growing number of unexpected situations needing innovative solutions. Thus, it is great that writing stories trains the skill of imagining and dreaming – something that is often overlooked in the fast-paced life of ours. Expressing oneself in writing can have an emancipating effect. It can release the tension of not being heard, satisfy the need of being able to finish a thought undisturbedly, and help to sort out feelings and ideas otherwise left unnoticed. Moreover, writing stories helps students to create something new, something on their own, something as they see it.

GOSH, I'M SO BAD AT THIS!

Mari-Liis Douglas

16 years

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Saku, Estonia

I rest my head on my bag as I lie on the freshly mown grass and the soft breeze strokes my skin. It's early May and the first warm days have finally reached Narnia...I mean Estonia. Here I go again, complaining about the weather. I'd never admit it, but I secretly actually like the winter season: soft white snow, beautiful decorations and all the fun winter activities. I just tend to get a little annoyed when all that lasts for half the year.



This is my last year at school; I turn 18 in June. Adulthood – as small children we can't wait to reach it. Seems rather glorious . . . making decisions of your own, not having to listen to anybody else. And yet, when the time comes for all that I've waited for 18 years, all I want to do is go back to the time, when things were so simple and the world made sense. I

guess it's just part of the process of growing up. People expect you to have an opinion of your own, to know what your perception of the world is and how it works. It sucks. How am I supposed to know? My brain hurts from all these thoughts and questions that fill my head. I get up, grab my stuff and walk back towards my school. Lunch break has always been my favorite time to think and have some time for myself.

"Krissu! Krissu, wait up!" Birgit scurries to catch up with me, carrying her painting set. Birgit and I have been best friends as long as I can remember. She is intelligent, gorgeous, an amazing artist and everyone likes her. She's good at anything she tries and knows exactly what she wants to do with her life. It is something I've always envied her for.

"Hey Birgit!"

We share a fleeting hug and walk towards our class. Birgit begins warily: "Martin Summers is having a party this weekend, did you know? He said we're both invited. Do you want to go?" I'd never been much of a "party girl." I've never even been to a party before, not to talk about trying alcohol or smoking, even though all my friends do, even Birgit. But I guess there's no harm in just going, right? "Sure, why not." I answer slowly and Birgit squeals in satisfaction.

As Saturday evening arrives, it's time for preparations. Birgit is here so we could help each other pick out our clothes and do our make-up. After we're ready we head to the bus stop under Viru mall to take a bus to

Martin's house. We arrive fashionably late, just an hour. The party, however, is in full swing. All the windows and doors are wide open, the music is as loud as can be and people are obviously very drunk. "Promise you won't leave me alone, Birgit!" I whisper to her intensely. "Oh, take it easy, Krissu! Have some fun!" says Birgit and blends into the crowd of teenagers I had never met. I have no idea what to do with myself so I find a bench in the far corner of the large room, as far away from people as possible.

"Why did I come here?" I murmur, thinking that no people would hear me, or if they would, they wouldn't care. A boy, I predict a few years older than I am, sits next to me and hands me a cup with some strange drink in it. "Hi! I'm Lars Oja, but just call me Lars." He says in a friendly voice. He doesn't seem too intoxicated... "Hi! I'm Kristiina Roos – Krissu." I answer him diffidently.

"So what is this that I hear? Are you not enjoying yourself?" He demands in a playful manner.

"Umm..."

"Loosen up, girl. Have a drink!" Suddenly all eyes are on me. I've never liked being in the middle of attention. Where's Birgit when I need her?

I doubtfully take a sip. "Now we're talking!" says one of Lars's friends and someone pats me on the shoulder. The drink tastes strange . . . bitter. Everyone but Lars has returned to their business but he is still staring at me. I keep drinking just so I wouldn't have to say anything and he seems to be pleased. Soon my glass is empty and the party doesn't seem a bad idea now.

I wake up at... where am I again? I look around slightly confused as to where I am and how I got here. I can't see Birgit anywhere so I just grab my things and walk to the bus station to drive back home. She'll be all right.

I'd spent the whole of last night with Lars, talking, until he left and I went and fell asleep in the back room. Lars seemed like a really nice guy and the party had turned out to be a lot more fun than I had expected. I go home and spend the rest of Sunday preparing for school on Monday. I try to call Birgit, but she doesn't pick up; I guess I'll just talk to her tomorrow.

When I walk jauntily into my first class on Monday morning and wave hi to my friends, they glare at me and don't respond. What's wrong with them? The bell rings, so I have to go sit down but it keeps bothering me for the rest of the lesson. They whisper amongst themselves and point at me. Why are they acting so strange and why hasn't Birgit called me back? I decide to confront Birgit during the break and demand to know what's going on.

As the bell rings I rush towards her classroom. She sees me coming but turns away.

"Birgit! What's going on? Why are you and everybody else avoiding me?" I shout out.

She turns around and hisses, "Don't act like you don't know, Krissu. I know what you told Lars about me and everyone else at the party and now the whole school knows too, so much for being my friend and keeping secrets. And we also know what you DID with him; I never thought you'd sink so low. I don't want anything to do with you, leave me alone." She turns around and disappears behind the corner.

What? What is she talking about? All I remember about that night is that we talked for hours...but I don't remember what about. What does she mean under "what I did with him"? WE did nothing. I run, grab my things and leave school early.

I spent that night thinking. What had Lars told them? What had I told Lars? I feel so stupid. Why did I have to give into the pressure, why did I have to drink that stupid drink? And I'm back where I started. Why did I even go? Here I was, thinking he was really nice. Stupid, stupid, stupid. Tears start rolling down my face and I fall asleep worried about what tomorrow will bring.

The next few weeks will probably be the worst time of my life. Birgit refuses to talk to me, as do all of my other former friends. I tried to apologize and tell them that I only told those things to Lars because I had been drunk and that we didn't do anything more than talk. They didn't believe me, of course. The annoying thing is that I don't even know what I told him. I tried to call Lars several times but he hasn't responded either. Coward. Lunch break is now the worst part of my day. At least during lessons I can focus my thoughts on other things. It's awfully lonely when no one will talk to you... It's even more awful when everyone around you hates you. The stories about "Lars and I" have spread over the whole of my Catholic school and people are not afraid to express their opinion on the matter. I don't know if an insult exists that I haven't had to hear being shouted at me over the last few weeks.

It's hard to see a point in anything anymore. Everything I ever had is gone and I'm just left here, stripped bare. I never expected things to turn out like this. I always imagined getting together with Birgit and talking about how we're doing in college, if we like it and then we'd reminisce over high school. Now I'm left to reminisce about the time when that was still a possibility.

THREE MONTHS LATER

Summer passed quickly. Mom and dad helped me move to a city closer to college. My roommate, Lily, came a week after me and we get along really well. She introduced me to her friends and they're all really welcoming. I don't plan on drinking again, at least not for a long time and never because I'm being pressured into it. If I had stayed true to myself and what I believe in, none of this would have happened. Yes, Lars and his friends might have not liked me, but I shouldn't have cared about their opinion of me in the first place. Of course I'm sad that my friendship with Birgit is over, but I realize that even though she accuses me of not being a good friend and I do take the blame for telling all her secrets to a complete stranger, she should have been there for me that night. She knew I was nervous and didn't know what I was doing. I asked her to be there with me, but she only cared about herself. Maybe it was meant to go that way. Now I've got friends who support me and who I can count on. They don't care if I drink or not and accept me exactly the way I am.

Life is a funny thing. Everything happens for a reason; each of us has a purpose, whether we know what it is or not. We try to act as though we have the power to change what awaits us, but the moment we let go and let things go the way they're meant to, we'll see how everything will fall into place. We need to learn to lie back and not try so hard. We need to... I need to learn to trust that everything will be okay.

Illustration: Mari-Liis Duglas



FROZEN

Merlin Kasesalu

15 years

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Tallinn, Estonia

In a frozen town square there stands a beautiful ice figure – a bald woman without an arm. Everything about her pose stands out as tense: her back, her legs so close together they could have been glued that way, her left arm tightly pressed against her side. There is no particular emotion distinguishable on her icy face, but the sculpture radiates sadness, even to those who do not know her story.

Before the figure in the ground there are carved words. Before those words stands a young girl, her eyes as cold as the ice figure, focused on the text.

In a world of fire people and ice people, there once was a family of aristocrats. To the public they seemed a loving family of a fire man, an ice woman and their daughter, an ice girl. But the public had no idea of what was going on behind the scenes.

The family lived in a luxurious, baroque mansion as was becoming an upper class family. The garden was made of ice; every single detail down to the smallest of the flowers decorating it. The wife loved the flowers, she had always held them dear to her as they reminded her of her hometown where flowers had grown everywhere. She had taught her daughter to love them, too.

One evening the wife prepared a delicious dinner for the family; she and the young daughter sat patiently at the dining table, waiting for the man to come home. It was not considered appropriate for them to eat without him.

The clock's hands had already ticked past 9 p.m., two hours past the time they had expected the man to arrive, and he had still not made an appearance. The two ladies kept waiting, without a single complaint. They knew better than to whine.

An hour later the double doors to the dining hall finally flew open with a bang, making those waiting jump. The girl directed her gaze at her plate, sitting still as a rock, while the woman stood up, forcing a smile to appear on her face.

She moved to pull out a chair for her husband, praying to her Goddess that he would not notice how horribly her hands were shaking. She welcomed him lovingly.

But the man was intoxicated, it became obvious as soon as he took his first steps in the room. His eyes were half-lidded and eyebrows furrowed, his flame burning hotter than usual.

The woman stilled as he stood quietly and let his eyes run across the room. They came to a stop on his



daughter. The woman felt something clench inside of her and her grip tightened on the ice chair. Her breath caught in her throat.

The man's bellowing to the girl to go to her room made her jump again.

The girl got up without a word, fleeing the room as fast as her skinny legs allowed her to. Her hair shielded her face and the frozen tears that ran down her cheeks. She closed her door tight and hid in her bed under the sheets. She covered her ears and closed her eyes.

When dawn came, it made the sky bleed red. The girl took it as an omen, being too young to know that it was merely nature's doing; to her red meant terrible as everything red resembled fire and fire people, whom she feared. Red was chaos. Red was hurt. As soon as she dared to leave her room, she saw that the colour of the sky had faded and the calming blue sky was above her. She opened the door silently, peeking out, conscious of making any sounds that would disturb the silence.

Her father was nowhere to be seen. He always left early before dawn. To where, the young girl did not know or have any interest in.

Outside the house in the garden she found her mother on the ground. The girl took her in, analyzing all details of the young woman sitting before her, whom she loved and trusted more than anyone in the world. Involuntarily her eyes followed the direction of the woman's blank stare.

Shock pierced through her and all her icy limbs started shaking, threatening to fall apart. She fell on her knees, tears streaming down her face. She covered her eyes with her hands.

All the flowers were gone. Melted! There was only a ribbon of water flowing out of the garden from where the flowers once used to grow.

The man was away for seven days. During that time the woman always prepared dinner for them, even though they never got to eat it as the man never returned. The young child monitored her mother working in the kitchen, finding it strange how she was using her left hand much more than she used to. Her movements were lacking the gracefulness they once used to have.

As the woman was lighting the candles on the dining table, her daughter caught sight of the reason for the change.

All the fingers on her right hand, save for the thumb, had been melted also.

When the man returned seven days later, he walked in sober and happy. His good mood made the woman smile a little wider and her words were all but genuine when praising him for his good deeds that he talked and boasted about. He was loud and witty as he dined, letting his woman and child dine for the first time in a while, too. Only the girl was left unaffected by the light atmosphere that surrounded the table. The memory of her mother crying on the lawn and mourning the flowers still stood clearly in her mind and unlike her mother, she was not so eager to push it out of her head to forget about it. She remembered everything. Her fork barely touched the potatoes and pieces of meat on her plate, much less made it to her mouth. She remained silent, her gaze down.

The father noticed that and quietened. His eyebrows furrowed in disapproval. Dismayed by the sudden change of mood, the woman whipped around to see what had caused it. Fear built up inside of her faster than fire on petrol. She wished for a way to let her daughter know how vital it was for them to pretend happiness and gratitude towards the man.

But the daughter was too young to understand. She did not realize the reason behind her mother acting like this, smiling as though nothing had happened. She felt lied to and betrayed.

Her mother tried to cheer up by asking her in a light-hearted tone what was wrong and why she was not eating, but the child did not react. She did not understand.

Hardly a minute later, the man's patience came to an end and he demanded that the girl stand up. She did as she was told for she lacked the bravery required to go against the word of her father. Her clenched fists were shaking with anger and fear.

The man shouted expletives at her, letting out all the rage that had abruptly gathered behind his joyful facade. His hands and body flared up, the flames so great they nearly touched the woman sitting by him.

He started taking threatening steps towards the youngster who cowered in fear. It was then that the woman sprang though terrified for fear of her daughter's life. She flung her arms around the man's flaming body, holding him back and yelling with all her might for him to stop. She pleaded with him, that the daughter was only a foolish child and could not be held responsible for her acts yet.

The man's fury was uncontrollable. He did not listen to his wife, insisting that their child would never learn unless punished. He shook his wife off of him and continued towards the girl who was standing there helpless like a china doll. He extended his arm, formidably towering over her. As he was about to swing his hand against the girl in a slap, he found himself unable to move his arm. He did not understand what was happening; not until both his legs and torso had become motionless and frozen as well, *frozen* in the most literal sense of the word. When he glanced down at his feet, he found solid transparent ice wrapped around his legs. The layers were thick and cold; they were immune to the hellish heat radiating from his own body. The more he tried to melt them, the more heat he gave away from himself and the colder he became until in the end, he could not feel any warmth at all anymore. His body had become as cold as his heart.

In the last seconds of his existence, he twisted his neck to look behind him and lay his eyes on his wife, whom he had pushed onto the ground. The woman's hand was missing; it lay near her foot. Her other hand, still attached to her body, was extended towards him.

And as his head froze, extinguishing his fire and life, he could forever remember the defiant look on the woman's face as she had sacrificed her life energy for saving her daughter.

She froze motionless. When the police discovered her, the words that were later copied into the ground on the square were actually found next to her on the floor.

You will be alright. And now as the girl gazes down at the words before her mother's frozen figure, she still does not understand. Why had her mother lied? She had lied, even after what had been done to her flowers. After they had been melted.

And why had she left? Why had she left her all alone? Why had she gone?

A tear of betrayal runs down the girl's cheek as she turns her back on the frozen figure. She can sense the citizens staring at her, taking in the torn rags that now cover her body, her scraped knees and nearly melted hair. A girl of aristocratic origin, left on the streets for the hot, fiery wind to melt and people to take pity on.

You will be alright.

The girl walks away from the words, never returning, not until she understands. She needs to understand to forgive, and that is what her mother will be looking forward to for an eternity, standing still, frozen in time, waiting for her daughter's return and forgiveness.

Illustration: Merlin Kasesalu



THE WITCHES

Anneli Kuldkepp, Katrin Kirsikka & Janelle Koskela

17 years

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Tallinn, Estonia

We start our story with a pack of jelly beans.

"This is not working," said Henri and pulled off Robert's blanket, "You can't go on like this. I mean I'm actually getting angry with the fact that you haven't been my wingman for two weeks." Robert didn't move; he didn't even flinch. "Fine! Here, look what I brought you," said Henri pulling a pack of jelly beans out of his pocket and shaking them loudly. Robert moved his leg, but did not open his eyes. Henri pulled out a second pack of jelly beans.

"I also brought you a second pack of your favourite candy," said Henri getting a little bit annoyed. Robert opened his eyes, shot out of bed and grabbed both packs out of Henri's hands.

"Thank god! I almost thought you were dead," said Henri with an irritated smile but in reality he could never be really angry with Robert. They'd been friends for fifteen years despite the fact that they couldn't be more different. Robert Laasis was what you would call an eccentric genius. He has an IQ of 170, which he says is complete nonsense because "no human's capability can be determined with a pen and a paper writing stuff that has been conjured up by people who like to call themselves scientists.. Robert has an immense love for candy, especially jelly beans. He always has them with him although Henri is pretty sure that Robert will get diabetes one day. He has brown hair with a hint of red and emerald green eyes. Henri Berg, Robert's best friend, is very different from him. Henri has black hair and chocolate brown eyes. Henri is 189cm tall but when asked, he always says that he is 190cm tall because Robert is of that height and Henri does not want to be any shorter than him. Henri can be very full of himself sometimes and it is perfectly clear why. He is lean and muscular with an angular sculpted face that melts every person alive. Robert says that it's actually very entertaining to watch people when Henri talks to them because they rarely listen to him, they only look, sometimes drool, and think "Why on earth is he so smokin' hot?" Henri loves parties and going out to pubs. Nevertheless the two of them are inseparable and always cover each other's back.

"What have you done for two weeks? Have you even left your flat?" asked Henri seeing all the trash that's lying, well, everywhere. Robert had already finished one pack of jelly beans and was busy opening the second one.

"No, I haven't. I believe I will be most comfortable in my bed instead of being outside." said Robert and stuffed ten jelly beans into his mouth.

"You still go to university, you know that. You need to actually show up in order to graduate." said Henri

trying to be very serious.

Robert burst out into squalling laughter. "What?" asked Henri, astonished. "Do you really think they would throw me out? Besides, I have an independent study period right now during which I have chosen to work on philosophy, pondering on the idea of "Why does Henri need to wear such skinny jeans?" Henri threw Robert a slightly angry look but before he could say anything Robert's phone started ringing.

"Aren't you going to answer that?" asked Henri.

"I'm letting them wait, if they really need to talk to me they'll wait for another 30 seconds." said Robert calmly while munching on his jelly beans. Henri grabbed Robert's phone.

"Hello!" he said. After a couple of nods he put down the phone and told Robert: "You have five minutes to get ready, we are going to the Old Town, apparently the police have found a chopped up body in the well on Rataskaevu Street." Robert got up and within five minutes he was washed, dressed and ready to head out.

"So, what have you found?" asked Robert from Erik Post, the police chief.

"We found a body of a woman probably around her 20s, entirely chopped up," answered Post. "Christ!" said Henri staring into the well. "Any witnesses?" asked Robert, carefully watching over the edge of the well.

"No, not one. It's rather strange because the Old Town always has people wondering around, especially at night. I will send the body parts for examination and let you know about any new information as soon as possible," said Erik and went to the forensic pathologist.

"What do you think happened?" asked Henri. Robert was still examining the outside of the well.

"Well, obviously it was a murder and the person had seriously hated the victim, but I can't really say anything for certain, except that she wasn't killed here." said Robert, clearly thinking about the case and trying to make some sense of it.



Photo of the Old Well at Rataskaevu St

"So, what are we doing tonight?" asked Henri, when they were walking into the police department.

"Nothing, we have a case and that's what we are going to be working on," said Robert without an inch of compassion. "What? Are you kidding me? I haven't..." started Henri when Robert silenced him by humming a song loudly. They reached the pathology department.

"What have you got for me?" asked Robert from Sofia, the forensic pathologist. "Well, her name is Maria Tuul. She is 25 years old, works as a shop assistant in the store called "Loitsukeller"—no relatives-- but she does have a boyfriend who should be here any minute. I also found that she wasn't killed by chopping, she was made unconscious with formalin and crushed to death with something very heavy," explained Sofia. Henri's mouth dropped open.

"I want to see her boyfriend," said Robert and walked out of the room. Henri followed him. "Erik!" shouted Robert upon seeing the chief of police and ran after him, "Is Maria's boyfriend here?"

"Yes, I just finished talking to him actually. Poor man, he was so shocked, they were supposed to get married next month," said Erik. "Good, what did she do in her free time? I heard that she was working at that store where they sell all kinds of witchy stuff," asked Robert impatiently.

"What has got you so worked up?" asked Erik, surprised by Robert's excitement.

"He hasn't had a case for a long time and now that's all he wants to deal with," said Henri giving Robert a irritated look. "Oh, I see. Also please call your sister she is worried about you," said Erik, who is married to Robert's sister Elisa.

"I'll call her when she stops trying to set me up with her friends, thank you very much," said Robert rocking back and forth on his heel. "Let's get back to the case. What did she do in her free time?"

"Yes, of course. This is really interesting, according to her boyfriend, she loved magic and reading tarot cards for people who wanted help or advice," said Erik. Robert's eyes got big. "She was a witch?" he asked.

Erik's phone rang, he picked it up and when he hung up he said: "A new body has been found, in a chest, in Old Town."

"Old Town again?" said Henri and looked at Robert whose face was glowing with excitement, "You're happy?"

"Yes! A new body!" screamed Robert jumping up and down.

The sight of the chest was as horrifying as the last one. "Same case, boys," said Sofia, "crushed like the previous one." Henri started to feel sick. "Robert, I think we're done here," said Henri desperately trying to get Robert to leave the crime scene. "Henri, I need to be here, I'm not finished yet. This is mighty interesting and intriguing," answered Robert.

"Over here, I found something!" announced Erik, "Look, dried blood stains on these limestone pieces here." "Excellent!" exclaimed Robert, "This is amazing, we have found the possible murder weapon. Take everything with you to the lab, Erik. Any information on the girl yet?"

"Her ID card was in her pocket, so we ran it through our database. Her name is Jane Meri, she was an employee of "Loitsukeller" as well as Maria's colleague," said Erik.

"Let's go and inform their manager about what has happened," suggested Robert. "Good idea, the best you've had so far," agreed Henri wishing to leave the crime scene.

"Mr. Mets, we are sorry to inform you that two of your employees, Maria Tuul and Jane Meri, were found dead this afternoon," said Post when the men met the manager of "Loitsukeller". "How horrible! This is truly horrible," answered Mr. Mets after a few seconds. "When was the last



By the city wall

time you saw them?" asked Robert. "The day before yesterday, I think," said Mr. Mets, "Yes, the day before yesterday. I left the shop early that day and told the girls to lock up after they're finished with whatever they were up to."

"What were they up to?" inquired Robert with a fiery look in his eyes. "I don't know, they were trying out some new products, I believe," said Mr. Mets. "Did you see anything unusual when you left?" continued Robert. "Not that I remember," answered Mr. Mets, "Although I saw a foreign-looking construction worker near the shop; he has been walking past our door for the last week or so."

"Alright, thank you, Mr. Mets, if you remember anything, please inform us," concluded Erik and the three left the store.

"We absolutely need to find this construction worker," announced Robert. "What, NOW?! Like, right now?" asked Henri, completely astonished. "Yes, now..." demanded Robert rolling his eyes. "Well, it's time for me to have fun now, I'm going to the coffee shop to meet some girls," said Henri. "Fine!" said Robert mockingly.

Across the street Robert saw a construction worker. He was of Slavic descent and seemed to be deeply religious since he had a cross and a little church icon around his neck. He seemed to be the man Mr. Mets had described so Robert decided to follow him.

The man wandered around the streets of Old Town for a long while, repeatedly passing "Loitsukeller" gazing at the windows. After several minutes, he took a different turn and started moving towards the Bastion tunnels. Robert sat himself down onto a bench near the entrance to the tunnels and observed the man. The foreigner's phone rang and he spoke what Robert thought was Lithuanian to the person at the other end. After ending the call, the man took out a key and entered the tunnel. Robert started to grin and within a few moments there was a wide smile on his face. He knew exactly what had happened. Now he just needed to prove it.

The next morning, Robert was anxious to get his hands on the case again but he had to wait a little since it was 5 o'clock and nobody seemed to move. When Henri arrived at 8.30, Robert sprinted out of the apartment grabbing his friend without any explanations. "I'll talk later," said Robert not even letting Henri greet him.

"Where did you disappear yesterday?" asked Henri. "Oh, I just had some fun following the creepy Lithuanian and solving the case," answered Robert, "Now, come on, we need to get to the police department as quickly as humanly possible." Entering the police department, Henri came in after a few seconds, cursing. "Robert, you just don't jump off my motorcycle like that! She's my baby and you might scratch her," he shouted as he entered. Robert was already rushing Erik to get a move on. "Oh, sorry about that, Henri, won't happen again," said Robert as he ran past his friend. "Everybody MOVE! We need to get to the right place at the right time, so no time to waste!" he shouted.



Newly renovated entrance to a passage by the Old Town Wall

Eventually Robert, Henri, Erik, and a bunch of policemen arrived at the Bastion tunnels. They investigated

the place and found something incredible. In one of the hidden rooms there was a wall full of pictures of young women and the ones of Maria and Jane had been crossed out. Above the pictures "WITCHES" was written in red. On a table near the wall was a bottle of formalin which was half empty. They also found a rusty bunk bed with a mattress covered in dried blood. "This is the scene of the crimes," said Robert with a proud face, staring at Erik, knowing he had beaten the police once again and solved the case before they could.

Suddenly, they heard a key turning in the lock. The Lithuanian had returned. He realized that he wasn't alone and turned around but there stood Henri who had no trouble catching him before he could even think of running. "Where do you want him, chief?" asked Henri.

"What on earth is going on, can anybody please explain? Robert?" asked Erik. "Isn't it blatantly obvious already? Henri, why don't these people ever understand anything?" asked Robert. "Just tell them like you told me, their IQ is not 170," suggested Henri, grinning.

"Alright, here's the deal. Our Lithuanian friend here is very religious as you can tell by the cross and church icon around his neck. Maria and Jane were interested in magic and things associated with it and liked to experiment with it. As Mr. Mets said, the Lithuanian had been spying on the girls for at least a week so he obviously knew about them practising magical stuff. Since he was an extreme Catholic, he instantly thought of the Inquisition and wanted to clear the world of these witches and other suspects as well, as we can see from this wall behind us. As we know, historically, some accused witches were executed by crushing them under heavy weights and this is exactly what our felon did because he had no other resources, he is just a simple construction guy. He attacked the girls from behind as they were leaving the shop, making them unconscious with formalin, took them to his lair in these tunnels, crushed them with limestone blocks and chopped them up with tools from the construction site. Later, he dumped the bodies in the most convenient places he could find and put the limestone blocks back to where he had obtained them, hiding them in plain sight. He thought he had done good for the world and that his crime had gone unnoticed but unfortunately for him, the case landed on me and I got onto him," explained Robert, "Any questions?"



"Yes, one," said Erik, "How did you deduce all this? It is impossible for a normal person to make all these connections based on the information we had." "Well, he's not quite as normal as you and me, now, is he?" said Henri "Well, no, but," stuttered Erik. "And that's all you need to know, really," said Robert, "Come on, Henri, let's go to the pub, I'm feeling on top of the world."

Photos: Anneli Kuldkepp

Glossary

"Loitsukeller" - the name of the shop where the girls worked means "Spell/Charm Cellar" in English



MR. TAMMISTE`S LAST CASE

Sille-LiisMännik, Ann Rehemaa & LiisaSalin

17 years

Photos by Authors

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Tallinn, Estonia

It was May 15, 1445. The narrow streets, once crowded with craftsmen selling their goods, and customers trying to bargain and get the best deal, was now empty. Even the sun had hidden itself behind the clouds as if afraid to get the terrible disease that had devastated the town.

The Black Death had reached Reval and those who weren't already dead were nursing the ill or praying for their lives. As if that wasn't bad enough, the symptoms of the plague were not always clear like everyone had believed. Some of the deaths were different, even bizarre! A person who seemed to be as healthy as a horse would suddenly start to choke and cough as if a demon had gone inside him and then die suddenly. The desperate people insisted that the doctors perform bloodletting and bought medicines from the pharmacy that would cure the illness, but nothing helped.

It was just after 6 pm when Mr. Tammiste went for his afternoon walk in the Old Town. The weather was nice, it was not even slightly windy, and Mr. Tammiste enjoyed it. He had retired two weeks ago and was enjoying every minute of his freedom. No clueless police officers wanted his help, no annoying, deceitful witnesses or long sleepless nights investigating mind-boggling cases which were exciting but rare. Most of the cases were about minor uninteresting topics like tax frauds. Everything was peaceful and Mr. Tammiste believed he had earned his freedom. He had been walking for ten minutes when suddenly his phone rang. He sighed after seeing the number and answered in a harried voice, "What do you want?"



Craftsmen in the 15th Century

"Toomas, I'm sorry, but we need you." The voice in the phone sounded a bit nervous.

"You people... Why can't you let an old man enjoy his retirement that he fully deserves?"

"This case is pretty serious, I promise. It's not like I'm calling you about a wrecked car. This is good. Real good."

Mr. Tammiste gave up. He sighed again.

"OK, what is it?"

Deaths, Toomas, bizarre deaths."

His curiosity grew, "I'm listening."

“So, two girls, twelve and twenty-eight are found dead in Haapsalu on the same day with the same cause of death. Died alone in their rooms. Never seen each other. Two hours later, a man, thirty-nine, dies in Paldiski in a park. No witnesses. The same cause of death again.”

”What’s the cause then?”

“Choking. Some kind of poison. The autopsy will be today. Thought I’d still give you a call.”

Mr. Tammiste was quiet. The voice was confused, ”Err.. Sir?”

“Yes, yes, I’ll come to the station!”

“Perfect. See you soon“.

Mr. Tammiste arrived home at midnight. Even in the old days, he never arrived that late for he never worked in the office. He preferred his home where he could smoke his cigar and chew his fingernails when thinking. But today he didn’t want to leave the office until the autopsy results had arrived. The poison that had killed the two girls and the man was potassium cyanide, a common poison, extremely deadly, only a little amount causes immediate death. The question was – how? Suicide was not an option, there aren’t three suicides committed in one day, all similar to each other. It had to be murder, or an accident? Suddenly his phone rang.

An alert voice started to speak Toomas, “We have another death. On Vene street. A woman choked to death.”

”What did she eat?”

“I don’t know.“

“Find out as soon as possible. And what did the rest of the victims eat?”

Back in the days of shining armours and bustling merchants the plague had swept clean the cobblestone streets; now mysterious deaths still continued to occur. As more deaths occurred due to the disease the people tried a variety of measures to protect and cure themselves, but the number of deaths still continued to rise. Those who didn’t believe in the modern pharmacy and medical treatment and only relied upon the Higher Power seemed to have more luck. Hence, people started to grow suspicious of the apothecaries as promised nostrums brought no relief. A selection of drugs were tested on rats, wandering cats, the ill, and practically anyone and anything that was found around town. As feared, the various mixtures and medicines were the cause of the sudden death. The collected mixtures and potions were taken outside the town, some forty kilometers to the west, and buried, never to be spoken of again.

As Mr. Tammiste was waiting for the autopsy results, he accidentally found himself reading about the curious case of sudden deaths in Reval during the Middle Ages. He paid no heed to the matter, however. The test results showed that all four victims had been drugged resulting in their death as the level of cannabinoids was very high in each of the victims’ bodies.

“It is clear then, the victims have been poisoned with pernicious weed,” Tammiste concluded, “the question is, who produced this marijuana and what was his intention?”

The next couple of weeks passed slowly, with two more victims and very little progress, as the amount of information was insufficient for the case to develop. However it was clear that the victims were from the North-Western part of Estonia. A crucial lead presented itself soon enough. The police managed to capture a drug dealer associated with poisonous cannabis. The task of finally cracking down on the suspect and getting the vital information out of him turned out to be more time-consuming than expected. Eventually, a few names of the plantations around the area slipped from his lips. This finally gave the

detective and criminal investigators a clue. They immediately set off to check out the alleged marijuana cultivation farms. After a long day of searching and no luck the tired and disappointed investigators drove back to the capital. Both the places identified showed no signs of a plantation or the plant. Mr. Tammiste was desperate for he couldn't stand an unsolved case and feared he would never be able to retire as the thought of being a failure would trouble him throughout his life. "There must be something we have missed... anything... a tiny little detail...

What was the poison that was found in the victims' bodies again?"

"It was, umm... potassium cyanide. Why?"

It's just interesting as I have heard about it before.. But I can't remember... oh my, look what age does to your memory. I used to be so... ah! Never mind. Hah! The good old days when I was young." Laughs and suddenly the realization strikes him. "I know! I know where I heard about potassium cyanide before! Let me see.... think...., where did I... Oh, there! Look!"

He remembers what he has heard: During the ancient times when the plague devastated the town, medicines sold in the pharmacies also included potassium cyanide. All those medicines were buried right near Vasalemma where one of the marijuana plantations was situated, the one where they did not find anything. "We must go back there!"

It was no surprise to anyone, that a thorough search showed signs of a cannabis cultivation: traces of cannabis seeds and a couple of solar lamps were also found. A search around the area later on also produced a bunch of disposed plants of which some contained a considerable amount of potassium cyanide. The owners of the plantation, a married couple, were held for questioning but it was highly probable that they had no idea the ground there had been poisoned hundreds of years ago. A trial and five months later both of the culprits were sentenced to six years of imprisonment.



Mr. Tammiste

Now, a year later, Mr. Tammiste recalls the course of events of the Vasalemma case. He is enjoying yet another walk in the Old Town, this time retired, happy that he had taken the case. It had been one of the most enthralling cases of his career.



Note : _____

THE MISERY OF VESKIMÖLDRE

Lisa-Marie Nüüd & Katrin Repetskaja

17 years

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Tallinn, Estonia

It was a dark foggy Tuesday night, colder and darker than usual. Even the stars were out, which was very unnatural in the suburbs of Veskimõldre. The birds were singing. You could hear starlings and titmouses trying to out sing each other, but there was no one who would notice the stars or the untypically cold weather or the birds competing and singing for their lives. Usually the quiet and peaceful street was crowded with anxious people and filled with chattering, fear, and concern. Some were nervously talking on their phones while others were giving information to the police. The atmosphere was very tense which seemed to make the cold dark night even colder and darker. You could see from the people's worried faces that something was wrong. Mr. and Mrs. Sepp, Mrs Lääne, and Mr. and Mrs. Mäesalu were searching for their children who had been lost for almost three days. Some neighbours were trying to calm down the panicking parents and did everything in their power to help find the children. Some tried to contact the families' relatives. Others were running around, searching and screaming out the children's names. Mrs Mäesalu was all pale and on the verge of losing consciousness.

"Yes, I understand, OK, thanks Martin," Mr Sepp got off the phone with his brother, but there were still no results. Mr. Mäesalu was talking to the police. The words "safety" and "neighbourhood" could be heard from their conversation. Yes, indeed, this neighbourhood had always been considered to be one of the safest in town. Veskimõldre is far from the downtown and big roads, it's a small place where everybody knows everybody. Nothing like this had ever happened here before. It was a total shock for everybody.

The Police had started their investigation. There had been no sign of the children. Policemen were questioning everybody in the neighbourhood trying to get as much information as possible, but only Mrs Öunapuu, a 97 year old lady who lived next door from the Sepp family, confirmed seeing the children on Sunday morning when she was going to the local shop to buy some milk. She was the only witness. That's all. That was not very helpful as the information was three days old. The kids could be anywhere by now.

Mrs. Mäesalu and Mrs. Lääne started to lose their minds. They were constantly trying to call their children's cell phones with no result.

"Saara's phone is never turned off; something is wrong! She would never turn it off herself!" said Mrs Lääne with tears falling down her cheeks. Neighbours gathered around her, offered her some water and tried to calm her down. "It has been turned off since Sunday, the day when the three kids disappeared. It is not normal, Kärt never turns off her phone," said Mr. Mäesalu to one of the police officers. Apparently Saara's phone was not the only one that has been turned off.

Mr and Mrs Sepp shared hand-outs and posted flyers on the posts and trees with the help of a couple of police officers and neighbours. At the same time Mr Kuusik, a man from the house at the end of the street, paid a visit to the Lääne family. Mr Lääne has known Mr Kuusik for a while now, Mr Kuusik once helped him to repair his car and they have gotten along quite well since then. He was a sincere man who always offered help to his neighbours. Mr Kuusik told Mr Lääne he was deeply sorry for what happened and offered his help with the investigation.

It was really hard for the police to investigate the case as the only clue they had was that the children have been last seen on Sunday, probably right before they vanished. Mrs Õunapuu told the police she saw the children in Tammepuu Park so that's where the investigation started. But it was useless. It was no use searching for fingerprints as there were millions of them. There were no sign of anything belonging to any of the kids. The parents have been constantly calling their kids', only Mrs Lääne had almost given up. The whole neighbourhood was in or near the park now trying to find the children. People were calling out their names and talking to other kids. The police talked to the parents and drove around in their cars. They searched playgrounds, bushes and trees, but with no luck. People started panicking. The chattering became louder and louder until Mrs Sepp, crying out aloud, screeched "Silence!"

Everybody stopped talking and stared at Mrs Sepp. There was a long silence. Everybody started to look around but no one dared to say a thing. Suddenly, the long silence and confusion was cut short. A phone rang!

"It's Mattias!" said Mrs Smith despairingly. Her eyes were suddenly filled with tears and she fainted.

"Find it" shouted Mr Smith and ran to his wife.

The phone rang for only several seconds until "Found it!" could be heard among the chattering. It was Mr. Kuusik who found it. He handed the phone to the police who started checking the calls made and received.

"Last call made to 'Mom'... On May 11 Sunday at 5 o'clock in the evening," said the officer.

"But I never got the call", cried Mrs Sepp.

There was a silence and exchange of confused looks among all the people who had now gathered around the police officers examining the phone and Mr and Mrs Sepp.

"It couldn't have been long before they were... Kidnapped?" said a female officer. Everyone looked amazed when they heard the word "kidnapped" as it wasn't used before during the searches.

"It's not possible!"

"It's a safe neighbourhood!"

"There are plenty of people in the park at daytime who would've seen!"

The crowd started murmuring and turned anxious.



“Mr Kuusik where exactly did you find the phone?” asked one of the officers.

The murmur stopped. Everybody started to look around and shrugged their shoulders.

“Mr Kuusik!” said Mr Ranna, the chief of the investigation.

Where is he? Where did he go? Did he leave? He was right here!” resounded from the crowd. People started to get worried, their faces turned pale.

“Go find him! I heard he has only lived on the street for a couple of weeks. His sudden disappearance might not be a incidental ,” said Chief Ranna to the officers.

“Damn you brats! You think you're so clever? You think you can outsmart me? By throwing your phone away? We'll see about that! Your dumb parents are never gonna find you!” mumbled Mr Kuusik to himself while he opened the door to his basement.



Photo/illustration: by LisaMarie Nüüd

Glossory:

Veskimöldre – a suburb of Tallinn



Note : _____

THE TERRORIST

Henri Mart Pihl & Oliver Vinkel

17 years

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Tallinn, Estonia

For the past two weeks during my Sunday visits to the Nevski Cathedral, I have repeatedly noticed this awfully suspicious guy lurking around the area. I considered it my duty as a civilian to keep an eye on his curious behaviour. After all, one can't be sure of his intentions. I, as an exemplary Estonian citizen, took upon myself the responsibility of finding out what he was up to and expose him!

It is a nice Sunday, the sky is clear and the recent temperatures appear to be declaring summer's fast approach. I leave my house this time with the intent of gathering evidence to bring some clarity to this case that has deprived me of sleep ever since I began thinking about it. I bring my camera with me in the hope of getting some quality shots that I could use against this dubious fellow. I arrive at the cathedral at 10.30 a. m. because around this time I usually see the man. I keep looking, but don't see the man anywhere. Maybe he will arrive a little later today?

I am walking to the construction site a little further away from the cathedral, and then I see him. He wears the same clothes and glasses every week, so I recognize him easily. I quickly hide in a nearby bush and begin snapping photos of him simply standing there at the stairs and watching the cathedral as if he is saying goodbye to it.

He stands there for a good five minutes before walking up. I pursue him around to the front side of the building and manage to slip past and hide in the small yard behind him. Once again I manage to get some interesting photos of him. This time it seems as if he is measuring something. What for? If he hasn't come to attend church, why is he here every Sunday behaving in an oddly suspicious manner? I don't wish to interrupt him to ask him questions, as the material I've gathered so far isn't substantial enough. I follow him to the side of the cathedral, where I witness the most frightening course of events. I see him walk to a corner. His gait is fast and hurried. He crouches in front of the side entrance and begins to work on something in his bag. Could it be a bomb? Why would he do it in broad daylight with people around?

As I am taking the pictures I am also fumbling in my pocket to find my phone. With a trembling hand I dial the police and tell them that an explosion could be imminent. (In the meantime I take my camera with me and pursue the suspect...). I follow the man down the small hill, heading away from the cathedral;



The terrorist on the run

however, I lose sight of the suspect when he, as if by magic, disappears amongst the twisting streets of Tallinn. I hurry back to the cathedral to see how the things are. It seems that I have saved the day, as I had not heard an explosion or any screaming.

When I get back I see only a single police car and two officers inspecting the corner I had described. In my mind I can already see the medals of honor, valor and courage being awarded to me. I ask them if they have already removed the potential explosive. They respond saying that there is no such thing there; the man has left nothing behind. It is possible that the man had seen me, aborted the act of terror and escaped, only to come back at a more suitable time. I tell the police to be alert but they dismiss my suggestions and write it off as nothing serious. At this point I understand that this is no ordinary case. The heinous criminal is obviously of high intellect and well prepared, but he has discounted one key aspect: Me! I have seen through his plans immediately, child's play, really! I understand that not all can see and draw inferences. I know that law enforcement cannot be counted on. This is a task to be solved by me and me alone.

The very next day I return to the same place, at the same time and guess what, the man is there once again! He is kneeling in the very same corner as the day before. There is no time to be wasted. I have to confront him right there. I rush towards him, grab him by his coat, rip the bag from his hands and demand that he surrender to the law. The man looks at me, he is visibly shocked and terrified by my ingenious mind that saw through his devious plans. He tells me to let go of him and return the bag to him, but I will not be fooled or tricked by this slimy weasel. I immediately call the police and tell them to come and arrest this enemy of justice. The police arrive quickly and take the man into their car where they converse for about twenty minutes. Already I can feel the gratitude and admiration of the people softly caressing me.

A turn of events -The police come out, ask me to return the bag to the criminal, apologize and let him go. I am baffled I am unable to understand the reason. If this was not enough, they ask me to sit in the car and they drive me down to the police station where they accuse me of disrupting police work and put me in the cell to "cool down" for a bit. They tell me that the man is a biologist, researching the effects of acid rain and collecting samples from the drain pipes near the cathedral. Apparently he had run down from the hill in a hurry because he had had to pick his daughter up from piano practice and he was late. It seems I have been chasing and harassing an innocent man, meddling in his affairs and have ruined his day.

I guess this means no medals of honor, valor or courage quite yet. I have been outsmarted for once, but I will not let this incident demoralize me. It is my duty to keep protecting the innocent and defenseless from the claws of evil. I will keep up the vigil.



Note : _____

THE BLACKOUT

Sander Rõuk & Kenneth Tominga

17 years

Photos by Sander Rõuk

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Tallinn, Estonia

As I woke up, I instantly realized something was wrong. I felt cold and my ribs hurt as if I had been struck in the stomach with a heavy object. I remember feeling a similar pain a couple of years ago. I had been riding my bike downhill when I suddenly lost control over it and ended up falling against a tree. This accident left me with a couple of broken ribs and internal hemorrhaging. This time however I knew that it must have been different. I picked myself off the ground and tried to make sense of what I was seeing and where I was. I noticed that I had either fainted or was sleeping on my kitchen floor. The odd part was that I had a pillow with me. The pillow however was covered with blood. Seeing such a disgusting amount of blood frightened me. I have never been fond of blood and the fact that I couldn't remember anything or the fact that my ribs hurt like hell made me worry about what had happened. I limped to the bathroom to take a look at myself and all my injuries. In the mirror I saw a face smudged with dirt and blood. I was almost certain that the blood was mine because I did not know where else it could have come from. I carefully washed my face and got rid of the dirt. After that I examined myself but to my surprise I could not find a single injury on myself. Seemingly apart from my painful chest I was perfectly fine. So I was left, wondering, where on earth could the blood have come from?



The Pillow

As I was wondering about the origin of the blood I pulled up my shirt and examined my chest. There were all sorts of strange marks on my chest, so I started to think that maybe I had been in a fight and that I should go to the hospital to make sure I do not have internal injuries. I turned around and started to leave the bathroom but as I reached the door, I decided to turn around. I took a glimpse at the bathroom, and everything seemed fine so I decided to look for my phone. I wanted to enter my study but the door was jammed as if something was blocking it from the inside. I nudged the door but it didn't move. I thought that the door must have been locked which was weird because I never ever lock it. The only justification was that it must have been locked by my maid Tatjana. I then headed for my bedroom, and again the door seemed to be blocked but after nudging this one, the door slid open. There was a heavy bag in front of the door which had fallen off the shelf. I was slightly scared of this mysterious and heavy bag. I carefully opened it and found that it was full of 500 kroon bills, which I found really odd, because as far as I knew kroons hadn't been in use for a couple of years now. I didn't know what to do with the money and where it

had come from so I left it there.

By and by, I was beginning to get really worried because I still had no clue about what was going on. I saw my phone lying on my bed and I also noticed that my pillow was missing. I picked up my phone and noticed that the screen of the phone had been destroyed, rendering the phone useless. I cursed these modern touch phones. Suddenly I heard someone knocking on my front door. I rushed to the kitchen because it was next to the front door. I slowly took a peak through the blinds but I was careful not to expose myself to whoever was out there. From the yellow bright jackets the men were wearing. I could read out the word "Politsei" and instantly feared for the worse because I couldn't think of a single reason the police should have showed up on my doorstep. I panicked, grabbed the bloody pillow and rushed to the front door. I feared that they were coming for me but I did not know why. I tried to remain as calm as I could while opening the door. They were friendly and asked me if I had called the police with a unusual message asking for help. I thought a little before giving an answer and replied that it might have been me. I told them that I had woken up from my sleep and noticed that my pillow was covered with blood from my nose. As I am incredibly uncomfortable with blood, (I am really not) I had panicked and called the emergency service but after a short time I had collapsed. They laughed a little, told me to be more careful next time, and they also recommended that I go see a doctor. Then they left. I now knew that I needed to find out who the hell was in my study. I rang from the landline and called my maid. I could hear the sound of the phone ringing from the study. I yelled out her name but heard no reply. I went to my garage and grabbed a sledgehammer. And to think my wife did not want me to buy the thing! She claimed that it was only a waste of space. Thinking about my wife Grete got me wondering and thinking about her whereabouts. Where exactly was she?

I checked out the memo board near the front door and noticed that she was out of town for a few days with her friends. I was a little glad to see that. I took the sledgehammer and headed to the study. I repeatedly smashed the wooden door with the sledgehammer and broke it down. I then entered my study. I was shocked. My heart started beating and my hands started shaking. The entire room was filled with blood. I even saw two dead bodies, one of whom was my maid, Tatjana, and the other I think was her rather buff boyfriend, Igor. It was scary. I grabbed my head and started to yell to myself, "Think, god damn it! Think!" What could have happened?

At that moment the front door opened and my wife rushed in. She said, "Oh, thank god you're up. Are you ok?" I of course replied that no, I was not okay, and what the hell was going on and why was she not freaked out by this. She told me to calm down and to let her explain. She told me that the two people lying on the ground were our victims. As soon as she had said that, I immediately realized what had happened. I remembered the whole thing. My wife and I are sort of hobbyists, but our hobby is a little different from the usual ones. We kill people. I was hurt because one of the two victims had hit me in the stomach with a pipe. My wife is quite capable as she had managed to kill the victims by herself.

After remembering what had happened, I asked her about what she had in the bag. She said that she had brought us



Kopli

everything we needed to get rid of the bodies. So we got to work. We chopped up the bodies into little bits. The bits were about the size of an average hand. We then took these bits into our basement where we had a pool of chlorine. We soaked the bits in the pool one by one. After that we packed them up into little bags. We drove around the city's shadier part, Kopli, and dumped all the bits into different trash cans around the city. The intestines of the people, we took to a pig farm just outside the city. We fed the intestines to the pigs and got out of there.



Study

Now all that was left to be done was the cleanup. In our basement we had a UV light with which we could detect blood. First we scrubbed all the blood off of the walls and floor. We were lucky that there was no blood on the side which had bookshelves with books on them. The difficult part was that some of my paperwork for the next big legal case which was coming up next week had blood stains on it. I noted down all that was in the papers and then burned them. We cleaned the walls and floor with some hydrogen peroxide as this would not leave any trace of our work. After we were satisfied that we had removed all the traces we could chalk the calendar with another hunt finished. I only fear that someday we might not be as lucky as this time, but one thing is for certain, we husband and wife make one hell of a killing team.

Glossary:

Kopli - a suburb of Tallinn



Note : _____

WORDS UNSPOKEN

Kerli Kalk & Keidi Suursaar

17 years

Tallinn English College

Teacher: Piret Bossak

Tallinn, Estonia

There once was a boy called Rasmus who lived an ordinary life in an ordinary town. He did not seem special in any way. Yet, as days passed and passed again, he grew agitated. Agitated over the fact that

“Dammit! I can't write.”

I crumple my notes and throw them in the trash where they belong. The words “You're a good writer, Rasmus,” echo in my head as I reach for a new sheet of paper. I sigh and look at the small scratch on my window. Why is it that today of all days, words, my only true companions, fail me?

Rasmus was an ordinary boy, he was an only child, he lived in a typical 3-room apartment, he had some friends and he wasn't anything special. However, he had a secret much like everyone else he knew did, but his was bigger.

FOUR WEEKS EARLIER

“Quiet!” I hear someone say and I flinch. There's someone downstairs, I think to myself and look for the small hole I had found in the floorboards a few weeks earlier. I try not to make a sound as I crouch down on my knees and peer down the hole. I'm not really worried, only curious.

It is only when I notice two suited men carrying guns stopping right below me that I feel everything inside me go still. As curiosity flees and fear takes its place, I feel ice-cold sweat trickling down my spine.

“Finally,” I hear a frigid voice ---the owner of the voice slowly but purposefully walks towards my hiding spot. He stops a bare meter before the others, takes out his gun and shoots. It takes a moment to process what has happened, a moment until I realise he has shot at the ceiling, the bullet shooting through the floorboards in front of me. A moment later I feel warm blood trickling down my cheek as I hear a low chuckle,

“Don't look so shocked, boys; you knew we had business to attend to.”

At that, the two men hand over a battered briefcase I hadn't noticed before.

“It was not intentional, we're sor...”

“Till next time.” he says, interrupting them.

He starts towards the exit, his last words uttered just before the door closes.

“Don't be late again.”



The site

I've been back to the building for two weeks now, unable to stay away from the place that created so much fear in me. It's like an addiction, every time I see something different I feel compelled to know more about it. I know it's stupid. Common sense begs me to stand up and leave, but I cannot. I hide behind the decrepit pillar I noticed before and lean against it. Now all there's left to do is wait and hope that they'll come soon. Anticipation grows in me my hunger for adrenaline overpowering my senses. I can no longer smell the mustiness of the old building or feel the coldness creeping under my skin.

Yet, nothing has happened so far. I look at my watch and see that another hour has passed. I feel disappointed; just as I'm losing patience and start for the door, I hear noises outside. I stand up a little straighter and fiddle with phone. I turn it off, just in case, and wait for the men to enter the building.

"Are you sure no-one's here?" one of the men ask.

"Yes, of course I am. Who would want to come to this god-forsaken place?"

With a tinge of nervousness in his voice, the other answers, "Well, you said so yourself yesterday. There was someone here the last time."

"It was probably just my imagination. No-one's here, I'm certain of it."

For a moment I think I hear footsteps nearing me but I dismiss it as paranoia. Yet, suddenly I am grabbed by my collar and dragged to the centre of the room.

"Well, look who we have here, Paul," one of the men says with a smirk on his face.

"Seems like we have a visitor, Jakob," Paul says while pulling out his gun. He aims at me and I realise there's no way out of the situation.

Panicking, I begin to scream maniacally hoping that someone can hear me, but suddenly Jakob's arms are around my throat, strangling me. I start to feel dizzy, my arms are flailing aimlessly and I'm gasping for air when he unexpectedly removes his hands.

I recognise the man from the incident that occurred two weeks earlier. From Paul's demeanour I know that he has let his guard down. Realizing that this might be my only opportunity, I grab the gun. Yet, Paul's quick reflexes triumph over mine as he tries to seize it. I feel agonizing pain in my stomach as he pulls me forward kneeling me in the gut. He twists my arm attempting to grab the gun when it goes off in my hand.

"Crap!" I hear Paul say as he releases me from his hold. I look in the direction of the shot. The man is laying on the ground, bleeding. I drop the pistol, realising I've shot him and make a run for the door.

I run as fast as I can and as far as possible, until the house is many blocks away. Horrified, I see an ambulance pass by, but I realise it's going in the other direction.

"Breathe, it's over. It's all over." I say to myself and start walking home.

My hands start shaking as I read the article, and as the meaning sets in, guilt conquers my body. In a panic I throw the paper away, unable to look at the face of the man I have killed. I was so certain that I only wounded his shoulder, but the words "Businessman found dead from gunshot wound" keep haunting me.

In the background I can hear my parents leaving, but the sound doesn't register in my mind. All I can think about is what's going to happen to me. What if I get caught? What if the guys tell the police everything? How will I survive in a prison?



Slowly rage takes control over my body. I can no longer distinguish myself from my surroundings as everything becomes blurry.

How dare they take my life away from me? What did I do to deserve this?

I punch my pillow repeatedly but find no satisfaction in it. I continue to hit the wall, until my knuckles are red and bleeding and all feeling has left my hands. I can feel my anger subside as pain infiltrates my body and exhaustion overcomes me. In resignation I fall on the bed and within minutes I am fast asleep.

As I walk along the bleak corridors of my school, I hear people whispering around me. It has been like this for a week now, a week of never ending torture, both here and at home.

made an effort.

Yet, it's not just me they're talking about. The shooting has quickly become the most scandalous topic in the city and judging by the concerned looks of the adults and intrigued students peering into their phones, another intriguing report has been made regarding the case.

Curiosity gets the best of me and I check out my phone to see what all the fuss is about. Fear tightens the ever-present knot in my stomach as I contemplate whether I'm still entitled to a few days of freedom or if the police are waiting for me already.

PRESENT DAY

The emotions I feel when I read the article, realising that I was not instrumental in killing the man is beyond description; I'd never experienced such ecstasy before. It's as if a weight has been lifted off my shoulders. I'm happier than ever before as neither guilt nor dread will dictate my emotions and actions. Even the realisation that I acted as an utter jerk the whole of last week does not lessen my euphoria. It's true that I regret mistreating my friends. It is no use living in regret, when we have the ability to live in the present. There's nothing more fulfilling than the feeling I get when thinking about the joy and freedom I'm entitled to. Yet, now hours after my initial elation, I feel tired and melancholy. As I ponder over the weeks and days gone by I come I realize they are rather meaningless.

I can't quite recall the exact moment when it dawned on me that no experience will ever compare to that of the past few weeks. I am certain that no emotion will leave me as scathed as the one I encountered. Nothing will be important anymore. Nothing will make me happy again.

I look at the blank paper in front of me and the several discarded ones in the trash and decide that words will never hold enough meaning. They just don't matter. So I keep it simple....

Sorry Mom and Dad.

Rasmus



The family of
RASMUS KASELA
mourns the loss of
a great son

TRAVEL

Marge-MaritPäss

15 years

Tallinn Co-Educational School

Teacher: Margit Timakov

Tallinn, Estonia

Or an excuse to write whatever crazy thing comes to mind and I try and get away with it! It's hard to tell what is up and what's down. It's all blue: the sky and the soft zig-zag of reflection on the sea. It might be the water hitting your legs in a cool wave, but maybe it's a softly cutting breeze of wind instead? But no, that's definitely sand between your frozen toes. So you weren't walking on clouds after all, this time.

You turn around, the scene changes. In front of you, the endless hills of sand, you're in the middle of a desert, riding camelback into foreign lands, a flurry of adventures and excitement buzzing in your mind's eye.

You walk further, feet digging holes in the warm sand, wiggling your toes in an effort to rid them of the tiny particles. And then you're standing in the middle of an enchanted forest, galloping on a unicorn, tracking down a gigantic bear or eating pieces off the cookie dough house.

You climb upon the highest tree in sight—a lanky pine—and look down upon your kingdom. There are your little villages of red brick houses and your big white castles and the green pastures in between, your horses and horsemen and ten different breeds of sheep. The roads, wind down further than your eyes can see. There are your people, poor and rich and happy and sad, all of them content with where they're from.

The tree falters under your weight and then you're dropping like a stone. But then you're not falling anymore—a pair of wings spreading from your back—you're a bird! You glide the skies in a dizzy joy and rejoice—you're free! Wings can take you wherever, no more need you worry about the troubles of the world. Endless deserts, forests of lush greens and clever traps for all the unfortunate to fall into, lands where the sun never touches the horizon... Destination—anywhere.

Your wings carry you to a land of cold and white. The snow coats your little head and you shudder—it's been a while since you've seen a winter quite like this. You rest your tired wings and sit yourself on a windowsill. You peer around curiously: whatever could this icy tower hide? Your little wing swipes the icy pictures off the cold glass; your tiny, beady eyes widen in awe: billions of figures of blue and black fire dance around in circles.

There's something strangely familiar about the view, but you forget about it instantly as the cold sneaks under your wings and you decide to move on. Racing a bull, drinking tea with the queen, climbing up the Great Wall of China, enjoying the view from the Eiffel Tower, playing cards with the sphinx, trying to turn an elephant upside down, it's all on your agenda. You spread your wings, intent on flying to the end of the world and sneaking a glance over the edge.

It takes you days and days, but you're finally there. The rocky, frightening landscape, you assure yourself, is only there to try and turn you around. But you are no coward. Warily landing on a crumbling cliff by the edge, you give a quick glance down. And...nothing. Nothing but empty space, darkness so thick you wonder if you could walk upon it.

You decide to turn back—no point in staying at the end of the world longer than needed. And you're hungry. You put your wings to work again and fly to land of endless bananas. Trying to peel a banana with your wings proves to be quite difficult and suddenly you find yourself upside down, hanging from a branch by your tail that has become very long and hairy.

After munching on dozens of bananas, you decide to do some sightseeing in this undeniably incredible land, monkey-style. You arrive at a great big market packed with people dressed in vibrant colours. You hop through the maze of legs, nick a hat from one of the stands and admire your newly-hatted reflection in a golden plate in front of another stand. Skipping through the crowd, you make it to a grand tent covered with shiny fabrics of every colour of the rainbow. You step in, inspecting the colourful inside of the tent curiously. Bottles of curious liquids in them stand on the floor, jars filled with crushed leaves or even more curious pastes stack on top of each other and in the middle of the tent, a table is covered with heavy red drapery, a pack of cards lying on top. And behind the table, under a heavy multi-coloured turban, is a thick black moustache on top of a wry mouth and black, beady eyes.

He beckons you closer and you step, quite warily. One hand gesturing to a stool in front of the rickety table, he takes the pack of cards with the other and shuffles them.

He tells you your fortune, all the things you're going to see and you can't help but wonder how he could know all the things your future has yet to shove at you. And he tells you, shows you the art of seeing beyond time. Now all the doors are open for you; you can travel to all the strange lands and time, nothing can stop you. All the tiny corners of the world are open to your eyes.

You arrive at a castle of gold and jewels and walk around in awe. Could this be real? Your tiny fingers trace the contours on the walls: intricate patterns woven into one another in rubies and sapphires and opals and emeralds and amethysts, all glinting in the light. Everything is so beautiful you feel you could stay here forever, just staring. It's hard to try and tear your eyes away from all the opulence, but a guard sights you and starts moving closer, waving his sword threateningly. You decide to back away. After all, what's a monkey going to do with some shiny stones?

The jungle is full of sounds: quiet squeaks and loud roars and chirping and growling. In the midst of all of it, you, you climb the trees with such athletic skill, only your kind possesses. You swing yourself upside down, tail fiercely grabbing hold of a tree branch and come face-to-face with the biggest frog your eyes have ever seen. Its black frog eyes stare back at your own startled ones and then it's long tongue sneaks out and catches a fly like it was no biggie. You decide you do not like the jungle very much. With its trees and sounds and tongues, it seems to be a very unsafe place. Who knows what else long and sharp that frog may have...

It's a wonderful day in a beautiful forest of greens. A sea of flowers covers the forest floor, the light spots giving the scene a calm, serene look. You paw at the ground, wondering where to go next. You've been almost everywhere, seen the most well-hidden places of the world, but nowhere feels quite right. You long for somewhere—somewhere so familiar, so close, but yet so far in your mind, somewhere you've been

before, sometime in times long past and you come to a decision.

You're going home. The waves crash at your feet and you open your eyes. There's blue up, there's blue down, blue all around. You feel the cool breeze hitting your skin, making it prickle, and the water, cold and cutting, but yet so familiar. Like you—it's travelled all around the world, seen the biggest of empires rise and fall, seen people born and dying, the nature change season by season, century by century. And yet it has decided to return here.

Here! A place that seems so unimportant right now, but miles away, when you are feeling lonesome, you realise there's nothing quite like it in the world. All the gold and jewels and adventures and freedom of choice are useless against it.

It's home. It's cold and it's windy and it's filled with people who like to see the downside of things. The past history which was cruel to people; the winters when the snow is up to your knees and you wish you were somewhere, anywhere else, but you're here; in your heart you know there's no other place that could feel quite like this because this is home and it's special.. It's the small towns with their small shops and the dirt roads in the middle of nowhere and the big holes in the road that make your stomach bump into your heart and it's the tiny hills you like to call mountains and it's the pride of being who you are. It's home and there's no place quite like it.

And then you wake up.



Note : _____

GEORGIA



Nino Sekhniashvili

Public school #165

Tbilisi, Georgia

When children create and tell a story in their own or a second language, the language becomes theirs.

~A. Wright

My name is Nino Sekhniashvili. I work as a EFL teacher at Public school #165 in Tbilisi, Georgia. I have been teaching for 26 years. I am an alumnus of TEA 2010. I teach students age 11 to 18. I love my profession and do my best to help my students. We do a lot of International Educational projects and have been awarded twice by the British Council. We don't teach English literature as a separate subject in our country, but our students enjoy reading books by different English and American writers and try to take their first steps in writing. Story-writing develops our students' creative and critical thinking. Our students are talented and imaginative. When they try to write something and realize that they don't have enough vocabulary at their disposal, they understand that they need to read more as reading helps them develop their lexicon and, as a result, their articulation.

Georgia has a long history of storytelling. Georgian literature comprises of folktales as well as numerous stories and novels written by famous Georgian writers. The masterpiece "The Night in the Panther's Skin" by Shota Rustaveli dates back to the 12th century. Storytelling helps our students learn about the country's past, traditions and customs. There are different regions in Georgia and each of them has its own style and genre. Children learn these styles as they are read to. It is important for children to make up stories, just as it is important for them to hear and respond to stories told by other people.

Creative writing is any written utterance where the purpose is to express thoughts, feelings and emotions rather than to simply convey information. Our children are very creative. It is teachers' duty to help children tap their creative resources.



NanaTatiashvili

G.Chilashvili t.Gurjaani

Public school N4

Republic of Georgia

*Stories are mighty, however not only because we shape our lives through them but also because they have the power to unsettle the lives we have comfortably shaped by them Weaving together the human and the divine enables us to hear our own stories retold with clarity and new possibilities; our lives are transformed in telling. - **Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley.***

JACK'S STORY

Sopho Liparteliani

14 years

Public school #165,

Teacher: Nino Sekhniashvili

Tbilisi, Georgia

Everything started on the 25th of December. It was snowing. Jack, a 10-year-old boy, was looking out of the window and thinking about his future. That day he made a promise to himself that he would do something awesome like visit the center of the world, find an island that had never existed, or spend a holiday on the sun. Years passed. Jack graduated from the school and went to the best university in his town. He worked in several places, and even had his own business. He made a lot of money.

Everyone thought that this was the start of his luxurious life. But, one day, Jack suddenly gave up everything. He took his money, clothes, food, and a bicycle and went on a trip around the world.

Thirty years passed. You cannot imagine how many things Jack had seen and done. He is old but loves children, football, travelling. He hates peanut butter sandwiches and coffee.

Jack's most memorable travel experience occurred when he worked with archeologists in Egypt. To tell the truth, Jack never had any great luck elsewhere: he was chased by wolves in America, almost eaten by crazy people in Bali, almost bitten to death by poisonous mosquitos in Australia...and so on. But, in Egypt, when Jack was digging for ruins, he found a box made of steel. It didn't have any keyhole. Jack showed it to others, but nobody took any notice; they told him that he should keep it as a souvenir. For Jack, the box was just an example of rubbish. He couldn't take such a big box with him; he would break it into tiny pieces. This would be impossible. Jack tried everything. Even a chain saw didn't work. He came up with a great idea while he was boiling eggs in his 2-star hotel. The idea was to heat the box and when the steel melted he would see what was inside it. On that morning he used his "boiling egg" technique. It worked! To his surprise there was an old Egyptian parchment hidden inside. Everything was getting more and more interesting. There were no words written on the parchment, only numbers. Jack couldn't make anything out of it. He tried to solve the message for almost three days, but then gave up. It was hopeless.



After some challenging days, Jack decided to take the parchment to his most intelligent, elderly, bearded friend. This elderly Greek man figured out the message in no time. The parchment said that there was a place where the sky opened. The old man started laughing and thought that Jack was pulling his leg. What Jack didn't know was that his friend was the worst prankster in the world. Jack laughed at the message too but deep in his heart he believed it. There was no time to waste in Egypt, no time for riding camels, he had to

pack everything quickly and start his new journey. This journey would help him get in touch with the old civilization. The modern world wouldn't help him learn where the sky opens.

The first place Jack thought of travelling was to a tribe in Africa. Few people know that in this tribe called "yxalag"(galaxy) were people similar to those in old Egyptian civilization, because they could tell the future by simply looking at the stars. Jack knew that the members of the yxalag tribe wouldn't talk to outsiders, so he thought of a plan. Jack had a lot of friends. One of his best friends was Sir Nicolas, whom people often called Mad Nicolas, because they thought he was crazy. But Jack knew that Nicholas just thought differently from everyone else. Well, Sir Nicolas carried food in a van from South Africa to the north. Sometimes he took travelers with him (although some tourists got frightened of his crazy talking).

When Jack asked Sir Nicholas if he could take him to yxalag tribe, he of course said yes. Why not? Jack was his only companion. On the way they talked about food, moustaches, jellyfish, steering wheels . . . It was fun hanging out with Nicolas, but again Jack didn't have time too much time to waste. He had a very important mission to accomplish. When the van got closer to the tribe Jack thanked his friend, gave him some candy, and said goodbye. It was too late to do anything. So he camped by the river and remembered the promise he made to himself when he was ten. The next morning, Jack he ate tuna fish and mushroom soup, packed quickly, and journeyed on. The place where the tribe lived looked scary; it was surrounded by the forest full of wild animals. He couldn't just rush in; the animals might eat him alive. So, he made a fire near the biggest tree close to the tribe. The tribesmen came running, taking water from the river and splashing it at the tree. Almost everyone participated. It was time for Jack to enter the village and visit the Chief's tent. He did so. Jack found the tent easily, because it was the biggest and the most beautiful one.

The chief was a fat guy, who had earrings everywhere. He looked frightened seeing an outsider. Jack couldn't use force against him (he wasn't that kind of person) so he just offered him a deal. Jack would give him wine, shoes, gold anything they wanted, but in return the Chief would tell him about the opening in the sky. The Chief agreed. As the Chief couldn't speak English, he used body language. He looked funny using gestures. He took Jack's shoes. Even though they were too small for his feet, he put them on anyway. It was worth walking barefoot, because Jack got what he wanted.

That night the most intelligent person of this tribe, a 5 -year - old kid who knew a little English, told Jack that there really existed a place where the sky opened and that it would open on the 5th of October. Jack didn't get all the information he wanted. He still had to find out where that place was, but he was really, really glad with this little bit of information. Nobody has seen Jack so happy since the survived a lion's bite. One part of the mission was finished. After that difficult day, he went to the city to buy new shoes and get the information about the ships, because Jack was going to South America.

He knew that in the Amazon non-civilized tribes lived, who could help him. It was May, almost four months were left until the opening of the sky, but Jack still had a fear of not finding it. At the harbor of west Africa a ship called "Pequeña Santa Maria" was about to leave carrying tea, chocolate, wool and some people including Captain Silver, Joe the Carpenter and Professor Jackson.

They were all going to the beautiful Amazon. Jack got along with everyone . . . especially the intelligent and kind professor. He taught Jack how to avoid poisonous snakes, make a shelter when it rains, and find your



way again when you get lost . . .But, what interested Jack most were the stories and legends about tribes. These people lived in places where outsiders would never find them, they had different views of life, different materials, and every tribe had its very, very old calendar.

The professor warned him that if he reached any of the tribes he had to bring them chocolate because people from each Amazon jungle tribe were chocolate lovers. "That is great. I mustn't forget to bring sweets and 3 pairs of shoes," thought Jack. The sail from Africa to the Amazon got really boring. Every day was the same: wake up, catch fish, listen to the professor, go to sleep. It couldn't go like that for so long.

Then, the captain warned that a huge storm was approaching them. First, the color of the sea changed; fish hid; clouds turned black; passengers could hear thunder roaring, lightning flashing, and the sea moving. Jack realized that he had never been through a storm before. Everyone, including the professor, began running around carrying out the captain's orders, trying to save their lives. Jack stood still, eating cheese, and watching that beautiful natural disaster. He was paralyzed until he was knee-deep in water. He was going to drown and all his dreams would crash, and he couldn't let that happen so he quickly stretched the ropes and took water out of the ship...

Two days of struggling with the storm was over. It didn't matter that they were starving; the main thing was that nobody died. Jack felt seasick. The Amazon harbor was a relief. He tried to put one foot in front of the other on firm ground without falling over. Jack continued his mission. He bought a second-hand bicycle and set off to search for the tribes. The professor was right; it was extremely hard to find them. To make things even worse, if something bad happened, Jack couldn't contact anyone, because there was no signal. But his brave heart wasn't frightened even a little bit. He had done worse things like jumping off a cliff into the narrow river, surfing in a tsunami, diving near sharks, riding tigers, and so on.

In the Amazon he couldn't find any clues, until he saw a burnt branch. It seemed that some people were hunting and stayed there once. That was a clue . He camped there, and when he woke up he was in someone's house. His bicycle and luggage weren't there—creepy. He slowly stood up, still wondering what was going on. Suddenly he heard a stranger's voice behind him. At that moment Jack felt as if he was the happiest man in the world. He turned around smiling and saw one red-skinned deadly face. Jack and the Professor soon found out that the place where the sky opened was on the North Pole. The professor decided to travel to this place with Jack. They had one toughsail from the Amazon to Europe then to the North Pole. Both of them took cameras to take photos.

Finally the day of October 5th came. It was a memorable day. That day he sat still for hours thinking about his journey. The sky was clear; nothing was going on. Then, suddenly, the sky changed radically. There were no clouds of any color. There was the Galaxy!!! Stars, planets, sun, asteroids,

ALL OF IT made up this Galaxy. It was so beautiful. No one dare to move or take pictures. That Galaxy disappeared as quickly as it appeared...suddenly...unexpectedly. After that night Jack and the Professor went on with their own lives. Jack still travels around the world and the professor sometimes goes with him.



STORY OF A PSYCHOLOGIST

Eka Tsiviladze & Anna Kankadze

15 years

Public school #165.

Teacher: Nino Sekhniashvili

Tbilisi, Georgia

Goga: - You see, you are so interesting!

Sesili: - Thanks; I can say the same about you.

Goga: -Are you really so cold?

Sesili: - Why, have you never thought that ice is melted by warmth?

Goga: - Sesili, have you ever loved anyone?

Sesili: - Yes, and I still love him. He is dead, but I love him. I always dream about him and always miss him. I was so little when I first met him. And, suddenly, he vanished. I miss him like never before.

(I take a coffee cup, seize it hard in my hands as if I'm going to try to break it. Goga is surprised . . .and he can't believe that an ironclad girl like me is in love.)

Goga: - Do you know what? I understand you! Will you tell me how everything happened?

Sesili: - Yes, I met him by chance. Step-by -step our relationship began. His confession of love was unexpected. He was so nervous; he was afraid that I would reject him. We both knew what was going on between us, but we did not hurry anything. Everything came on its own...naturally. I remember dancing in the evening rain, walking and talking with each other, and eating ice-cream in winter. He was 7 years older than I am, but when he was with me he was like a 2- year- old child. We did not hide anything from each other. Sometimes, I want to stop time for only two minutes so that I can hug him just once—no other person is like him. He used to say that he was not romantic, but he used to call me“angel” and say that he missed me even when I was beside him. He was unusual, warm, strict and careful at the same time. I love him still...even though he is now lying in a cold grave. Do you know, I did not see him dead. Everybody criticized me; they do not believe that I loved him, because I could not go to the funeral. I did not want to see a boy who was so full of life lying lifeless in a coffin. I go to the cemetery every evening when there is nobody else there. I know he can hear me and he is watching me. I felt lonely for a long time after he had passed. At first, I looked for someone like him but I could not find anyone. Yeah, maybe you think that I am not well, but I am in love with him so . . . *I looked into the cup like I was looking for someone who would listen to me.* Goga smiled, and I do not know why, but he said nothing.

Goga: - You are capable of love, you know; I am sure that you were born for plans that are not yet revealed.

Sesili: - Yes, maybe, but I am not iron and I have got feelings.

Goga: - How did he die?

Sesili: - In a car accident, when he was coming to me. Ten minutes earlier he called me and said that he loved me and would be there soon. I remember, one evening we argued and neither of us slept until 6 a.m. I was looking in the window and the amazing thing was that near my house I saw his shadow. I knew he couldn't stop and he would come. I immediately called him, and heard his mobile ring in my garden, and do you know what he said? “You always get on my nerves, but despite everything I still love you, and I came

here because I knew you would be looking from the window as usual when it is dark . . . and at that moment I understood that he knew me better than anyone else.

Goga: - Do you tell this story to everyone?

Sesili: - No, I am supposed to listen and give advice to others, so I do not have the right to talk about my own problems with everyone.

Goga: - You speak so openly that anyone would talk freely to you..

Sesili: - That's why I am a psychologist.

Goga: - Can I visit you tomorrow as a patient?

Sesili: - In the evening hours yes.

Goga: - I will definitely come.

Sesili: - I think too much time has passed; it is time to go.

Goga: - Wait.

Sesili: - No, I have to go and also it is raining.

Goga: - Okay.

Goga asks for the cheque, and I take my bag, put on my coat, and get ready to leave.

He may think I am a woman with glasses, who does not care about anything but her profession. I am not like this. I am a 22-year-old girl who has her own personal life. But, my personal life begins after 7 p. m. Until then I work by listening to people. I am very pleased when people thank me for advice that really helped them. I live alone at home. Goga is my new friend but just a friend, and we go out in the rain. Goga opens an umbrella to protect us from the rain drops. I ask him immediately –

Sesili: You said you liked rain, didn't you?

Goga: - I love it, but we will get wet.

Sesili: - I love rain and I don't need to be kept from it.

Goga: - Do you know if you get wet you will catch cold?

Sesili: - I will take medicine but I will never be afraid of rain.

Goga: - Okay.

Goga throws the umbrella away and looks at me smiling. Sometimes I think I am an object being scrutinized. Some people perceive my words as if they have never heard anything like them, but in reality I articulate wisdom from my experience.

Humans like people, but sometimes do not trust them. They love wind, but sometimes close shut the window against the harshness of it. They love, but also fear. It started to pour. I looked up to work out the speed of the falling drops.

I know Goga is very cold, but he does not say anything. Then I stop a taxi and say to Goga :

Sesili: You seem to have caught a cold, now go home and come to my office tomorrow.

Goga: You know, you made me think about many things.

Sesili: But let's talk tomorrow. *Goga tries to kiss me on the cheek but I turned my head away.*

Sesili: It means that you will not come tomorrow?

Goga: No, why do you think so?

Sesili: It means that you will disappear and you will not turn up yet.

Goga: Okay, I will only say goodbye.

The taxi driver looks tired, so I apologize and close the car door noisily... I feel a strange desire to visit a nearby café and so I do. I enter it and order a cup of coffee. I light a cigarette and look at the smoke rising in different directions. I look into the cup and see a cold face of a woman without any emotions, the woman who often forgets herself.

THE PURSUIT OF HAPPINESS

Gvantsa Kobakhidze

17 years

Teacher: Nino Sekhniashvili

Tbilisi, Georgia.

We can waste our lives drawing lines or we can live our lives crossing them. John Lennon once said an amazing thing: "When I was 5 years old my mother always told me, that happiness was the key to success, the key to life. When I went to school, they asked me what I wanted to be when I grew up. I wrote down HAPPY. They told me I did not understand the assignment. I told them they did not understand the meaning of life."

A major factor in being happy in one's life is – FAMILY. A child's behavior is very telling about the upbringing of a child. Family life may be soft, crazy, cringing, or oppressive. Each of us has a unique childhood. Some people have a hard time talking about their personal life. We do not want to reveal secrets and want to keep our memories to ourselves. Some bad family memories such as heated arguments between parents, angry adults, inappropriate behavior, remain as bad memories into adult life. Combating these conditions prevents happiness. Parents must be wary of how they bring up their children. The way parents act is so important, because a child sees grown-ups as role models for how they should act in the future. It is an unbalanced notion to think that all a person's play happens at a young age, and all a person's work happens in adult life. This leads to regrets in old age. Certainly, childhood is a short season in our lives. It can be pleasant AND difficult. Some memories from childhood never will disappear.

To create a happy child, and, therefore teenager and adult, one has to raise a child in calmness and serenity. Also, one must be wary of habits, education, taste, and indulgence. In this age, we are surrounded by drugs, prostitution, and illegal activity that places children in jeopardy. For me, the main problems are technology and censorship. Children are over-involved with these false friends. Children become absorbed by the media. This is dangerous. The advantages of books over computers could be quite a long discussion; maybe the question is improperly structured? I believe in the power of engagement with good, old-fashioned books. Reading is an art which seems to be enjoyed these days only by the ill. Books are seen as tedious. Reading seems to be an obligation. In books, we find people like ourselves. We also find people who are very different culturally and traditionally. We get to know the authors. It is unbelievable how ignorant we are becoming about different written forms such as verse. We do not cherish those gold-lacquered page edges found in beautifully bound volumes of literature. If we do not start paying attention to books, technology will claim us all.

Teenagers must know the price of success...that they have to face many challenges in order to achieve great things. It is offensive to make literature idyllic so that challenges are not spoken of. The way to fame is fraught with challenges and children must know what to expect.

Another major part of happiness is good relationships. Sometimes being with a particular person is like being in heaven. We call this love... It is tragic when a person we love leaves our lives. Depression stems from the heart-break caused by break-ups. Millions of songs are written about this. Whenever you part with someone you love so much a long process of grief occurs. You are thrown into a sadness that you have never known before. Sometimes your heart needs a long while to realize it needs to be off of your sleeve and back in your chest.

I believe you should never ever let your happiness depend entirely on something outside of you or someone else. You should feel happiness in yourself.



Note : _____

HEAVY RAIN

Leri Kokilashvili

15 years

Public school #165,

Teacher: Nino Sekhniashvili

Tbilisi, Georgia

Once there was a man named Bill who had lots of friends. Everyone loved him. He had a very good family, a wife and two beautiful children, a girl and a boy. The boy was older than the girl. He was 13 and his name was Robbie. The girl was 11 and her name was Rebecca. Bill's wife was called Ann. They all lived happily, but one day something appalling happened which changed their lives. One day Bill woke up but could not find his wife and children. At first he thought they were outside playing. When he looked, they were not there, so then he began to worry. Bill decided to search for them. He searched everywhere: at his relatives' houses, in the cinema, at the theatre, and, finally, the park. He went to the park at night, thinking that he would not find them there. He was about to go home when he saw a woman on the ground. When he reached her, he saw that it was his wife. She was very badly hurt. She could hardly breathe but said: "They are lost." The worried husband took his wife to the hospital but her condition was very bad. The doctors didn't know if they would be able to save her. Bill told the police the story, but the police didn't have enough clues to search for the kids. Bill began to cry. A good-looking detective by the name of Detective Connor told Bill that he overheard the story about the lost children and could help. Connor told Bill that children were kidnapped every night, and, sometimes, the adults accompanying them were killed. Connor also knew that the killer, could do Origami because he left paper animals or flower behind when he kidnapped children. The Origami killer. That was what they called him. Bill was terrified after hearing such things and didn't know what to think. He went home. Two days passed. On the third day, Bill's mobile phone rang. He answered thinking that detective Connor was calling, but he heard a strange voice saying that his children were with him. Bill couldn't believe it so he said, "Prove it."

The man let the children speak to their father and Robbie said, "Dad, please do what he says. We are so scared, Daaad !!!"

Bill said in a threatening voice, "If you hurt them, I'm going to kill you!"

The man laughed and said, "Don't threaten me; I am just giving you a chance to save your children."

Bill was so upset that he agreed to play the game. The kidnapper asked Bill to call him Mr. Who.

"Tomorrow you will go to the nearest junk yard. There, by a gate, you find your first clue. I'm watching you. If you say anything to the police, I'm going to kill your children." Bill swore on his life that he would not say anything. He was ready for anything and took his old gun that no one had fired for a long time. When the next day came, Bill went to the junkyard by car as fast as he could. After a long search, he found a ring which his beloved daughter Rebecca used to wear. He began to cry. He also found a recording tape. He turned it on and listened. He recognized his children's voices.

Day 1

Robbie, frightened, says, "I don't know why this man wants to record us on this thing."

Rebecca: "Neither do I; Let's do it... this but I'm scared. If we don't, I don't know what he will do to us."

Robbie: "Dad you've got to save us. This man is crazy. There are three other children here."

Rebecca: "Quick, stop recording! He's coming!"

Day 2

Robbie: "This is the second day and it's night. My sister and I should run away from here— somehow-- right now. Rebecca, wake up, wake up!"

Rebecca: "I'm sleepy."

Robbie: "No, we have to run."

Robbie, his voice heavy from running: "Dad, if you are listening to this we are in the junkyard. I think it's near the river. We're caught! Heeelp!"

Tears ran down Bill's cheeks. Then suddenly the phone rang. It was detective Connor. He asked if everything was okay. Bill didn't know what to answer and just said, "If you don't hear from me in more than two days you'll find my body near the river of Claus Street. I think I found the killer."

Detective Connor told Bill not to do anything foolish. They could help him, but Bill said: "There is nothing YOU can do to help me get my children back."

Bill dropped the phone to the ground. He quickly got into his car and went to the Claus River near the old ship and an abandoned old shipbuilding plant. Immediately he saw his children tied up very strongly and hanging high from the ground. He quickly let them down and untied them. He hugged them very hard, and then he heard the sound of a clap. It was Mr. Who in a mask. Bill told him to give up, it was no use but Mr. Who only laughed and said: "You are cleverer than other parents but not so clever. You know that it's just a trap." Then he laughed.

Bill: "What do you mean?!"

Mr. Who: "Look at the children!!"

He looked and understood that they weren't real.

Bill: "Where are my children??!"

Mr. Who: "They are in the ship and it will explode in 15 minutes. You will have to spend your time trying to kill me or save your precious children."

Then he took a button, clicked on it, and activated the bomb. Bill kept cool, took his old gun, and aimed it. The gun was no use. It was too old. So, Bill fought with Mr. Who until he won. Bill ran to the boat and deactivated the bomb. His previous training as an officer helped him with this task.

After beating Mr. Who and saving his children the police came and detective Connor got out of the car.

Bill asked how he found him. Detective Connor said that, "Today, technology can do everything." Connor found Bill's mobile phone, searched every piece of useful information that he needed, and found this place. Bill was much quicker than the detective. The origami killer was arrested and put in the jail. Bill and his children went home. The family was safe after all this tragedy, but Bill's wife Ann was in bad condition and had to wait for about 2 weeks to recover. After two weeks of praying to God, Ann finally recovered and they lived happily till the end.



THE NEW LIFE

Bela Danelia

15 years

Public school #165,

Teacher: Nino Sekhniashvili

Tbilisi, Georgia

It was Friday afternoon. The sun was shining brightly. The snow had almost melted and flowers were appearing slowly on the green field. The smell of the newly-blossomed ones made everything fascinating. Nature was reviving.

Central Park was full of people. Lovers, were walking, talking, laughing quietly, and joking. It was the 14th of February, St Valentine's Day. A handsome, young man in black was slowly walking alone along the path. He looked sadly at the happy faces. This was David, a police officer known to everyone for his story. David was in love with a pretty girl called Mary. They were the best couple in the town; they were engaged and were going to get married soon, but . . . On Valentine's Day, a year ago, David was returning home from his job thinking about Mary when suddenly he heard a terrible crashing noise. He turned and saw a girl in blood lying on the ground next to a car. He ran . . . Oh, my God, it was Mary . . . his beloved Mary lying there dead.

Everything stopped. David couldn't move. After that day, David isolated himself from people. He went to work and came home. He communicated neither with friends nor with relatives. David missed Mary a lot and was unhappy.

Time passed, but nothing changed. David thought about Mary, recalling every moment spent with her. One day, David heard a similar noise . . . the crash of a car. It was not his imagination. It was a real car accident . . . again. He turned pale, and he felt like he was going to faint. Suddenly he heard a weak voice, a girl's voice cry, "Help me, please, help me!"

David couldn't move. He felt something was melting in his heart. He felt as if he were waking up from a deep, long sleep. David called an ambulance and kept talking to the girl until it arrived.

When it did, he accompanied her to the emergency hospital. Something changed since that day. Katie recovered soon and she and David started going out every day. She was grateful to God and David, who was deeply in love again.

A few months later they got married and moved to another city to begin a happy new life, together.



MY COUNTRY'S CULTURE

Natia Jigurashvili

15 Years

G.Chilashvili t.Gurjaani

Public school N4

Teacher: NanaTatiashvili

Republic of Georgia

At first I want to say that Georgia is so beautiful, so historical, it's amazing...It's a very small country, but there is very big culture, and I am proud!

What is culture? Our culture is our Georgian soul, our heart. We are alive with culture and I think Georgia will die if our culture will die! We Georgians are Christian believers, so our belief is in our culture. I think so. There are a lot of historical monuments. Our history is also in our culture. Culture is for our country and man. We have both of them and man's culture protects his country's culture. It's our duty! Our culture defended us from enemies. Georgian culture is 4,000 years old.

A big part of our churches are occupied, so our culture should be bigger and more interesting with these monuments. Our written language is one of the 14 written languages which are in the world. We have our folk dances, folk songs and a Georgian kitchen is heaven! From other countries visitors discuss the differences in our culture. Yes, Georgia is so different. We have our rules and I like it!

Culture is a beauty of our nature. Our museums and our churches are from Georgian souls. Culture is in every Georgian's blood, so nobody can change it. I will be correct if I will say, Georgia without its culture is only the name "Georgia" and not it's meaning. Its meaning is holy! The Georgian people are a very traditional people, and these traditions are in our culture so that Georgians will never forget it! We love everything which is correct and we give respect to everyone who is frank and who loves us! We will do everything for such people. I can say that we have a very difficult nature and we don't look like anyone else. We can't because we are Georgians! We will protect our country!

Culture is man's character, man's nature, and sometimes a country's nature is our business, but it isn't only business. It has soul. Its name is GEORGIA!

We, all people must respect our own culture and everything will be ok! If we will have love, we will do everything. It's important! I respect and I love my culture and my country, so I advise you to visit it maybe once!

Georgia for me is an icon, a saint... It is dressed from God!



INDIA



Rita Banerjee
Carmel High School
Kolkata, India

Writing a story empowers the writer. It inspires confidence in one's ability to write and builds an enthusiasm for learning. A child learns to be creative, think critically, organize his thoughts and grow emotionally. It gives children the power to share one's thoughts in a variety of ways and builds bridges across nations.



Kashmira Jaiswal
Navrachana School, Sama
Vadodara, India

Words are used to articulate our reflection about life... There are times, when we sit back and recall some beautiful moments... when we've hummed and strummed through the day, longing to share the joy, or other moments... when we've been upset, and have wanted to tell someone about it... It is then that a story is waiting within you to jump out on the paper. This International Project has given students and teachers an opportunity for these stories to manifest themselves beautifully from what lies in the heart. The profile of the stories from India, fit this school of thought. Most of my young authors have written about incidents which have impacted or touched their lives. This project gave them an opportunity to collect their thoughts and present them in the form of a short story.

This project has also rendered me much richer by experience and discovery, giving me a window to the immensely imaginative world of young people. I learnt that the recipe that goes in the making of these stories is to take a large helping of assorted life experiences, marinated in the culture of the native place, boiled in the melting pot of innovative ideas, and served with a heady garnish of creativity... Happy reading from Navrachana Sama School, India.



Storytelling is the most powerful way to put ideas into the world today.
~Robert McKee

Mamta Kanti Kumar
India

Multicultural stories from different geographical location, exposure to ideas from other cultures enables the young minds to broaden their horizons rather than live and think in isolation. Attitudes, perceptions, traditions of different societies can expose children to various points of view, range of ideas, customs, and beliefs different from their own.

Story is more than a way of exchanging information and extending ideas, it is a means of reaching out and connecting with other people. Stories can be a powerful tool that can help unite cultures and bridge the cultural gap.

The young authors from India share a remarkable variety of experiences and understanding. They have used the story as a medium to shape their thoughts and feelings.

Enjoy reading!



Anagha Pathak
Navrachana International School
Vadodara, India

Greetings from **Navrachana International School Vadodara!**

Creativity is the fountainhead of intellect and sensitivity. Students apart from their framed study pattern should be nurtured in the zone of creativity to groom and enhance their overall development. We, at NISV encourage creative writing as a part of our Creative Writing Club where students are oriented and guided in developing their thinking skills to create innovative stories, poems and other such writing forms.

We are extremely elated to be associated with **The Power of Culture Project**. We thank **Julia Perlowski, Ms. Mamta Kanti Kumar** and **Ms. Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska** for giving us the opportunity to be a part of such a creative extravaganza.

Thank you for collaborating.

REWIND

Lahari Dam
14 years
Carmel High School,
Teacher: Rita Banerjee
Kolkata, India

Oh no! I have lost my purse...

"Miss Lahari you have lost your purse again? Mother is going to scold you very much" Screamed my heart. It had 500 rupees in it. I was searching for it everywhere possible... so to leave no place unchecked I started to check the store room.

'My God! Where on the earth can I find it?' screamed my heart as it was thumping very fast.

Suddenly I bumped into a big box in the corner.

It was written 'Bankura 1989.' I was curious enough to open it. And Wow! It was a box full of treasures. It had some old fashioned toys made up of sticks, some dolls, some letters, and... a picture.

"Hey I know this picture." I said to myself. It was a black and white picture of me (5 year old), my mother, my grandpa and Sherro. Sherro, my horse. Yes, I miss Sherro very much....

He was the horse whom I have known since birth.

His body was covered with glazy brown fur that used to shine in the sunlight. His big wavy tail would move left and right whenever I touched it. And his eyes were the most beautiful eyes I've ever seen. They were deep black in color, always glittery and shiny. His long neck was smooth and soft to touch ; I loved to feel the soft smoothness. His broad body used to scare me, but then I got used to it.

He was my life till I was 7 years old. He was everything to me. I used to play with him throughout the day. I remember those days. He was my best friend. Every morning; "Ma, where is Sherro?" "He is grazing in the field." My mom used to say. Without wasting any time, I used to go and play with him. I used to run after him to catch him. And whenever I wanted to get on his back , he would understand my wish would bend towards me so that I could climb and ride him. I remember one incident, one day while playing with him in the field; I accidentally went to the street, I was running behind him to catch him. After a few minutes I realized that I'm in an unknown street and lost. The street were empty, no one was passing by. I was upset and started to cry. I was scared that I was lost and I'll never find my home. But my angle, my Sherro saved me. He took me back home.

"He was looking so confident and powerful!" I boasted. He was always with me... Papa.

His death was so painful for me... it was one of the biggest loss for me and my family.

Shipra was so irresponsible. I still remember the incident.

One day, my father bought a packet of poison cake for killing mice. He gave it to the maid Shipra. She was unmindful; she mistakenly kept the poison in the hay. And our precious Sherro ate it. We didn't understand it at once. That evening when I went to play with him I saw him standing as usual. I was calling out to him, but he was not responding. I was surprised and not able to understand what had happened to him. I called out to him "Sherro" as I went towards him and touched him, I felt that his body is very cold. I was dumbfounded for a while. And when I looked into his eyes, I saw that they were without any excitement. I was stunned. There was blood coming out of his mouth. It was falling on the ground and a on the hay. I couldn't control myself, I cried. "No, no, no, he can't die; I was playing with him this morning. He really has no right to leave me alone. Without him, how will I live? I'll never be able to see him again! How will I spend my days? Without him there is no meaning in my life, he is everything to me, he is my life, and he can never leave me alone." I screamed, I cried aloud. His absence made me feel his importance in my life. He was my best friend.

When my father heard me crying, he came running out and saw that the horse was dead and I was weeping and was inconsolable.

Papa was also shocked to see our mighty, beautiful and faithful Sherro dead. Later he discovered that our maid had mistakenly kept the poison in the hay. This was how our most special and precious friend Sherro died.

(Back to the present)

"Hmmm...!" I was crying. Tears had rolled down my eyes.

I've started to cry for him as the wonderful memories of my childhood days swept past in my mind's eye.

"You were everything for me Sherro. And it was a bliss for me to remember you after a long time." I said rubbing tears from my eyes. "I love you very much Sherro." I kissed his picture and kept it inside the box. I came back to the present with a jolt!

LAHARI YOU HAVE LOST YOUR PURSE!!!!!!! Shouted my mind. So, instead of wasting any more time, I came out of the storeroom and went in search of my purse....



Note : _____

THE UNEXPECTED HELPER

Alowkikaa Bhala

14 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

Ramesh gave a broad smile as he looked at himself in the mirror and straightened a pleat in his *dhoti*. It was time for his favourite festival – *Uttarayan*. The dhoti was new. It was gifted to him by his mother because she was aware of the fact that Ramesh enjoyed and loved being a part of this particular festival. He had no strong reason to explain his passion for Uttarayan but he always felt that the festival of Uttarayan added a beautiful melody to his life

Suddenly he remembered that he had to reach the *maidan* sharp at 10:30 am. His best friend, Aman, had clearly warned him not to be late. Ramesh quickly glanced at his mother who was busy making delicious food in the smoky kitchen along with his elder sister, Kajal. Ramesh quietly moved out of the front door. He then tip toed towards the store room which was situated in the extreme right of the little courtyard in front of their small thatched hut. The courtyard was not well maintained. Wild grass, weed and a variety of insects with unusual colors and antennae proved this. Somehow, Ramesh made his way into the room and returned with a big polythene bag in his hands which contained the kites – vibrant, colorful and extraordinary. The kites had been gifted to him by his parents from the little savings they had collected over the past few months.

There was a maddening crowd in the ground. All the villagers had gathered there to celebrate this fabulous festival of Uttarayan. Ramesh searched for Aman frantically. “Hey! Ramesh! Are you all set to celebrate Uttarayan?! I hope you haven't forgotten the kites at home!” a voice exclaimed from behind. Ramesh turned and let out a beaming smile as he looked at his friend, Aman. It was really a wonderful surprise for Ramesh. “Oh! I am all ready for it and here are the kites. Don't you worry!” replied Aman. “I'll just take a minute to return, Ramesh. Do you know that Irfan has brought some good quality kite string from Ahmedabad? I am going to find him. I'll request him to give some rolls to us, too. I'll be back in a jiffy!” And with this remark, even before Ramesh could have said anything, Aman vanished into the crowd. Ramesh was getting bored standing in the crowd and waiting for Aman, who had not shown up since the past half an hour. Ramesh decided to fly his kite with the ordinary string that he had brought with him till the time Aman returned. It took some effort to get his kite up in the sky and he let out a happy sigh of relief. He had turned all sweaty due to the scorching heat of the sun. How lucky he was to celebrate Uttarayan with some of the most beautiful kites in the world in his possession. As he thought about the kites he had brought, he looked at a corner to the right where he had kept the rest of his kites. But to his surprise there was no bag there! He searched frantically for the bag but it was nowhere to be found. He searched behind the bushes, inside the baskets of the cycles, all around the ground but in vain. His mind burst into mingled thoughts. What if he couldn't find the bag at all and would have to spend his favourite festival of kites

without flying a kite? What would he tell his friend Aman, to whom he had boasted endlessly about his marvelous kites? Just when he was going through this dilemma, he saw Aman returning with Irfan, who had a roll of thread in his hand. "Here we are at last! There is so much chaos in this ground, that it must have taken me half a day to find Irfan", said Aman. Ramesh did not know what to say next. It was as if his mind had stopped thinking. But, he had to tell his friends, the truth. He had to reveal it. It was as if he was going to reveal how foolish he was. After gathering some courage, he finally blurted out the truth.....

Aman could not hide his distress and burst into tears. As for Irfan, he made an awkward gesture showing his disappointment and went back with his thread. "Aman, please don't cry, Iwait! Why don't we go around the ground once more and try to find the bag of kites?" suggested Ramesh. "O...OK" was the only reply Aman could give with tears in his eyes.

They searched the entire ground endlessly but they were met with disappointment. While Aman was busy asking people about the bag of kites, Ramesh had been lost in his own world. How would he tell his parents about the loss? He had no heart to let his parents down by telling them that he had lost the expensive kites, which his parents had struggled so hard to buy. He could not go and ask for another bag either as the family was very poor and could not afford.



But then all of a sudden he saw a man approaching him. As he drew nearer, Ramesh realized that it was Sanjay uncle. This was the last straw! Sanjay uncle was an old clerk in the nearby school and he lived in Ramesh's neighborhood. This lanky man always had a mocking look on his face. Sanjay Uncle's glass windows would often break by the local cricket team of which Ramesh was a member, since his house was just adjacent to the only playground in the village. Maybe that would have been the reason why Sanjay uncle hated Ramesh. He would leave no chance to beat him or pass a nasty look. The same person was approaching Ramesh. Ramesh felt as if his heart could break in his ribcage and fall out from his mouth anytime. He considered the option of fleeing from the spot but there was no time for it now. The man was already quite near him. But to Ramesh's surprise, Uncle Sanjay did not beat or do anything frightful to him. Instead he let out a once-in-a-year smile and lifted his hand to give Ramesh a bag of beautiful, multicoloured, kites. Ramesh could not understand the reason for this gift. Sanjay uncle did not allow him to think. He said, "Take it, and don't be shy. I know how much you love Uttarayan. I have been watching you for some time and realized that you had lost your bag of kites. Take it son".

Ramesh, enjoyed the festival of Uttarayan to the fullest. Not only did he get the most beautiful kites, but he also made a new friend. He would definitely cherish this day and incident for years to come.

Illustration: Sunit Gautam

Glossary:

Dhoti – Traditional formal Indian attire

Maidan – Open ground

Uttarayan – Festival of Kites (celebrated in western India)



THE FLYING KITE

Anjali Kamat

15 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

I wake with a start as the shrill beeping of the clock rouses me from my nightmare. I can hear the distant barking of a dog, and the faint sound of the Muslim prayers or “Baang” being chanted in the nearby masjid. Half asleep, I brush my teeth and wash my face. I drag myself to the study table and settle down to study. The luminous hands of the clock point at 4:30 am. It may seem a bit extreme, but these days my routine includes lots of late nights and early mornings. In a place like Vadodara, a small town in India, where medicine, engineering and law are considered to be the only sensible options for a bright young girl like me, sleep is hard to come by in the twelfth grade.

This is how most of my days go. Whenever I'm not studying, it feels like wasted time. My parents raise their eyebrows when I tell them that I need a break. I don't remember the last time I switched on the television. Even while eating my meals, there is always a book by my side.

I never used to be like this. I love art. Making comics of young girls and boys used to be my favourite past time. Swirling paint brushes on paper was my favourite hobby. Now, I have even given up on doodling tiny pictures at the back of my notebooks. Why make silly drawings while you have a pile of books left to study, right?

These days, I feel so empty. I don't believe I have a reason to live. I'm not thinking of suicide, I'm not one of those dramatic types. And I don't want to be one of those teens who go to watch flashy melodramatic Hindi movies-with the dancing heroes and heroines-with their friends every other day. And I know that if I study hard now...I'll have a better tomorrow.

But... what about today? I feel so empty.

I have walked around with this empty feeling for weeks and months.

Today, I am still mulling over something I saw a few days ago. One day I was returning from school, I saw a few young boys, most of them street urchins, playing a game of street cricket. There is a huge craze of cricket in our country. All the boys aspire to be Sachins or Dhonis. A particularly scruffy young lad, clad in rags was standing in front of the stumps, brandishing a wooden bat. Someone threw a ball to him and he swung his bat hard, and CRASH! It went straight through the window of a house, breaking the glass as it went. The young urchin's face grew pale as the owner of the house emerged, red in the face and calling out names. The other boys pointed out the culprit, who was looking smaller than ever. The fat owner came waddling towards him, caught him by the neck and dragged him away. I could hear the young child screaming, pleading, and begging for forgiveness. I thought of the scolding and maybe even the beating

that surely awaited him, and suddenly I was filled with anger and hatred, at this entire country, at this entire world. What kind of a system is this? Where one kid is beaten for enjoying himself and the other is nearly half dead of exhaustion, trying to score that precious hundred on hundred.

But I couldn't do anything, so I moved on; hating everything and everyone for the things I didn't have the power to change.

Today is the kite festival or Uttarayan. In our city, this festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm and vigour. People of all ages, young and old, gather on their terraces and fly colourful kites in the air. Mothers make stick sweets of jaggery, hits from the latest Bollywood movies blare from speakers, people scream as they try to cut all the other kites in the air, young urchins run through the streets, gathering fallen kites.

I am standing in the balcony, taking one of those rare, but much needed breaks. My mind is still lingering on the little urchin and his plight.

As I am leaning on the railing gloomily, the sun begins to set. Perspiration forms on my forehead because of the oppressive summer heat, which I am more than used to. And then, I spot two young urchins running in the distance. Both of them are chasing a slain kite flying in the air, squealing with delight. Somehow, that makes me a little happy, seeing their laughing faces. Then, as the sun falls on them, and their faces come into clear view, I realize with a jolt that one of them, the smaller one is the very same boy I saw being dragged away for a beating a few days ago.

I look at the joy on his face, his bright shining eyes, and the wide smile on his mouth. He leaps and catches the yellow kite, and now he is laughing, his smile even wider, if possible, and both the boys keep running, running into the glorious horizon. The Sun is almost gone now, and I can see a few glowing lanterns in the sky, gliding lazily above my head. And... it is so beautiful. And I feel... infinite. I can see it. I can see it all now. I can see the bright shining future that tomorrow promises. I can see the shining life that awaits the little boy. I see the reason because of which we do the things we do, and we are the way we are. I feel infinite.

There are some good days. And there are some great days. And some are not so good. But on those days I think of the laughing boy. And I remember that infinite feeling. And I know that it's going to be okay. That I'm going to be okay. That life really is beautiful. And that we can all be heroes and have our own Happily Ever After. So on those days, I keep on working, working for my own Happily Ever After.

Glossary:

Uttarayan: The kite flying festival celebrated widely in Indian cities in which families and friends gather on their terraces and fly colorful kites all day.

Vadodara: A city in Gujarat, India.

Baang: A muslim prayer chanted in mosques 5 times a day.

Sachin and Dhoni: Sachin Tendulkar and Mahendra Singh Dhoni, famous Indian cricketers.



REMEMBRANCE

Antara Sharma

17 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

Every person has a story to tell. I do too. And needless to say, being a girl, it's only a bit more detailed than the other normal short stories.

I am a girl who has changed three places and five schools, (this is my 5th school and 3rd place) in 12 years. So obviously, I have gone through my quota of changes. I have had my lot of pain and soreness.

I have been a little girl who knows nothing but the fact that she wants to play with whoever is ready to entertain her. She never understood that the only reason people entertained her was to deviate her from the so called “not-meant-for-kids” talks. It might have been, that sometimes during that journey of hers, she was getting what she actually craved for, but it was no different than the first case for her. It was at that point of time in her life when she didn't know how to use the dictionary that everyone told her she was a perfect example of a tautology. Now you must be getting the picture of a little innocent girl, becoming a target of those bullies. Sorry for interrupting your thoughts, but it was not that way. True, that I was not the “perfect-fit” then, but everyone did respect me for who I was-the smallest kid. While diverting me, no one was rude to me and when those “talks” were over, they did play with me for the sake of it. Not as long as I was there, but when I'd shifted to another state and came back to visit after a year or so, grown up, they did agree that I was the glue that ever held them together. They, no wait, “WE had a connection and I was the wiring”. That is what everyone remembered of me. I came to know that after we went to the east, some of them went to the west, some to the south and some changed their homes.

And so, when I look back at those 6 years of my life, 4 years back, I'm all in high spirits. I'm over the moon whenever I think about that jovial girl me.

I was someone then. I was me. I knew who I was and knowingly or unknowingly, I never tried to change that.

I have also been a part of the nerd-herd, the ones who are so low on the uptake that even the bullies don't pick on them, considering them “too boring and too slow to ever respond”. I still remember the day of the entrance exam. I was sitting along with the other students in a circular room, with my heart thumping so hard that I had to keep my hand over it, to block it from jumping out. As my dad said, “Don't think about anything other than your exam, concentrate and look only into your paper. When you'll move your head around, you might see some changed heads of your friends, but nevertheless, safe people.” Translation: There will be some strangers in there. But don't eat my head about it. They'll soon be your friends. And yeah, there's no harm in there.

Well, moving on. I got into the school and made some friends. Others didn't care to even consider me. So, I avoided those who over-looked me and befriended the others. This must be sounding like it didn't really

bother me; people turning a blind eye to me. But let me just tell you that whatever I might say now, I was nervous then, more than I have ever been. That was the only time I tried talking to strangers, when in my senses. The feeling was bad. The pit in my stomach slowly grew large enough to make a void within me. I was dejected, crest-fallen, dismal. But since it was the first time I ever felt that way, I got over it soon enough (after 1 year) when I changed my school again. Now again, don't think that I didn't enjoy that year, I had my family to support me and laugh along with; I had other issues with my friends. Believe it or not, in that 1 year, we had more than 3 fights among ourselves that resulted in breaking up of our group. I was the leader of that nerd-herd. That did make me the biggest dork, but it also gave me a chance to discover my un-leadership qualities. Ok. Now before you start wondering why I used this no-word, let me tell you that I have no other option to describe my inability to keep my group cemented like I did at my last place. Now you get the idea how I had changed and grown. But even then, I was someone. I was me. I knew who I was and knowingly or unknowingly, I never tried to change that.

Well, anyways, moving on.... I spent 2 years in my next school. But those years were the most magnificent, the longest years of my life. If I sit and start to describe every detail, it would take my next and next-to-next reincarnation to complete half the story. I was the STAR KID there. I was one of the members of the group who performed (sang and danced) at every occasion. The other children were all 2 years elder to me and were one group. Needless to say, I had a very special place in that group. Our school house would not be able to reach its position if it weren't for me. I was the girl whom every kid used to look at and say "You're the girl who is on the stage every time to say the pledge in the assembly, right..?" I was the basketball captain for my house team. Everyone knew me in our society. I was the first person anyone opted for any sport. Every bookworm competed with me.

In other words, I was the perfect kid that every school wishes to have.

Now, I need to leave those years at that line. But look at that, I was someone then. I was me. I knew who I was and knowingly or unknowingly, I never tried to change that.

Then my father got transferred again and we went to the west. I can't remember one night during our first 3 months here when I didn't cry myself to sleep. I was excited about this at first, "Maybe I'll be even better here. Maybe I'll make even more good friends and I'll get chance to improve myself. Maybe I'll be the perfect-new-student of this school." With these thoughts in mind, I went as the new kid to the new school. My first reaction was "OH MY GOD!"

I couldn't believe it! Whatever I had experienced up till now, nothing was this bad. No one was this rude! People had over-looked me after taking a look. And maybe because I wasn't wearing my skirt low-waist and my hair was not in the latest trendy cut and my socks were pulled up, they got a bad impression. Like, you know good lenses bad frames.

But, anyways, no one had ever over looked me like THAT. It was like, I was totally invisible. I literally, walked into the class, saw the children all set to break the doors and windows, put a smile on my face and stood at the doorway. The boys were trying to hit a spot on the door and when they saw me, I expected them to look at me and be all "New kid?" and then maybe announce it in the whole class or worse, somehow pick on me and then some girls would come up to me and tell me to avoid them and then even those girls would be bullied. Or even worse, those boys would just tell me to shift and join the perky girls at the side. I was ready to be a part of the nerd-herd, I was ready to be picked on, I was ready to be somehow embarrassed. But I was never even the slightest bit of ready to be "unseen". I was smiling like a total fool, when without even a warning, the boys hit on me. I don't know how I missed it. Before the ball could hit my head, I had enough time to duck from the side and rush to the corner seat at the last. And that is how my first day at school went. Don't think about the rest of the day because, I did not do anything else other than

standing up, introducing myself to the teachers and listened to them when they told me that I could borrow whoever's notebook to complete my pending work and how they were happy to get a new child in their school and were sure I would turn out to be a brilliant student and make great friends. YEAH RIGHT! AS IF!

And now you can imagine how much I cried after that day and why I cried for those whole 3 months without making any progress. It was after those 3 months that I decided that it was enough. This had gone on just too long. I won't bear it anymore. So, I made a choice. I made a choice to join a group who looked as if it ruled the class. Kind of. Of course, making the choice wasn't all and implementing it was even difficult. I fought for around 2 months with my heart, telling my heart it was ok sometimes to do what you earlier considered wrong. I let circumstances change my aura. I even allowed my mind to take over my whole body. I did not even try to stop my nasal passage to stop the air of change I sucked in from spreading all over my body. Worst of all, I let my inner self die.

All of these sounds totally HORRIBLE! But it sounds right. It sounds just the way I felt. Exactly like the bad feelings and nightmares that used to haunt me. But finally, I got it! I got into the group. I suddenly, became visible. People started smiling at me. No one even condoned me. I stopped crying myself to sleep.

But that is not the end of it. Not all stories have a happy ending. I then, tried being myself with those people. That was because 4-5 months of not being myself was too much! I wanted to feel happiness the same way I experienced it earlier.

So when I tried that, I found rejection, once again, I was dejected, I was gloomy. I felt more that miserable and for the first time in my life, I prayed that God would send me an angel who would be making things right or at least tell me what to do or would be with me, giving me a shoulder to cry on. But NOTHING. Nothing happened. No angel was sent. I felt lost. I could live what I used to only read. I saw and heard and spoke and felt and smelt darkness all around me. I had nothing to divert my mind. After concentrating so much on social life, I had forgotten the rest of me. My grades had gone down into the drain. I had stopped taking part in any kind of games. I had stopped playing basketball, which was once what made me happy. I didn't know where I was. I couldn't understand anything. I wanted to believe that everything would be alright. But no one would let me. I have no idea why in just a moment I lost everything I didn't have my family's support. I couldn't call any of my old friends. I lost everyone, I lost everything. But worst of all, I lost myself. It is amusing, if you ask me, how nothing could make me sad when I was that little girl and its comical how nothing can make me happy now.

I don't exactly remember who I was, at first. That explains the hard time I've given myself, I guess. But then I was happy. I was someone then. I was me. I knew who I was and knowingly or unknowingly, I never tried to change that.

They say there's nothing like learning from your own mistakes and past. The only lesson I get out of my story is never to go too far from home. Never to drift away so far that you can't find a way back. So now I will not only try, but change things for the best. Somehow, I know that if I try hard enough, if I put in enough effort, I will be able to achieve that. Reach that spot. Be who I was; who I am; who I started with. It will be long and painful But at times it is necessary because sometimes you have to step outside feel the pain to gain..



CLASS PIGGY BANK

Indrani Chakravartty

17 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmiri Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

Growing up...I always felt like the black sheep. Literally!! As a young Indian growing up in the West, to say that I felt out of place was an understatement. With my dark skin and boring black hair, I envied the smooth pale skin of my peers and their shining blonde hair. The different hues of blue and green of their eyes seemed much more exciting and beautiful than my eyes. I would often daydream about the hair colour or contact lenses I would use once I grew up. I hated my Indian roots, that rich Bengali culture of mine that gave me my dark skin and stood me out from the others. So obsessed was I with fitting in, that I overlooked the fact that I came from such an amazing land, with its own unique heritage, full of beauty, passion and diversity.

At that time however, all I wanted was to become like them. Not only did I want to talk and look like them, I also wanted my parents to change. As pure Bengalis, they were very proud of their ethnicity and couldn't grasp why I was so hell-bent on "fitting in." Expensive brands and makeup were a big NO- something that all my friends did. I would often fight with my parents about this, where both of us would end up saying horrible things to each other and making the other one cry. At those times, I would always wonder whether fitting was really so important and worth hurting my parents and myself. Why couldn't I be just my own person? And then the phone would ring and just listening to my friend's accent that was so different from mine, would make me yearn all over again.

I never let my friends come to my home, or meet my parents. Though they wouldn't hide their cultural identity, I chose to hide mine from them. I started to bunk my beloved drama classes, just to evade being called a nerd and a bore. I became rebellious, defying my parents "zero makeup rule" as I secretly used my friends' cosmetics in school and styled my hair just the way they did.

These acts of boldness came with a price of guilt that heavily weighed on my conscience. I would feel terrible about my defiance but dismissed it, assuring myself it was a small price being paid for the acceptance I craved. Somehow, in the quest for popularity, I started stealing. At first, it was just a dollar or two, but still, it was stealing. Stealing from my mom the only person supported me. The reason I gave myself for this was that I needed the money to make myself happy and buy small things like chocolates, books and key rings. Then I started using them for things I wasn't allowed to buy- lip gloss, hair barrettes which I showed off at school to get praise from my friends.

Within a few days, some of my popular classmates started asking me for money and I thought "Why not?" I knew I was being a pushover but I didn't dare speak up, afraid I would be seen different more than I already was. So I became my class piggy bank. Soon 50-60 dollars were finding way into my pocket from Mom's

purse. I was scared because I had no idea what I was doing, but at the same time, I didn't have the guts to stand up. Every time Mom called me, I would feel like I was at gunpoint, certain that she knew what I was doing. She never did. I felt so guilty and ashamed about myself and how I was betraying my mother. Each time I would promise myself I wouldn't do it and each time I looked at my mom's purse, I caved in.

Eventually my mom discovered that her wallet was being emptied. My parents asked me countless times whether I had taken the money or not and, every time I would deny. More than the stealing, the lying was horrible and stressful. However, at the same time I felt relieved that it worked. It didn't though, because my father was convinced that I was the culprit.

Ultimately the strain became too much. One day, after returning from the candy store, Mom questioned me and I found myself spilling everything till the last detail. To her credit, she listened to all I had to say and didn't say anything as I poured my angst out about how much I had needed the acceptance and the approval.

My parents were very disappointed with me. However, not once did they hit me, scold me nor yell at me. They didn't need to. The hurt and disapproval emanating from their faces was so strong that it would have been less painful if they actually raised a hand at me. It ripped my heart into shreds. If I was earlier disgusted about my actions, now I felt horrible about it. I tried to compose myself and remain calm, but the strain of the guilt and fear was so much that I couldn't stop the tears flowing down my cheeks.

In the end, my parents forgave me. My punishment was that my pocket money would be cancelled until 'Durga Puja' was over. Frankly, the punishment was too less. I didn't deserve their forgiveness or Mom's kindness afterwards. My mother, in an effort to help with my peer issues, told me that she would cut back the punishment a month if I tried wearing some beautiful kurtas to school which she had bought for me. At first, I refused, preferring the no-money deal, but by then I was so tired of the halters and spaghettis I wore just to impress others that I craved back my comfortable clothes. So with great trepidation, one day I tried it out and to my great surprise it was a hit. May people remarked how pretty I looked and how unique my kurta was, something that stunned me beyond speech. All this time I had been trying out crazy schemes to "be cool" and popular and evidently, all it took was to be myself! The irony was not lost on me.

But that day, I learned the importance of being true to myself. In the end, my parents forgave me and started trusting me again. It took quite a while to do so- to bridge the gap between me and my parents, but in the end all was fine. Today, when I see people around me struggling with the same identity issues I faced, I feel sad for them. "I want to tell them that it doesn't matter what clothes you wear, what colour your skin is or what language you speak to make true friends. Because if it does, then probably, they weren't the truest of friends anyway.

Glossary:

Durga Puja- a Bengali festival

Kurtas- Traditional Indian upper garment

Note : _____

STANDING OUT TO OUTSTANDING

Jason Shepherd

13 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

20 YEARS EARLIER:

“Get out... RIGHT NOW!” The teacher said. Slowly I got up and walked out of the class. It was my normal behavior. Everyday I went out of the class. Just another minute later my friend, who was rather quite similar to me walked out of the opposite class. His name was Raj and he was thinner than me. “I knew you would be out!” he said to me. I laughed and asked? “Which teacher?”, pointing towards the class he came outfrom.”Rajan ma’am...She really does get angry...” He was interrupted by a laugh from another class. The laugh then led to a shout.



Out came another friend, Kishan. He was big, muscular, sporty and a typical *Gujarati*. He was laughing when he came out. “You don't have any shame, do you?” I asked him. “Do any of us have ?” He said jokingly. We all laughed. Raj asked, “What period was going on?” “Bio” He replied. “So why the laugh?” I asked. “*Arre yaar...* I asked the teacher , 'if you can't see microorganisms with the naked eye, what is this?' pointing towards the illustration of a bacteria in a textbook.” He said. Then the door of another class opened.

Out came another friend whose name was Richard. He was an Anglo-Indian. He was quite fat and the same height as me. He kept correcting other's mistakes. “Hey! Good to see you guys!” said Richard cheerfully. “Aa gaya Angrez ki Aulad” whispered Kishan. “I HEARD THAT KISHAN!” scowled Richard. Raj and I started laughing. We all started talking with each other. I and Richard were talking about restaurants and Kishan and Raj were talking about the cricket selections. Fifteen minutes remained of the period, when the door of the last class of the eighth grade opened. Out came a fifth friend, Aaditya. He was short. He was a good sportsman. “What happened in there?” I queried. “Don't ask...” Aaditya said smilingly. We all talked till the bell rang. However I did not feel good..... I felt that I had lost a lot of precious time and instruction as well as earned a bad reputation for



myself.... Somehow I was not comfortable.... We now had to go into the class. The class teacher came out and asked, "I hope you will be disciplined from now on?" I replied, "Yes ma'am." Surprisingly that's what I thought too.

NOW:

"Sir, the guests are arriving." The party organizer said. "Oh yes!" I said. In came Raj. "You have grown fatter!" I said. "Ya..." he said, "You too!" he added. Raj was now a doctor, same as me. We were talking while Kishan came in. Kishan had become a really famous football player. "Not many goals you've hit..." I told him sarcastically. "Seriously?! 55 goals in 59 matches are not good enough for you?" He said feigning shock. Then came Richard. He was now an English professor at Oxford. "Aa gaya Angrez ki Aulad!" muttered Kishan. "I HEARD THAT!!" Richard said angrily. Richard was now taller than me. We talked about how life had dealt with all of us. Raj and I had families with two lovely children each. Finally Aaditya came in. He was now a cricket player. We all ate dinner, and caught up with all the news.

19 YEARS EARLIER:

"Your son has shown a lot... I mean it, a LOT of improvement in his behavior. I still remember, it all started from the time I sent him out of the class. I can now say, 'This boy's behavior has gone from always standing out to outstanding!'; The teacher said to my mother.

Illustration: Deshna Nagar

Glossary:

Gujarati - People who belong to the state of Gujarat in India

Arre Yaar - A casual way to address a friend in colloquial Hindi language of India

Aa gaya Angrez ki Aulad - Here comes the foreigner



Note : _____

STAND UP

Muskaan Vaidya

14 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar

Vadodara, India

The day had dawned and the sun was rising at its own pace. The city of Delhi slowly started buzzing to life. The noise of the alarm clock reached Radha Sharma's ears. She put the alarm off and sat upright in her bed, yawning. Yet another day at the hospital awaited her. She got ready quickly and checked herself for one last time before leaving her room. Her *dupatta* was carefully pinned on her head. Heaving a sigh, she headed downstairs.

The Sharmas were a wealthy family with quite modern thoughts. But, the problem was that they still held tightly to some of their ancestors' beliefs. One of which was that girls cannot take up sport as a career. They *had* to become doctors. Unfortunately their shift to Delhi from a village had made no impact whatsoever in their thinking pattern. They felt that Radha's dream of becoming a professional footballer was a waste of time.

Radha strongly aspired to become a footballer. It can be said that Radha and her cousin were the only ones who believed that a girl can aspire to be anything a boy can. While flipping through channels on the television, Radha once found a Football League playing. She was blown away by the tactics they used. This was when she realized her love for the sport. She had tried but failed to convince her joint family of her passion. Only her cousin was there to support her.

Presently, she ate down her breakfast in a hurry, muttered a few prayers to her God and left for her internship at the hospital. The day whizzed past as it normally would. She had informed her parents that she would return every day at 7pm however, her shift actually ended at 4pm. She spent three hours every day for extensive football training, unknown to everyone except her cousin.

Upon reaching home she immediately busied herself in lending a hand in the kitchen. After all work had been completed, she returned to her room to freshen up. She splashed cool water on her face. It felt wonderful. She played around with the water and observed how the water changed flow on her manipulation. Thoughts suddenly filled her mind. "I am just like the water, flowing under the directions of my elders with no voice to stand up for my dream!"

Just then a clear rapping sound was made on her door. Akanksha, Radha's cousin, walked into the room. She had had enough of Radha's timid attitude. Not seeing Radha anywhere about the room, she placed a letter on her bed and left. A curious Radha pored over the letter and it turned out to be what she anticipated: "A completely absurd thing to do when we are living under the same roof but I had to write so that our parents wouldn't overhear our conversation. You know the consequences if they find out about you."

The rest of the letter went onto compel Radha to stand up for her dreams and to make her family realize her potential and capabilities. Radha was completely moved by her cousin's words. She received the support she wanted from only one family member, but it meant the world to her. She pondered over the letter. Read and re-read it. Just then the call for dinner came. Everyone was chatting away merrily and they found it unusual that Radha was exceptionally quiet. Little did they know that a marvelous idea was dawning in her head?

Before going to bed she managed to share the idea with Akanksha. Her response was a loud gasp and eyes wide open but she immediately agreed to help her out. Both of them had to curb their excitement and enthusiasm for a week. Next week would see the end of their worries. Till then they planned to bring up the topic of Radha's football passion just a tiny bit every day with the family members.

Their plan was quite simple to execute, only the last bit would prove to be tricky. You see, Akanksha was to bring Radha's father to her match next week. Till then they had to acclimatize the family to the topic of football. This trick worked precisely the way they wanted it to. They even caught Radha's dad watching football matches late into the night.

The week went by without any glitches in their plan. For an unknown reason everyone was in good spirits on the day of Radha's match. The morning was just the usual, nothing special. The only change was that Radha turned right at the second cross-roads instead of the first and drove into the football ground's parking. She started her warm-up. She was determined to perform better than she ever had.

Meanwhile, at home Akanksha slid next to her uncle who sat comfortably on the couch. She coaxed him into joining her for a little trip. It took all of her patience and much more than the usual politeness to convince him, but finally it happened. They left home around 10 O'clock with Akanksha at the wheels and a suspicious uncle next to her. She zoomed to the football ground. On reaching the main gate she looked at her uncle and met his bewildered eyes. Though, he was slowly, very slowly, beginning to understand Akanksha's motive. Akanksha just smiled and guided her uncle to the seats reserved for them.

A nervous yet confident Radha entered the ground with her team. She was more than just determined to deliver her best. The shrill whistle blew and the match was in action. It was a nail-biting match with some near goals by the opponents. But Radha's team won 4-3. Radha made the first as well as the winning goal. A resounding applause followed the winning goal as the audience cheered for the home team. Radha was carried to the dressing room on the shoulders of her team mates.

After changing she was ready to face an even bigger challenge, convincing her dad. Because, in her patriarchal family convincing her dad meant everyone agreed. Upon reaching, a pleasant surprise greeted her. Her dad had apparently changed his mind when he saw his daughter make the first goal. He ran to hug Radha and muttered an apology with moist eyes. Radha hugged him back and realized that their efforts had been successful. "I won't have to go to the stinking hospital anymore." she thought, then mouthed a 'Thank You' to Akanksha and hugged her father tighter.

Little did they both know of the honors and fame that Radha would bring to the family with her unparalleled skills in football.

Glossary

Dupatta - a long multi-purpose scarf essential to many Indian women's suits, traditionally worn over the head or across the shoulders.

AS SEEN FROM A KALEIDOSCOPE

Niyor Baruah

13 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmiria Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

It was a wet September afternoon. There was a light drizzle pitter-pattering on the window pane. To a layman it was just another gloomy monsoon day, probably one which did not promise any hope of a bright sunny morning in the following week. But in a few houses, utter excitement reigned; the Class XII board results were to be declared that day. Although Nilima had admitted that she wouldn't be getting high scores, she was on tenterhooks as well.

Nilima was a 17 year old girl, freshly out of school. She had just completed her XII grade at the St. Joseph's Convent where she had been one of the most promising students the school could have boasted of. Like many other girls of her age, she was looking forward to a bright future in the stream she was pursuing - Science. However, destiny had something much different in store for her.

The year she passed her XII grade had not a time period for her to cherish. She had shifted to a new town last year and had struggled to readjust. The atmosphere at the new school was not one which particularly impressed her. It was very different from the other convents she had studied in. The tutorials she had joined to overcome the poor and ineffective teaching at school also proved to be of no use. Added to that, she had been suffering from a serious illness which had kept her away from school for almost two whole months. Had it not been for the important notes posted regularly by a few compassionate friends at her previous school, she was afraid that she would have had to repeat the year. Nilima found it difficult to cope up with the sudden change of events in the final year of her academic studies. However, she was strong and braved all odds to overcome the misfortunes that had befallen her.

After scoring low score in her boards, Nilima decided to take up architecture. Fortunately, she gained admission at a renowned university in Ahmedabad. Her experience of studying architecture was a rather pleasant one, vis-a-vis to her previous experience.

She realized that her decision to switch to architecture was, after all, not a "wrong" one. She still had a penchant for science, and she found it quite amusing to incorporate science into her architecture. She had found a different perspective of looking at science, not like the orthodox view she had before. After graduating, she went on to become one of the finest architects of her time, won great acclaim. But for her, this wasn't all. It brought her no satisfaction. She now wanted to move ahead in the other spheres of life.

Motherhood changed Nilima's life completely. From being a workaholic and successful architect, she found herself to be a loving wife and a doting mother. But she hadn't lost her ambitious trait. She still aimed high.



In the 1980's there was a financial crunch in the global market. Her husband, being a freelancer, just earned enough to satisfy the basic requirements of the family. This created friction between husband and wife. Later, clash in opinions even led the couple to part ways. But all these decisions were carefully made so that nothing would blight the future of their child. Despite so many incidents, Nilima kept a positive and a truthful approach to life. Sometimes she did wonder how and why those who tread the path of falsity, corruption and Schadenfreude seem to be on the top of the world but she managed to elude such pessimistic thoughts from fogging her mind. Her main priority was her son, who was growing up into a fine young gentleman.

Life had taught Nilima to ponder over the mistakes made by her in the past and to never repeat them in the future. Therefore, she was conscientious as to not let her son trip over obstacles she had once faltered.

Time flew by very quickly. Soon, it was time for Nilima's son to carve out a niche for himself in the vast tree of eternity, time for him to leave a mark on the sands of time, time for him to spread out his wings and take flight into the wide skies, the world. It was the day her son's XII board results were to be declared. Nilima's poised composure did conceal her anxiety but it was evident that the mother-son duo was excited about this day. Nilima even reminisced the poignancy of the moment when she herself was in her son's shoes. Her hard-work did pay off well. Her son passed with flying colours. He pursued medicine at AIIMS Delhi, the most prestigious medical college in India. Her joy knew no bounds.



Once her son had left for New Delhi, Nilima paid visit to the *mandir*. After a very long time she experienced bliss, felt that she been successful in unraveling the puzzle of life. As she knelt in front of the *murti* and closed her eyes in prayer, she reminisced all that which had shaped her life. Many such unforeseen incidents which she had perceived as disappointments were mere shadows and reflections through which the real could be perceived. All her efforts hadn't gone in vain. She realized that she was successful in putting all the fragments of life into an organized pattern and come full circle. What she learnt was that Life is multidimensional and if viewed from its' perspective, one can see through it the desired goals.

Glossary:

Mandir - a hindu temple

Murti - the idol of the deity



Note : _____

NOTHING LEFT TO SAY BUT GOODBYE

Meghana Gupta

17 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar

Vadodara, India

It was difficult to fathom how anybody could look so familiar, so close and yet even more strange and distant; almost unreachable. You could see the light shining around her; she looked like an angel dropped from the heavens. The breeze emanating from the sea ruffled her hair, and caused her carefree laugh to resonate down the beach. She was dressed in her favourite salwar kameez; her dupatta trailed behind her on the damp sand. Then, as if noting my presence for the first time, she whipped around and gave an exclamation of joy. "Arre! Akshara beta! Come here na!" She beckoned to me imperiously to join her.

"Mummy!" I couldn't help shouting. I sprinted towards her, but my feet could gain no purchase on the sand; it felt like the air around me was some viscous medium that opposed my every effort to run. Time seemed to pass excruciatingly slowly.

After what seemed like an eternity I was just a few yards away from her. Abruptly without any warning, the air around her began to shimmer violently, becoming redder by the second until she burst into bright, humongous flames that licked the sky. I gave a scream that could have awoken even the dead...

And snapped out of my nightmare. Soundless sobs began to choke me, and tears streamed down my face. My body began to shudder violently as if I myself was going to break into pieces. Tears began to choke my throat but I could still hear my cries of terror. After a few minutes my eyes began to run dry and I curled around my knees, rocked back and forth and tried to calm myself. I could feel the exhaustion creep over me, and after sometime I gave up all resistance and surrendered willfully to the darkness.

I had dozed off in the last period that day and didn't hear the bell signaling the end of the school. By the time, I woke up and rushed to the bus stand, the bus had left without me.

I telephoned *Maa* to pick me up. She was reluctant at first, telling me she was up to her elbows with work, but after a lot of persuasion agreed to pick me up.

I patiently bided my time in the school office. Having been in Delhi for a year and half, I knew I was in for a long wait, because Delhi traffic was notoriously slow and tricky. I took to various activities while waiting: solving Math, pacing down the tiny narrow hallway impatiently; sweat trickling down my face in the excessive heat, even taking a quick nap. But half an hour turned to one, one hour to two hours; there was no sign of her.

A feeling of uneasiness began to spread through me. This behavior was very unlike her. If she was going to be delayed, she would have informed me. My intuition told me something was terribly wrong. To add to my

discomfort, even her office said she had left two hours ago.

Frantic, I dialed her cell phone.

She answered on the third ring. “*Maa*? God! Where are you?”

“Hello?”

It wasn't *Maa* who answered. A rough thick voice; a stranger's manly baritone.

“*Beta*, is this Mummy's phone?”

“Yes, I am her daughter. Can I speak to her?”

The man faltered for a second and even before he uttered the words, I knew that something had gone horribly awry.

“I am so sorry *Beta*, but there was an accident here. Your mother's car has collided with a truck while she was taking a U-turn. She is being taken to the hospital as we speak.”

Time seemed to stop as the meaning of his words began to register in my head. The handset slipped from my sweaty grip as I stood, horror struck and hysteric. But before I had time, my father bolted into the office, breathless and frantic, his forehead creased with worry lines.

“Hurry up Akshara; we have to go to the hospital.”

We reached the hospital, panicked and weary. The doctors tried to explain the severity of the situation. She had received very extensive injuries; her entire right side had been crushed, the spleen ruptured and skull fractured; even the internal bleeding had been too much. Her chances of survival were very slim. It would be a miracle if she did.

After that, everything seemed to run together. I was hardly aware of anything going on around me. The only emotion I could feel was a gripping sense of guilt threatening to overcome me. I fiercely believed that had I not told her to pick me up, she would never have been at that intersection, would not have been involved in this mess. We would be at home like any other Sunday; lounging lazily in the balcony, reading newspapers and downing our morning tea. But we weren't. And I knew that if *Maa* wasn't going to make it, I'd carry that burden on my shoulders forever, having nobody to share it with. I would never be able to forgive myself and I'd know it was my fault, my most grievous fault.

After few hours, I could feel someone tugging at me, pulling me out my dark thoughts. The head doctor was standing with Papa, conversing in hushed tones.

Although I'd never been one to believe in miracles, there was nothing I could do but wish fervently that she was OK. But she didn't make it. The doctor delivered the deathblow so softly, it didn't seem like one. “I am so sorry, but..your mother..is no more.”

At first it did not make any sense. I waited for him to go forward. He suddenly started moving to the OT. I shuffled behind like a lost lamb, dazed and not quite able to comprehend. It was when I saw her lifeless body the full impact hit me.

Her usually flawless and cream-and-peaches skin was pockmarked with bruises and slices; some purpling, some scarlet red. The harsh fluorescent lighting of the hospital made her seen even more pale

and sallow; all her lifeblood drained away. Her right eye was heavily swollen and the nose seemed to be twisted at an unnaturally odd angle. The ominous blank on her face was completely at odds with her otherwise animated and bright expressions. All that alchemy and vitality had been sucked away, leaving a dead shell behind.

I didn't even dare to look beyond her torso.

Mummy was gone forever.....And there was nothing I could do about it.

I felt myself crumple to the ground; my knees were like jelly. I could hear the doctor's staccato orders, my brother's anguished wails, my father's cries of loss and urgency but I willed the darkness to swallow me wholly; wanting the release of nothing but numbing emptiness, I fell deeper down into the unending black abyss.

When I awoke, everything seemed bleary and dead. A pall of depression had fallen over. Condolences poured in from everywhere- colleagues, friends and relatives. I accepted them all with the same detached numbness, not even bothering to understand what anyone was trying to say.

I spent most of my days curled up uselessly on the bed, not even bothering to eat. My *nani* brought food and tried to feed me but my mouth wouldn't even open. The need and urgency to live had vanished and was replaced by emptiness and a gut wrenching guilt; an unbearable vacant stillness. I could feel all eyes on me; waiting for me to break down, staying to see the fallout.

Sitting on the wide window sill, I'd stare out for hours together.

The pigeons and hawks would soar past, the hustle and bustle of life all around; the cars honking, vendors selling their wares, but none of it held my interest. My mind would keep flashing back to all those moments I had shared with *Maa*-our own private jokes, tiny giggles behind my father's back; whispered secrets shared in the dead of the night; staying up till two at night in the same room- she doing her work and I completing my own.

One particular incident kept hitting me repeatedly- every time tragedy befell someone, *Maa* would ruefully wonder what misdeeds they had done in their life to receive such retribution. I began to wonder what sin I have committed to be meted out such a horrendous punishment. I felt my insides contract at that. *Maa* shouldn't have been punished; I should've. For all my faults and flaws, I was still standing alive, while she'd been snatched away from me.

I remained impassive throughout the funeral, and for a long time afterwards, I was still in that empty and vacant phase. The nightmares used to send me screaming my lungs out at night, though no one came to comfort me. But a month later, I saw a dream that changed the course of my life forever.

I was back on the beach; Chowpatty Beach, I think. While we were posted in Bombay, we used to love coming there in the evenings. It was sunny this time, and light seem to sparkle off the sand, sending the rays dancing in front of my eyes. I was just about to get up when she appeared, dressed in white; a spectral aura around her. Her beauty and grace seemed to knock the breath out of me; I wasn't accustomed to it.

She settled down beside me, fluidly crossing her legs. "It's been so long, Beta." She smiled ruefully.

I let out a small whimper. "Maa..... I am so sorry. You have no idea how much... I should have never..."

“It wasn't your fault,” she cut me off “stop blaming yourself. You have to let go of that guilt. Even if you wouldn't have called me, I could have gotten into another accident while returning home. You should know, God has it all planned. It's all in our destiny.”

“But I need you Maa! You left so soon, so abruptly. I didn't even get to say goodbye...”

“Then say it now. Look, you can't bring the dead back. No amount of guilt or repentance on your part will bring me back to life. And it wasn't even your fault. But I am not gone. I will always be there with you- in your heart. I'm never going to fade away from your memories. I will be looking for you, silently from above, but you will have to move on. You will have to remain strong for both Papa and Akshar. Look at them! They're coping so terribly with it all. They need you!

“You were always the pillar of strength for all of us. Whenever anyone of us was down and low, you'd be the one to pull them out of the dumps. YOU need to be their beacon of hope, the sun that drives away their darkness. And I know it seems like a huge responsibility to take on, but you have to do it more for yourself than anyone else. It'll make you learn to live life in its true spirit. And when you learn that, I know you'll learn to honour my memory, beta. That's all I can ask of you.”

She stood up, all the while holding my hand and giving me a wistful smile. But, this time, when she began to fade away, I didn't panic. A feeling of calmness and strength washed over me, until she faded away completely, leaving me holding nothing but damp sand.

I woke up with an odd sensation; part of me felt like a weight had been lifted off me, but I also felt like an even greater responsibility had been thrust upon me.

I slowly started to pick up the pieces. We began to come back to life and tried to fill the void that Maa's death had left in our lives. We moved forward; if not for us, atleast for her sake. Slowly, we began to go through the motions, until they regained some of their meaning again. Life regained its meaning again.

We marched forward into the future, Maa solidly by our side.

Glossary:

Maa - Indian name for “mother”

Beta - term of affectionate endearment used for a “child”

Salwar Kameez - A traditional Indian attire

Dupatta - Long multipurpose scarf worn with a Salwar Kameez

Note : _____

THE STORY OF SAKKU

Rhythm Rastogi

13 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmiri Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

When Rhea's eyes opened to the morning light, she heard many birds chirping in their chipper voices, it was a beautiful morning and Rhea was at her aunt's house in a village for her summer vacations. She heard someone shouting, "Couldn't you carry more water? Do you think this amount of water would be enough to last us for a whole day?" When Rhea went to see who her aunt was shouting at, all she could see was a small girl with two pots on her head, wobbling and shaking from the weight of the pots. After a few minutes all, the members in the family started telling her to do their jobs, "Sakku, why are my shoes not polished?"; "Sakku, where is my tie?"; "Sakku, why didn't you clean my room?" the little girl was so perplexed that she did not know where to go first or whose demands to fulfill.

Throughout the day, she was beaten and shouted at, and by lunchtime, when everyone was eating the delicious food cooked by Rhea's aunt; Sakku was eating the leftover food, which had gone stale. In the evening when Sakku came to clean Rhea's room, Rhea asked her, "Why do you work here? Don't you go to school?", Sakku could feel the tears in her eyes but she answered that her father was a drunkard who never worked and her mother had to provide for the family; she has three more sisters and her mother who works as a laborer didn't earn enough money; therefore Sakku had to work to provide her family with the extra money they need.

Rhea was in tears, all this time she had been living in a fairy tale where everything was perfect however things were not so perfect in real life. Just then, she heard a loud whack and a cry and saw her aunt standing there with a shoe beating Sakku, she said, "Do you think you have got a lot of time? Chatting away to your heart's content, get back to work! I shouldn't see you resting for even a minute!" Rhea pleaded with her aunt to stop beating Sakku but her aunt rudely commented, "What do you mean, stop hitting her? Will you do all the work? Get back to cleaning your room and I shouldn't see you talking to her!" over the next few days, Rhea noticed how smart Sakku was. She could cook; she sewed clothes, learnt new things very quickly and even took care of everyone in the house.

One evening, when Sakku was just about to go home, Rhea's aunt saw her taking two pieces of bread, she scolded her and started beating her black and blue, when Rhea asked her why she stole the bread, all she could say was "there is no food left at home, I was just taking these pieces of bread so that my sisters could eat something, they haven't eaten for days.", Rhea could see the sadness in her eyes, but couldn't help but ask, "don't you ever wish to go to school?" Sakku answered, "My mother did put me in a school once but my father... he snatched me by my collar and told me that girls were supposed to work and not study. I have always wanted to go to school, I wanted to make friends, play in the playground, buy books and study, but my father ... he snatched my dream away from me".

Holidays got over and it was time to go home. While in the train, all Rhea could think about was Sakku. Even when she was sleeping, Rhea imagined herself to be Sakku facing drudgery every day. Rhea woke up from her nightmare and let out a loud shriek. Her parents rushed to see what had happened, when she saw her father, she tightly hugged him and started sobbing. She asked her father if it would have been better if she was a boy. Her father was confused and asked her why she had asked such a question. She told him all about Sakku and how she had to work at such a young age. Her father told her that he knew a friend who worked at CRY (Child Relief and You) organization and could help them.

The next day he visited the village and asked Sakku's father to let Rhea help his daughter. Sakku's father got angry and declined to leave his daughter but when Rhea's father told him about how he could get thrown into the jail for abusing and hitting Sakku, he got scared and let them take Sakku away but he refused to give any money for her education. Rhea's father assured him that CRY organization do not demand any money from the parents but educate the children from donations; the father then let Sakku and the sisters' leave.

As Sakku and Rhea got into the car, Rhea could see the huge grin on Sakku's face as she was finally getting a chance to study and enjoying the wind as a free bird for the first time. Sakku was finally living her dream of studying.

Glossary:

Rhea - Rhea is an Indian name of a small kind girl living in the city who has just come to visit her aunt in a village.

Sakku - Sakku is an Indian name of a small girl living in a village who has to work because she does not have enough money to support her family. She also dreams of studying.



Note : _____

PATEL`S PALATABLE PURAN-POLISE AND MORE

Sarjan Sheth

17 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar

Vadodara, India

Gogibhai Patel and Jayantiben Patel run a successful chain of fast-food restaurants, famous for fusing Western cuisine with Indian, particularly dabbling with Gujarati ingredients to make exotic dishes popular with everyone, from the busy Beijinger to the posh Londoner to the common Mumbaikar. Mr. Patel has won the 'Entrepreneur of the Year Award' in the category of 'Maximum Profit, Miserly Spending' seven times in a row while Mrs. Patel has been winning the 'Lady Behind the Successful Man Award' since its very inception.

Gogibhai and Jayantiben, after celebrating the inauguration of the 250th outlet of their chain of restaurants, called 'Patel's Palatable Puran-Polis and More', or more popularly '3P & M' on the South Pole with much fanfare, decided it was finally time to expand beyond the globe. Adventurous Gujaratis that they were, they bought a piece of land on the moon for half its asking price, convincing the space estate dealer that prices were about to slump on the moon, and started making the appropriate preparations.

Why our very own moon, the celestial body of Luna, one may ask? NASA's Civilian Space Program (CSP) was starting to pick up pace, and already the small community on the moon was thriving. Mr. Patel, who had long been called an iconoclastic monopolist, after reading an advertisement in the newspaper for the piece of land and convinced about the absence of a decent restaurant on the moon, was spurred into action. Or perhaps it was the Tata Tea he had been drinking at that time, with their 'Jaago Re' slogan holding true at the moment. Either way, the Patels were soon on the move and ready to conquer new domains, quite literally.

The Patels, at the space shuttle launch, bid their children Einstein, Ambani and Pikachu (Patel) a teary adieu with lots of "Skype *karjo, hon!*" thrown in. Mrs. Patel was secretly happy that she was leaving Earth, for she always insisted on tasting (read devouring) her recipes first, and was approaching the rough dimensions of a full-grown hippopotamus. Also, she knew that one weighed about one-sixth of one's weight on the moon. The Patels packed their luggage in the most spacious suite on board, while flying economy class themselves. They slept through the whole journey, Mr Patel waking up only for his drinks while his better half opened her eyes for her only passion-food . On arrival, they decided to walk the distance to their newest outlet, and were satisfied to know that it was up and ready for business.

Due to good publicity and location (both, the largest crater on the moon and the iconic foot imprint of Neil Armstrong were within walking distance from their 3P & M outlet) the crowd came in numbers. However, on the very first day, during the very first serving, an unprecedented and unexpected problem cropped up.

Due to the reduced gravity of the moon, eating out of a plate became quite impossible as the food would float out of the plate and decorate the walls. Though this 'floating food' was a hit with the under-20s, the more orthodox public found it quite messy and refused to eat there. Business declined, but did not come to

a complete standstill as a separate room was created for the younger generation to enjoy floating food at double the price. But, something miraculous had to happen for the masses to be back. What was to be done?

This little obstacle apart, the Patels settled down in the small community quite well. Mrs. Patel's famous kitty parties, which were once proclaimed by a renowned Hollywood actress to be 'an experience to be had before you die' were a favored haunt of the paparazzi on Earth, had to be toned down a little bit due to the flying food, but otherwise proceeded without any hiccups (no pun intended). Mr. Patel played cricket every Sunday and was soon made the captain of the Lunar Cricket Team, complete with its own cricket pitch. It was so arranged at the behest of Mr. Bell, Chairman of the Cricket Club, who got discount coupons for his son's upcoming birthday party which was to be celebrated in 3P & M's flying food room.

The solution to the flying food problem came as unexpectedly as the problem itself. Once, while Mrs. Patel was animatedly arguing with her youngest daughter-in-law, about who was dearer to her son, via pirated NASA video link software, she committed a grave mistake while making dough for the *chapatti*, and eventually her lip-smacking *khakhra*s. Such was the magnitude of her blunder that it would have drawn the ire of the most lenient of culinary critics. Mr. Patel was at the temple at that time, and seeing the flame go off the lamp suddenly, rushed home at the bad omen.

Mrs. Patel's dough now resembled a hard, gray, gravity-defying mass that could be cut only by the sharpest of knives or by a really hard blow of an axe. Mr. Patel took one look at it, thanked the gods and declared the hard mass to be the perfect solution to the flying food problem. Incidentally, he had had Tata Tea that morning too.

The gray cake was used to keep the food in the plate much as a paperweight is used to keep papers in place. One could even take the 'Gray Miracle', as it was marketed, home as a souvenir, for a nominal charge, of course. The masses were more than willing to return, as 3P & M was once again the best place to eat out and not much time passed before the cash registers started ringing in trademark Patel style.

As of today, Mrs. Patel's kitty parties have become the envy of every homemaker on Earth and on the moon. Her youngest daughter-in-law was pleasantly surprised at how her mother-in-law now talked to her, though the latter continued to insist that her son loved her more. Mr. Patel patented the dough as 'Gray Miracle: The most resilient Cement' which was lapped up instantly by the infrastructure sector on Earth. Though his team lost the inaugural ICCL (Inter-Celestial Cricket League), he bagged two more deals for his outlets, one to be set up on Mars and the other on the Sun. The Patels are there right now, using the Sun's searing heat as part of their advertisement campaign for their new spicy range.

From the bestselling book "Confessions of a Food Critic" by Sarjan Sheth.

Glossary:

Patel - a surname carried predominantly by many Hindu communities, but found also in Muslims and Parsis. Most Patels are from Gujarat. These peoples are well known for their business acumen.

Gujarat - a state in India. It is home to the Gujarati speaking people of India.

Bhai and Ben - Gujarati words which actually mean brother and sister, respectively, but are colloquially used in Gujarati in place of Mister and Miss.

"Skype karjo, hon" - roughly translates into "Remember to Skype us!"

Chapatti - an Indian bread made of wheat.

Khakhra - a Gujarati snack

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Shaistah Chasmawala

13 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

In the Indian Ocean close to the Gulf of Mannar was, Swimmi's house in the reefs below. Swimmi was a cheerful, fun loving black and white striped angel fish. She and her family were out of their house for a leisurely swim. Laughing and enjoying, she with her family entered a dark area unknown to them. Her mother on entering could sense danger. She said, "I think there is something wrong. I can sense gigantic vibrations and a whirlpool developing in the vicinity. I can sense peril." Papa said, "I think she is right. Let's move out of here. Run Swimmi! Run darling!" They rushed to save their lives. But, it was too late.

The whirlpool had already arrived. It swept Swimmi's family with it. Swimmi was not sucked in as she could swim very fast because of her light body. Papa screamed, "It's okay dear! Don't be sad! Live your life and keep swimming." As soon as he finished speaking these sentences, he vanished. Swimmi was crying, she was heartbroken. But, she kept on swimming.

After a while, she entered an unknown water zone. It was a clean and bright area with beautiful neon pink, green and red fishes swimming on a bed of white sand. Swimmi went to them and asked, "Will you all be my pals? I have lost my family in a whirlpool." They exclaimed, "No way! Look at us and look at yourself! We are colourful and you have such boring colors – black and white. Go away!" Swimmi was depressed and went to some snakes and sea-horses. They were kind, but said, "Oh dear! We feel bad for you, but we don't make pals with different species." Then, she met a large fish, but before she could say anything, the fish spun behind her to attack and feast on her.



With great difficulty, Swimmi saved herself from the clutches of the predator fish. Now, she was scared and lonely. She sat on a rock crying. But after a few minutes, she saw a huge crowd rushing towards her. This mob included fishes, star fishes, prawns, snakes and sea horses. They came yelling, "Run.... Help! The giant octopus is back. We have to run before he eats us up." "Yes, the last time he came, he ate two of my pals", said a prawn. Swimmi said- "Don't run away like this, learn to face your fears. Will you run like this every time he comes? Defeat your fears. Let us do it guys! I have plan." "Speak up fast, whatever your plan is. We don't have much time." blurted a sea horse.

'Okay, listen. We will together form the shape of a huge fish. I will be the eye. Mr. Snake can be the gills; all prawns will take the shape of fins.... When I say 'START', all of us will scream loudly. This will create a horrible spine chilling sound which will scare the octopus and he will run away.'

"Bingo!" the crowd exclaimed and did exactly as Swimmi said. The octopus on seeing the giant fish thought, "What kind of a frightening creature is this? Such a scary voice! It is huge!" He was frightened and bolted from the scene.

The crowd gave Swimmi a thunderous applause. She after this incident made a lot of friends due to her wit, courage and helping attitude. Swimmi missed her family however, she had many friends and she lived happily with them in the ocean.

This story is inspired by the unique tales of Panchatantra, where stories with moral values are told with the help of animal characters. The moral of this story is, united we stand, divided we fall. This story does not directly speak about Indian culture, but gives us an insight to an important aspect of the Indian Culture which is UNITY IN DIVERSITY. There are 28 different states in India with diverse climate, terrain, culture and customs which when combined together become India.

Illustration: Samarth Kanugo



Note : _____

THE POWER OF EDUCATION SEASONED WITH KINDNESS

Sunit Gautam

13 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar

Vadodara, India

The nameplate outside the house read: **No.39 - C.Rajagopalan**

I knocked on the door when Mr. Rajagopalan was probably watching a cricket match. As soon as he opened the door, I could see a forty years old Malayali gentleman in front of me. He looked younger for his age. Perhaps, he must have dyed his hair! He had a medium height, a typically dark South Indian complexion, short curly black hair and an oval – shaped face. I was astounded by his prominent nose and his broad forehead! He looked easygoing, kind and simple enough for my *purpose*. He wore a spotless white *dhoti* over which he wore a blue T – shirt (probably the jersey of the Indian cricket team).

“You look like a Cricketer yourself”, said I. There's nothing like flattery to break the ice!

“So do you”, pat came the reply.

“Well,” I said modestly, “I do play a bit of cricket myself.”

Then I introduced myself to him.

“Ravinder Singh”, I lied. I took a new name every month, which kept me ahead of the police.

I was still a thief when I met Rajagopalan. Although I was only fifteen, I was an experienced and a fairly successful hand.

“Do you need domestic help? I can work for you”, said I, giving him the most appealing smile.

“But I can't pay you – at least for some time”.

After a moment of thought, I asked him if he could feed me instead of giving me a salary.

“Can you cook”, he asked me.

“Yes, I can”, I lied.

“Then maybe I can feed you!”

After all the formalities were over, he showed me his house and allotted me the balcony to sleep. I sat down there and relaxed after I got some water to drink.

The food I made that night must have been terrible because I saw him throwing it all out to the stray dogs. Later in the night, he said that he wouldn't mind teaching me to cook. He also promised to teach me to read and write. I was grateful to him.

In the mornings, I would make the bed tea and take my time in buying the supplies for the day. I usually made an income of a rupee or two. He knew about it but he didn't seem to mind.

He wrote for the local daily, a strange way to make a living. He made money by fits and starts that left him worrying about the next cheque. And once he got it, he would celebrate with his so – called friends.

The next day, he came home with a small bundle of money cheerfully announcing that he had sold a book to a publisher. He put the money in the pocket of his trouser and hung it on the hanger behind the door.

I realized that since the time I had come here to this house, I hadn't really done anything big – only the paltry cheating on the shopping. But now I had every opportunity of doing so. I could come and go without being noticed. Raja was the most trusting person I had ever met. This was another reason why it was so difficult to rob him. Robbing a nice man could be a problem. And if he doesn't notice he is being robbed, then all the spice goes out of the act.



It was time to get down to some real work. And if I didn't take the money, he'd waste it on his worthless friends. After all, he doesn't give me a salary. I was convinced that it was alright to rob. That night, Raja was sleeping peacefully. I sat on the floor considering the situation. If I took the 11:30 Dehradun Express, I could get away. So, I slipped out of my blanket and tiptoed towards his room. I got inside the room, got behind the gate, slid my hand inside the pocket and once on the road I began to run. I stuffed the money into one of my vest pockets. When I had gotten some distance from Raja's place, I slowed down to a walk and counted the money – Rupees seven hundred in notes of fifties! I could live like a prince for at least a week or two.

When I reached the railway station I didn't buy the ticket (I had never bought a ticket in my life!). I dashed straight onto the platform. The Express was just moving out and it still had to pick up speed. I should have been able to jump into one of the compartments. But I hesitated for some reason I can't explain. I lost the chance to get away.

When the train had gone, I found myself standing alone on the deserted platform. I had no idea where to spend the night. I had no friends because I believed that they were more trouble than help. I didn't want to arouse curiosity by staying at one of the hotels. I moved towards the bus stand.

In my short career, I've studied people's reactions after discovery of the loss of their valuables. The greedy usually show panic, the rich show anger, and the poor show resignation. But I knew that Raja's face would only show sadness - not for money but for the loss of trust.

The night was chilly and the shower of rain added to my discomfort. I sat down in the shelter of the bus stand. Beggars lay beside me, rolled up tightly in their blankets. I felt for the notes in my vest pocket they were soaked.

In the morning, probably, he'd have given me Rs 20 to watch a movie but now I had it all. No cooking, no buying supplies, no more learning how to write, etc.

Writing! I'd forgotten about that in the excitement of the theft. Being literate could make me more clever

and respectable. I could earn more than those few hundred rupees. I went back to Raja's house.

It was simple to steal, but to keep it back undetected was a greater problem. I opened the door quietly entered the room to keep the money back in the pocket of the trouser. Raja was still asleep.

I woke up late next morning to find that Raja had already made tea. He stretched out a hand to me with a fifty Rupee note between his fingers. My heart sank.

"I made some money yesterday. Now I will be able to pay you regularly."

My spirits rose. But when I took the note, I noticed that it was still wet from the night's rain. So he knew what I'd done. But neither his lips nor his eyes revealed anything.

"Today we'll start writing sentences", he said. I smiled at Raja in my most appealing way. And the smile came naturally, without any effort!

Illustration: Aditya Som

Glossary:

Dhoti - A traditional garment worn by men in India

Malyali - People belonging to the southern state of Kerela



Note : _____

GRATITUDE

Umang Jaiswal

17 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmiri Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

I first met Asha when I was 10 and she was 17. She was the daughter of a close friend of my dad's. She was tall, lean and beautiful. She had long jet black hair and almond coloured skin. Apart from her deadly looks, she was intelligent and on her way to becoming a doctor. Every time I spoke to her, I saw a spark in her. There was a gleam in her eyes, a vision to do something...to achieve her goals and to fulfill her parent's dreams. In many ways, Asha was my idol. Even though I did not fully understand everything that she talked about, but the light in her eyes inspired me thoroughly.

I returned from school one day and found my parents sitting on our dining table. But something didn't seem right. Dad was home unusually early and none of them said anything when I entered. There was no talking and there was a strange sadness in the atmosphere. That is when I saw it. At first I could not believe my eyes. Never had I seen it before in my life. But my father, the toughest man I knew, was crying. As I approached them, I saw tears roll down my mother's cheeks too. I was shocked, baffled.

"What happened?" I asked. My mother sat me down next to her. She spoke in a low voice.

"You remember daddy's friend, Patel uncle?"

"Asha di's father, of course!" I quipped.

"He and Asha's mom were in a car accident. They both passed away on the scene." She choked on the words. I was shocked. My body froze. My head filled with thoughts about Asha and how devastated she must be.

We went to their funeral the following afternoon and I met her. She sat near her father's body in a white salwar suit. Her mother lay next to him. She was decorated like a bride in a red saree. I remembered how Asha admired that saree of hers. She had said that she would wear it one day, when she got married.

Soon time started flying and it was surprising that even though she was shattered by the incident, she still retained her spirit. With them gone, she wanted to fulfill their dreams more than ever now. The twinkly dreamy look she had, had now changed to a steely determined look. However, there was one problem. Her father had borrowed a lot of money from the market and all his wealth went in clearing his debt. Asha was left with minimal resources. Not only did she have to get through high school and join a medical college, but she also had to earn her bread and butter now.

I didn't fully understand the gravity of this situation, but I did hear my parents talk about how she was rendered roofless. She had no money to pay her school, college or that exorbitant tuition fees and she would have to put her education on hold to earn her livelihood. The funeral got over the evening, but our family stayed a little longer. We couldn't leave Asha alone. When I returned home that night the thought of

Asha not completing her education hurt me. I couldn't sleep. I gazed at my ceiling which I had decorated with glowing star stickers. I remembered something that Patel uncle had said to me sometime back, "there are millions of stars that you can't see on a dark night." I never understood what it meant, until now. When things were going bad, there were so many solutions that we ironically don't see, even though they are staring us right in the face. And I vowed to find a solution to Asha's problem the very next day.

Little did I know that my parents were already working towards the perfect solution. The next day, I returned from home, rather disappointed in my own self, as I had no solution to the problem. When I entered my house I found Asha helping my mom in the kitchen. She was chopping vegetables while my mom stirred the soup.

"Hey!" She called out from the kitchen, rather excited.

"Hi!" I ran up to her and hugged her. "What are you doing here?" I asked when I finally let go.

"Oh, Asha's going to be staying with us now." Mom said.

"Wooooo! That's great! How did this happen!?" I cooed, filled with joy.

"Your parents are paying for my education. I'll even be going to school with you from now on." Asha informed. My happiness had no bounds. I had always wanted an older sibling. And if that sibling was Asha, there was nothing better I could ask for.

The two years that followed were ones I will never forget. Asha and I shared a room. She would wake up early, help my mother cook food, wake me up, get dressed for school and drive me there on her scooter. On our ride back home, we would talk endlessly. She dropped me home, picked her tiff in up and rushed to her tuitions. She'd return late in the evening and we would spend hours talking in bed after dinner. She used to tell me the new things that she learnt, new medical terms, medicines. And every night she would tell me something about her parents. Even though she tried hard not to show it, she missed them very much.

As soon as Asha passed her 12th grade, she got into the best medical college of India and went to Delhi to pursue her education.

Asha's 45 now, she is a doctor at one of India's leading multi speciality hospitals. Our father passed away when I was in medical college. My mother did not have the qualifications to get a job. And for some time, it looked like I would have to stop college and take up some work. But that's when Asha intervened. She took full onus of my education and carried forth all the household responsibilities that my dad once held. She was now the head of the family, the earning member.

But she gave us a lot more than that. Every other weekend, she would visit my mother who now lived all alone, and spent as much time with her as she could. They would sit on wooden chairs in our verandah and talk about everything under the sun. Whenever Asha was home she never let my mom set foot in the kitchen. She is family. The food cooked by her tasted the same as my mothers.

Sometimes when I think of how Asha came into our lives..... these words come to my mind.... What goes around always comes back. A good deed will always be reciprocated. Asha hold an exclusive place in my heart, difficult to describe. May be she is my friend, philosopher and guide. Thank you Asha for coming into our lives!

Glossary:

di – sister

salwar suit, saree – Traditional Indian attire

TO PRAY OR NOT TO PRAY

Vaidehi Menon

17 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmira Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

The sun began its slow descent from its apex along the mountains of Jammu and Kashmir. I forced my exhausted legs to carry me down the steep trail of the Vaishnodevi Temple.

My parents and I, Anisha Pillai, a girl of 12, had embarked on our pilgrimage illuminated by the early 4 a.m. light. My mother, who was about to join a new company, had insisted that we spend the summer vacations climbing this mountain. The 26 km hike that we were to make today was supposed to be a quid pro quo with God for smooth sailing at her new workplace. This, however, is my analysis of the situation and mother would never admit to the above allegation. To me, needless to say, the climb seemed nothing but tedious. Even when I stood before the idol, my hands folded mechanically, I did not feel any spiritual connect.

When we returned to our hotel room that night, my parents spoke of the spiritual fulfilment our climb had brought them, while I concentrated on easing the weariness of my feet and forced myself to keep mum on how I felt about the subject.

Mother's penchant for pilgrimages, which had led us to almost all the religious hot spots of India, brought my family to the Tirupati Temple Campus in South India, in the summer when I was 14. To be clearer, we, along with several hundred people, had been locked into a large marble room in the temple complex. The room had steps for us to rest on and a gigantic television which showed live the ongoing puja at the main temple.

Through the grills that the room was enclosed in, I enviously watched the steady flow of 'VIP' pilgrims, who had paid extra money in order to avoid temporary confinement like ours.

After a few mind-numbing hours, the cage is opened and the crowd surges as one into the corridor. Our relief, however, is short-lived as we find ourselves trapped in another jostling gridlock of bodies creeping at a snail's pace to the temple. In another hour or two, the vista of the world-renowned idol was before me! But wait... ouch! It's disappeared from view already... What's happening, I wonder, as suddenly I am being pushed unceremoniously pushed towards the exit. I look up; it's a priest herding me away. Apparently, religious enlightenment and our prayers are not supposed to take more than a few seconds!



After the two pilgrimages I outlined and many others that I have silently suffered through, I summoned the courage to tell my family that I would not be accompanying them on a religious sojourn anymore.

"Why?" they asked.

"I don't believe in them", I replied.

"You don't believe in God?" they asked, incredulously.

"No", I whispered, knowing well that I was upsetting them.

"Hush, now! Don't say that. It's a bad thing, you will be punished", grandfather said.

"Don't be so extreme. Be tolerant. You can't completely go against religion", father said.

"It's all because of these Western Influences. She's forgetting our culture", mother said.

"It is because I pray everyday that YOU do well in your exams", grandmother added.

Till then, I had kept silent. I thought I would hear them out; listen to their side. But the last part had me indignant.

"I do well in my exams because I study... and if I don't do well, the blame goes to me. Not because I don't pray or go on pilgrimages but because I did not work hard enough", I said, angrily.

"You are not completely rejecting the idea of God... are you?" father asked, shock writ large on his face.

"I don't... I just can't convince myself of it. I don't begrudge others their idea of God or religion. I am against participating in something I don't feel sincerely", I answered in a lower, more reasonable tone.

They didn't rebut my argument, but this discussion didn't end there. It was taken up many times over the years and eventually their outright disapproval turned to grudging acceptance.

Today, I am 17 years old, on my way to give my 12th standard board exams. I haven't prayed to any God and I refused to apply the religious powder that grandmother had had shipped from Kerala for luck. But I had studied; I had studied very hard. I had found worship in my work and I know I will succeed.

Contrary to what my family feels, I have not shunned Indian culture or religion. I believe I have respected it by questioning its reasonability, rather than following it blindly. While I don't believe in the power of God or in religious quid pro quo, I do believe in myself and the values that have been inculcated in me by the very same culture that I am allegedly betraying. It is our culture that makes me believe in right and wrong, in working hard to get what I want, and in being good to others. Culture keeps the people who believe in it on the right path, irrespective of their religious faith. This, according to me, is the Power of Culture.

Note : _____

THE PHOTOGRAPH

Riya Savla

17 years

Navrachana School – Sama

Teachers: Kashmiri Jaiswal & Mamta Kanti Kumar
Vadodara, India

'For us it's just a mere story but for some it means a lifetime of pain and suffering.'

"Here are the photographs."

"Thank you. How much do I have to pay?"

"Five hundred please."

The man and the little girl walked out of the shop together; wide smiles that would have made toothpaste models envious, plastered on their faces. After all, they had just got their holiday photographs printed and were sifting through them on the sidewalk, laughing at all the hilarious poses 'Mommy' had made and reviving all the sweet memories of the time their small family of three had spent together in the peace and quiet of the Nilgiri hills in the south.

"Look at this daddy! You and me! Such a perfect picture!"

"Yes, my little princess, the best one of the lot!"

"But daddy, why do you look sooo big and I look sooo small beside you???" with all the innocence of a little seven year old.

"My dear....."

But he could not answer. For, at that moment, a shop just a few yards away burst into flames. Before he could register what was happening, hordes of people came rushing in from all sides. All were carrying sticks, ignited torches, and cans of petrol and kerosene.

And suddenly, there was violence... violence like the man had never seen before and fervently hoped his daughter would never see again. People beat each other with sticks and didn't stop till the other's body was smashed beyond recognition. Others were occupied with pouring kerosene on innumerable shops and setting them on fire.

The man could think of only one thing, that he had to get his daughter out of there. He grasped his daughter's hand as tightly as he could and started running towards the end of the street where he hoped this madness would end. He ran past burning houses, mutilated bodies, shouts for help, and shrieks of anguish. His instinct for survival had long suppressed his conscience that yearned to help the wounded.

Suddenly, he felt a weight lift off him. His mind did not instantly register the significance of this weight. When he did realize what it meant, a pained scream escaped him and he turned back, searching for a little brown head among the scores of agitated bodies. He started running back the other way, back where he had first started running from, all the while scanning the crowds for his precious beloved daughter. Just when he thought he had spotted her, something struck the back of his head.

And then....BLACK! Somewhere, a tiny voice "Papa!Papa!"Something told him that he had to get to the person to whom the voice belonged. He tried to push the darkness outwards, away from him, but it did not relent. Its formidable power was impossible to fight. He knew he could not stop trying, otherwise he would lose the voice crying out to him, and so he tried harderand harder. Just when he thought he could see a glimpse of light, his strength failed him.....he succumbed to the dark void ...he let go....and the darkness swallowed him whole.....“

“Huh...huh.....” the old man gasped. He sat up on his bed and poured out a glass of water for himself. His forehead shone with sweat. This dream had haunted him for years now. It had been twenty one years since his daughter had been separated from him due to the riots that had rocked Vadodara in the nineteen-eighties. Those riots had also claimed his wife, his home and his vigour for life. And since that fatal day, he had been troubled by this dream every night.

They say that time heals every wound. But he had yet to experience this. Even after twenty one years his heart still mourned for his dead wife, even more for his missing daughter. She had been what they call 'the noor of his eyes'. Her word had been law. Everything she asked for, an expensive gift , father's undivided attention, had been hers. Her faltering footsteps had been welcoming drumbeats for his ears, the sound of her voice, melodious music. He missed the way her eyes glowed with delight when he announced that he had brought her a present, the way her head, a mass of brown ringlets, bobbed up and down as she jumped with happiness when she saw her father come home, the way she put on an innocent expression and batted her eyelashes when she wanted something, and how he would always give in to her wishes. He missed everything about her; without her, his life was nothing but a boring old script. He got up at seven every day, brushed his teeth, took a bath, got ready to go to work, and resigned himself to a long day of tedious clerical jobs.

He was always the last to leave the office, sometimes he had to be forced to go by the watchman, because going back home meant dinner and then another night's sleep disturbed by the horrible nightmare.

The reason he hated the dream so much was not that it made him miss his night's sleep, he might even have been grateful because it enabled him to see his daughter's happy face every night, but that he couldn't bear to remember how he had let go of his daughter's hand and how it was his fault that his daughter had been left all alone. Yes, he held himself responsible for what had happened that day. He thought it was his fault that they had selected that very day to go pick up the photographs, his fault that they had selected a shop in that very street to develop the photographs, his fault that someone had struck him the moment he had finally found his daughter, his fault that his daughter was not here with him today. He always thought of his daughter as missing, not there with him, because he could not even consider the alternative. He did not....could not....allow himself to even think that his daughter might bedead. The idea that his daughter was alive, though he did not know where she was, how she was, gave him some modicum of comfort.

For the last twenty one years he had spent his every free waking moment in fruitless attempts to search for his daughter. He had hassled innumerable police officers, 'nari suraksha grihas', post office personal to get someone to help him find his daughter. If he could, he would even have knocked on the front door of every house in the city and even the country, if that would have been any use. But alas! All his efforts were in vain. Every person who met him had a single answer, 'I'll see what I can do.'But obviously, they didn't. He couldn't comprehend why nobody could understand the magnitude of pain he was suffering from and how important it was for him to find his daughter. Another thing he didn't understand was that for them, his missing daughter was just another one of those riot victims, just like a refugees whose stories sensitized you at first but after scores of the same stories of death, loss and homelessness, you started losing

interest, just like the millions of people who were rendered penniless or family-less by either terrorist attacks or a natural disaster. Just another one of those people! Who would take the pains to go looking for her?

One day, he decided that he would have to leave. He wanted to get away from all the heartbreaking memories of his daughter, away from all the nooks and corners of the city which reminded him of innumerable moments of pure joy and happiness spent alone with her, he had to run away from all those days when he and his daughter used to escape from their house, leaving 'mommy' all alone, cracking the most wackiest of jokes and laughing all day long. He wanted to run away from all of this, from the pain it caused him to remember that it had been HIS fault that he had let go of her hand. He needed a breath of fresh air, a new start.

A single trip to a real estate agent saw him buy a nice little cottage in the countryside. He would go to a place where nobody knew him, and he could leave the harsh memories of that fatal day behind forever.

But he was wrong. No, he could not forget his daughter, and maybe, just maybe, he wanted to keep his memories of her sweet little face, her round eyes, her 'little brown ringlets', her innocent laughter, her big round tears when her 'daddy' came home late...no he did not want to forget all these things...he probably couldn't even bear to...but he wanted to get rid of the last memory he had of her...her terrified voice...when she had wanted him to get up and hold her up close but he had not been able to fight the suffocating darkness...he was an old man now...he no longer had the strength to fight the pain.....and that is why he decided to move that very week.

The house he had bought had belonged to a young couple who had left to do relief work in the war-ravaged nation of Somalia. The couple had no choice but to leave everything behind and asked him if they could use the attic to store their belongings. Of course, he agreed. After all, they had sold to him at a laughably low price.

He settled into the house fairly soon and before long, established his identity in the place and began to think of it as home. He knew he ought not to, but curiosity led him to climb the steep stairs to the attic, one Sunday morning. He wished to know his home's former owners; he wished to understand them, who, just like him, had left everything behind to start a new life.

As he walked into the small loft, he discovered that they had been hoarders. He could see old school books, dismantled toys, graduation robes, old magazines heaped into boxes. There were little trinkets here and there, which he imagined they had picked up from around the world. Now that he came to think of it, there were very few objects of actual use in there. It seemed that they loved to keep memories intact, never forget their life's journey.

No, memories were not something he wanted to dwell upon and this place was full of them. It would drive him mad. As he turned to leave, his foot scraped against a piece of paper. He bent to pick it up and turned to the window to see it better in the light. His knees buckled and emotion overwhelmed him. It was a photograph, one he had thought was lost forever, the perfect picture, the one in which he had looked "soooo big" and..... his daughter, 'sooo small.'

'It is a story. Just like every person on earth has a story. And all stories, even those which don't start with "Once upon a time", always end with "Happily ever after..."



THE ABLE RULER

Vishwambhari S Parmar

13 years

Navrachana International School

Teacher: Anagha Pathak

Vadodara, India

Long, long ago, the hot lands of Marwar were ruled by a wise and just king, King Chandra Verma. He was respected by his subjects for whom he had built many monuments and gardens. His kingdom was prosperous and trade flourished. The city of Chandradesh was his capital. He built his fort on the Aravalli mountain range of Rajasthan. He had all that he wanted, forts, palaces, wealth, wife and two sons. However, his sons had neither the capability nor did they show interest in learning how to administer a kingdom and rule such a vast empire. He was very disappointed because they refused to show any interest.

His eldest son, prince Suryasinh would spend most of his time hunting. He was never seen sparing time for his subjects. His brother, Nishad Verma spent the whole day in idle talk with his friends. He was bad tempered and sometimes, would get angry at the smallest of things.

One night King Chandra Verma saw a dream, where he saw the goddess of bravery, goddess of gentleness and the goddess of beauty entering a pomegranate in his orchard. The next morning he brought the fruit to his wife and told her to eat it.

She ate it and after some months, she gave birth to a beautiful baby girl. The king was disappointed for he wanted a son to inherit his throne. He felt that a girl would not be a suitable ruler. Because he was disappointed and angry at her birth he vowed never to look at her.

The girl grew up to be brave and beautiful. Even Rani Padmini was no match to her. She was braver than the bravest. She showed gentleness toward all, she would go into the city and talk to the common people and solve their problems. The king loved her in his heart of heart. He however, did not think her to be an able ruler because she was a girl.

The queen wanted her daughter to be perfect in all aspects of life.. The queen sent for many teachers and they taught her everything- cooking, sewing, sword fighting, the use of bow and arrow, the mace and spear. She was excellent in studies. When she wore her royal clothes and jewellery, She looked just like apsara from heaven above. She was a true lady, 'Sukanya'.

One day the Mughals attacked Chandradesh and surrounded it. The king's army was defeated and the king wanted help. "Father please let me go and fight. I want to do something for my land." said Sukanya. The King thought that she was making fun of his defeat and he said, "Go away! I don't need you. Go, never to return." Sukanya left the fort immediately and ran into the forest.

Soon afterwards the Mughals occupied the fort and the two princes were killed. The king was sent to

prison. There he lay and thought of his behavior towards his daughter and grieved for her day and night.

A month later there was a loud banging on the door of the fort . A troop of soldiers broke open the door forced their way past the sentries , swift horses galloped into the fort and the able bodied horseman captured and killed the Mughal soldiers. Only their ruler was left. He was presented to the leader of the unknown troop of soldiers. On the insistence of the Mughal ruler the leader removed his armour and helmet, and there stood before him Princess Sukanya.

She sent the ruler into prison and brought her father to his room. Her father said "Forgive me dear. I had been so harsh towards you. I can't rule anymore. I am happy that I have got such an able daughter. I want you to inherit the throne after I die." And his eyes closed. A tear of relief ran down his cheek and he died. He died in the arms of his dear daughter, in the arms of the next ruler.

Glossary:

Marwar - Rajasthan

Padmini - A queen who was considered to be very beautiful

Apsara - A female dancer who dances to amuse lord Indra, the God of rains



Note : _____

THE LOST DAY !

Yogansh Prasad

13 years

Navrachana International School

Teacher: Anagha Pathak

Vadodara, India

It happened when I was just five years old. I fell ill during the winters and my mother took me to a pediatrician's clinic near our house. After visiting and consulting the doctor, we all came out of the doctor's chamber. I started playing with the toys kept in the waiting area. My mother along with my brother went to the chemist shop to buy the prescribed medicines. After playing for a while, I came out of the clinic and started looking for my mother and brother. I looked for them in the chemist shop which was quite crowded and I could not see them. I don't know why, I decided to go back home. The sound and light of vehicles on the road looked like a scene of an action movie where the hero & villain chase each other in high speed cars making screeching noises.

I felt scared. I prayed to god for courage and for the first time, I crossed the road alone and walked home. On reaching home, I did not find them there and the door of my house was locked. In the meantime, there at clinic, my mother and brother were searching for me. The doctor who was very good friend of my mother, suggested a number of possibilities but to no avail. They telephoned the patients who had visited the doctor that evening in case I had gone with them. My mother was searching for me everywhere, in the by lanes and the shops nearby, asking everybody, but had ruled out the possibility of my going home alone.

Here at home, I also asked my friends and my neighbors but they told me that they had not seen my mother and brother come back. After sometime, I saw my father's colleague coming to our house looking worried. Actually he had come looking for me. He had met my worried mother near the clinic, searching for me. After listening to my mother, he thought it advisable to check the house and so he came in his bike and luckily found me. He took me to back to my mother. My brother and my mother hugged me tightly and tears started rolling down their cheeks. This was the most frightening day of my life and when I remember this day I can feel the goose bumps. This day the 13th of December 2002 will always be imprinted in my mind.

Glossary

Pediatrician - Physician who specializes in the treatment of children from birth through adolescence.

Prescribed - Suggested, Advised

Screeching noise - A loud, harsh, squealing sound



POLAND



POLAND-MY HOME

Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

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“The soul of Poland is indestructible... she will rise again like a rock, which may for a spell be submerged by a tidal wave, but which remains a rock.” **~Unknown**

Every person has an image of herself, and the things that make up this image varies from person to person, from country to country. This is illustrated through the stories presented in our book.

In some parts of the world it is very important that one is a member of particular family; in other parts of the world, it might be more important that one comes from a particular place; in others, that one belongs to a certain social class. But, how do Poles identify themselves? What makes us Polish?

Without a doubt, national (‘ethnic’) loyalties can be strong among the people in Poland whose ancestors fought for Polish independence in order to preserve Polish culture and language for future generations. But, there also exists, among the young generation, weak ties to Polish roots, history and culture. For some people living in Poland now, national pride and loyalty is little more than a matter of emotional attachment. For others, it goes a bit further. Poles may cultivate Polish culture by belonging to various traditional folk bands, local foundations or regional groups (recognized abroad) such as *Małe Słowianki*, *Mazowsze*, *Highlanders (Górale)*; *Kaszubi* These gatherings and people promote national folk music, organize parties on special days, and foster a consciousness of Polish identity more strongly than do other Poles; for whom Polish involvement and identity is of lesser and lesser concern. In the stories written by Polish students you will definitely see a wide range of topics: to some, Kraków has been mentioned as home...a place where one was raised; its heritage and traditional festivals becomes the background to their stories. Meanwhile, others have indicated our migratory trends to take part in rags to riches dreams. There was much movement during and after wartime. The recent highest outflow of Polish citizens took part when Poland became a member of European Union in 2004. Indeed, the current question of identity in Poland is a much more complex issue than it used to be. My observation is that those who travel to other countries become enlightened about, and sensitive to, others. Poles who travel are less interested only in their own family matters at and reinforce the pride in Poland and Polish achievements, traditions and history. Poles and their achievements are appreciated abroad even if they are not as appreciated in their homeland. Luckily, there are also people like The Ślusarczyk Family (you can read the story written by Tomasz and see his sister’s drawings in the book). Parents teach their children how to preserve cultural

roots: children take active parts in Easter traditions (make traditional Easter palms, 2m long; decorated traditionally); they take up piano classes to know Polish traditional music and composers; they put a lot of effort into ensuring that their children know Polish language and literature at a high level; Marysia dances in the traditional *The Little Slavs* musical group formed in 1975. Pride increases with cultural practices, everyday habits and attitudes, and gradually become the foundation of Polish identity and belonging. Without a doubt, attention to culture is important as Polish sociologist, Zygmunt Bauman`s says, "*human culture is an enormous and constant effort which leads to making sense of our lives.*" To me Poland has always been my home. My parents are here even if I live 600km away from them; here was my childhood and carefree school life; here is Kraków where my husband Łukasz and daughter Apolonia constitute my daily happiness and motivation to live; and, finally, here is my base where I always come back with a pleasure from my travels. With my family I feel as if I am at home! Here, in Poland. Here is also the place where my friends, from all over the world, contribute their amazing life stories. Here is one of them:

A Life Story by Mrs Helen Blanchard, Hanford, California

To begin with, my parents, Joseph and Antonina Melnyk, were prisoners of Nazi Germany during World War II. They met, and married after the War.

My mother is from Tomaszow-Lubelski, Poland. Work and food were scarce in that region. She had heard there were opportunities in Germany to get work. With my grandmother's blessing, she and a couple of girlfriends left home at the age of seventeen. This was a year or so before the Nazis invaded Poland. As the war broke out, she was sent to work on a farm. She was treated as a slave and had barely enough food to survive. It wasn't long until a more sympathetic family bartered for the services of my mother, and took her under their wing. Life was still hard, but the family shared some of their meager supply of food with her. They were as good to her as they dared to be at that time. It was a time when all Germans had to be careful not to show any anti-Nazi feelings. "It was a time neither husband nor wife could really trust each other," she had said. My dad was a soldier during this time in the Ukrainian Army. He was captured and sent as a POW to work for a German family. He was fortunate in this family, because they weren't Nazi sympathizers and he was treated kindly. The man in this family had a secret radio where he could listen to broadcasts from England and the United States. His family was unaware of this. There was always the possibility that they might report him. For this, the Nazi's could have executed him. When the war ended, my parents were allowed to marry. The priest was so thrilled finally to be allowed to hold open church services. He celebrated mass for four hours. Mom said they were starved and exhausted before they got to their marriage vows.

Now another new chapter began in their lives. The POW's were placed in a German army base with thousands of other freed prisoners. Life was still very difficult. Dad worked at odd jobs for farmers, and would get paid in eggs and meager rations of food. They stayed there for two years. They decided to return to Griesheim where they had been at one time. They had German friends and knew more job opportunities would be there. I was born a year later. My name is Helen. My parents didn't want to return to Poland, since Russia had taken over their country. Dad had lost total contact with his family, and didn't know if anyone had survived. It wasn't until the mid 50's before he had been able to find out what happened to them. No one survived. My grandmother wrote and told him not to come home. She told him to try to find a better life. Nothing was left but poverty and Communist Rule. Soon plans were being made to emigrate from Germany. It took about four years before we were accepted to come to the United States. Friends of my

parents had come to California ahead of them. Through a Polish organization and Catholic Charities, we were able to get sponsorship. It took thirteen days to come over on a ship. We docked in New Orleans for some reason. It was such a disappointment for my parents not to be able to see the Statue of Liberty. Once we got off the ship, we were put on a train, and headed for California. Living in the small community of Lemoore, people were willing to hire my parents even though they didn't know the language. They both went to night school where they were taught American English and the customs of their adopted country. After they obtained citizenship, my sister Anne was born. She now has a daughter and four grandchildren.

The years have gone on. I speak Polish, and am extremely proud of this. At times, I will overhear someone speaking Polish, and I will introduce myself. My husband and I met when we were children, through another Polish family. He's not Polish, but a wonderful husband and father. My husband and I have gone to Poland to meet some of my family, with whom I have kept in touch. They encourage me to keep speaking Polish. They are the best of families.

We have two sons, Allen and Joe, who are married. They each have three children. My sons and daughters-in-law are teachers. We are so proud of them. Last year Anna came to stay at Allen and his wife's (Shirley's) home. Anna and her students belong to U.S.-Polish Youth Leadership Exchange Program for teachers and students. What a wonderful experience this was, for our family. Anna is such a blessing. We all fell in love with her. Time moved too quickly, and they had to leave.

Last summer, Allen and his students went Poland. He and I had worked on some Polish words, hoping it would help a little. He caught on quickly and just about everyone spoke English there. What a wonderful experience that was. Anna, her husband, and other families were so gracious. Allen had the opportunity to experience the history and culture of his grandparents' homeland. There was so much to knowledge to gain, and people to experience. Anna and her husband made a point of seeking out cousins, and going to visit them. When I talk to my cousins, they always speak of the opportunity that they had in meeting Allen and having Anna and her husband there. The organization is an amazing program that brings different cultures together, and gives everyone a chance to see how much alike we are.



CRACOW`S TREASURE

Tomasz Ślusarczyk

11 years

Szkoła Podstawowa (Primary School) z Oddziałami Integracyjnymi Nr 12
im. Janusza Korczaka

Teacher: Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska
Kraków, Poland.

"Here is your room, Mr. Black. It's number 23." My guide (Mr Tree) is talking to me. "Tomorrow we will walk to Sukiennice (the Cloth Hall). The trip will start at nine a. m. Please, don't be late. Good night!"

"Good night." I replied.

I'm Mr. Black, and I'm starting my first trip to Cracow in Poland. I have planned this travel for a month. I'm from England, but I have heard lots of good things about Cracow. I have always wanted to come here. And I am in Cracow, but it's 10:30 p. m. and I want to go to bed.

* * *

"Come on! Let's go to Cracow!" says Mr. Tree "We will walk to Sukiennice.

Our hotel is near the city center and after fifteen minutes we will be in Cloth Hall." The guide is talking to us: "In the Clothes Hall in the middle ages people sold and bought many things, for example cloth. Now, there are many shops with souvenirs. You have thirty minutes to buy souvenirs. I will stay here."

"Mr. Tree, what are those crests on walls?" I ask.

"They are the crests of many cities in Poland." replies Mr. Tree.

"Thank you!"

I buy souvenirs and I go to Cracow center. When I walk by buildings I see a pigeon. There are many pigeons on the city center (without these birds Cracow will not be Cracow!), but that bird has something on his feet! Something shiny! What is this? Oh, my God! It's a spear! Silver spears!!! The pigeon is flying to a small road between blocks. I think that pigeon is trying to say, "Come on, come on to me!" I follow the bird. I give him my pretzel. He stops and says in a human voice:

"Dzień dobry."

* * *

"Dzień dobry!"

"Oh, I don't understand. I'm not from Poland."

"WHAT!!! WHAT DID YOU SAY? YOU ARE NOT POLISH?!!!"

My grandfather said, that you will be Polish. Fortunately, I listened to an English tourist, and I know English."

"In this first year, from hundreds of years ago, you can find great Cracow treasure! First, you must go to a place full of flowers on the city center, find a woman in old Cracow clothes, buy tulips from her, and whisper, "Sucha woda do



tulipanów”3. When you say the password she will give you an old card. On her card will be a number. You should go this number of steps from the exit of the scariest Cracow monster's cave and dig. Good luck and bye!”And the pigeon flies away. I have ten minutes and I think that I can go to this woman. I know from books that Cracow flower sellers are famous. I look for a mysterious woman. I find her fast. I go to her and ask for tulips and say the password. The flower seller is smiling and gives a tulips old card. She says that this card is from her grandmother. I go back to the guide and we walk on to the city center. In the hotel room I take the old card and read the message. The message: It's number: 23.

* * *

On the next day my group walks to Wawel Castle. All time I think about Cracow's treasure. In Wawel Castle, I see the cathedral with the Polish king's graves, courtyard, and many rooms in castle. There are a lot of tapestries in the kings' rooms. At the end of my trip the guide talks about Wawel dragon's legend and his cave under Wawel Hill. I think that this dragon must be the scariest Cracow creature. My group goes to the cave. When we go out, I see that there is a lot of grass and treasure could be hidden there. After supper I go to a shop and buy a shovel. Next, I go to the exit of the cave. I step twenty three steps. I dig, but someone is watching me. He runs to me and shouts. Fast, I must find treasure! When the man is ten meter from me, I see—in the hole--something shiny! I dig as fast as I can. That thing is a silver chalice! When the man is one meter from me, I take the chalice and show it to him. The man is very surprised. He says that it's the lost chalice from Abbey Tynieckie and that I must take it to the museum. I'm very happy. I found lost a treasure from Cracow!



On the next day I with my guide take the chalice to the museum. Next I meet with TV reporters. I say to all people who asked me about the treasure:“To find a treasure you must have good luck, look around, and know information about Cracow. No more!”

About the Author

Tomasz Ślusarczyk won twice in a row National Level Contests on Polish Language Grammar and Correctness of Polish Language (in 2012 and 2013); holds the title of double National Contest Laureate.

Illustrator: Marysia Ślusarczyk, 6 years old

Samorządowe Przedszkole (Kindergarden) Nr 75, Kraków, Poland.

Glossary:

The Cloth Hall - A famous building on Cracow center, in the middle ages there were a lot of tradesman there. Now there are shops with souvenirs.

Pretzel - Circle bread with, for example, salt, cheese, sesame...

Cracow's flower sellers - For hundreds of years they have had one place on Cracow's center. They're very popular.

Dzień dobry- Good Morning in Polish language



RAINY PARADE

Nikola Boroń

16 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska

Kraków, Poland

I've run from Saint Anna Street straight to the Main Square. *Where the hell are they?* I thought trying to find my friends in the crowd. Little kids dressed up as princesses and knights and their parents, all with black or dark blue umbrellas (*seriously, am I the only person in this city who has a red one?!*) made a funny contrast with elegant European tenement houses.

"Niiiiikiiiiiii!!" Yeah, it seems like Kasia finally noticed my umbrella "What's wrong with you? Is it that hard to remember we're meeting under the head?"

Right, the head. I don't know anybody who has the slightest idea why this creepy, fallen head stands in the Main Square, although everybody who visits Kraków has a photo standing inside it and waving a hand through the eye of the statue.

The music of drums and singing are getting louder. "Turn on your camera, Daniel. They're coming." We got closer to Grocka Street, where dragons should soon appear. First came Grotoska's Theatre truck with dancers and musicians. And then... you weren't in this grey Kraków anymore. Henchmen were doing tricks with flags, children were singing and dragons... well, everyone is just amazed by the human imagination.

"Ladies and gentlemen, the royal court of Kraków." Daniel put on a jester's cap and mixed with the ladies-in-waiting so he could take better photos. Probably I would have joined him, but the delicious scent of grilled oscypek was calling me to come. In few seconds Kasia and I were eating this smoked cheese with cranberries. The last time we had eaten them was during the Christmas fair, when we had been buying new Christmas tree ornaments and cinnamon sticks. It had been so cold that day, so when we had seen a booth with osypki we had felt like we were in heaven!

Memories! Memories! They can even transform a frosty winter into a wonderful time. We go back to the scene to see how the contest for the most beautiful dragon was going this year. I immediately fell in love with the 'Miró's friend' as I named a dragon inspired by surrealism and tapestries from the Wawel castle. It's hard to believe, but those 'hanging carpets' have an incredible history. During the Second World War there had been special people who had taken them to Canada, so they wouldn't be destroyed by the Germans. Back to my Miró's friend, he had even a moustache like Salvador Dalí! "¡Qué maravilloso!" I chuff, "Oh, don't be so entranced with this crazy monster. I bet this year they'll choose a traditional Wawel dragon with a red hat and a peacock feather." Kasia is a sentimental person and she's telling me this every year, but...

"Hey! Where's Daniel?" Kasia sights him with scorn and points at one of dragons. "Number 14!" In front of a huge Chinese dragon stood a blonde girl with the number 14 and next to her, of course – Daniel. "Just

leave them. She's going to tube him sooner or later. It will take the jury some time to decide who the winner is, so let's eat something."

She hasn't finished the sentence when she starts walking to one of the cafés. I don't know how it works, but she always finds a free place. We sit in a 'garden' and order ice creams with latte. When I look at small portions of ice-creams, I really miss Italy with its generous sellers, but from the parade it's only a month to vacations!

"Look Niki, somebody wants to make your day!" Kasia says ironically, when I see them. Three men with an accordion and a guitar come toward us. I hate when people try to get my money while I'm enjoying the meal. The Main Square is full of street musicians and other artists. My favorites are people dancing with fire at night. Also they are ideal for night shooting practice. The best you can do on a warm evening is to take a walk to the Main Square. There always something is happening. All these people make the city more colorful and entertaining, but some of them should be kicked off.

"*O Maryjanno!*" Our guys start singing one of the old Polish songs. They are dancing between the tables and playing poorly. "Please go." I think looking for a waiter. "*Nie spaaaaaałabys w te nooooc!*" they continue. And suddenly they stop, bow, and leave.

We are paying our bill when one of Czech tourists starts making an awful row. Because Czech is similar to Polish we can more or less understand what is going on. He is saying that a waiter robbed him and that he's going to sue him if he doesn't return the money. Other guests who hear that start checking their wallets too and soon a half of our garden is shouting that they have been robbed. I also check my bag, but luckily everything is in its place.

"Better check your..." I just start talking when Kasia interrupts me. "Musicians. Listen everyone! Don't blame the waiter! Those musicians are responsible for this." For a moment there is silence and then people start to curse. They know there is nothing they can do because the musicians are lost in the crowd.

"I was looking for you! Girls this is... Wait. What happened?" We had to look very upset if Daniel was able to notice it, because he even stopped gazing at the girl with the number 14.

"When you're having a happy day, something has to happen in order to make it worse," Kasia says dramatically. "You know, Niki is a magnet for guys with an accordion" Yeah, her humor is back. It all started two months ago when we were strolling through the Planty. It had been a flowering period so walking around the old town's fortifications under blooming trees was a pure pleasure. But, as Kasia said something had to happen. When we were near the Wawel castle, a weird man with a huge, curly beard started walking behind us and playing the accordion. OK, situations like this take place, but later he start singing about "a girl in golden shoes flying with fallen blossoms" and then "let a singing man make your daaay awesoome." Since that happening I have an inner loathing of people playing the accordion. And my friends love making jokes about it.

"Hello, I'm Kasia and this is Nikoleta. Good manners say that Daniel should introduce us to each other, but as you see he's a fool."

"Nina. Nice to meet you. And I already could notice..."

Daniel tinkles the bells on his cap and says, "You shouldn't hold it against me! I'm an important part of a royal court. How do you think the king would be doing without me?"

"For sure better than at the moment! Now let's go to hear the results." announced Kasia. "...and the title of the most beautiful dragon on our great dragon parade goes to... Aitvaras!

Congratulations!" Neither Kasia nor I were right, neither the Chinese dragon nor number 14 was this year's winner.

"I'm starving." Daniel never is interested in the results. That day isn't an exception. "I need a plate of dumplings in a quiet place. Any ideas?"

"Same as every year?" I suggest. "Nina, are you going with us?"

"Good dumplings sound perfect to me." So we go to Jama Michalika, one of those cafés with the spirit, one of the oldest cafés in Kraków. When you're sitting here, you don't feel like you are in a basement, you're in a different world. The green hall is full of dim light, antiques, tall furniture with green trim, old poems, drawing, caricatures, and puppets from the first Polish cabaret – Zielony Balonik, and to enhance the final effect – a stained glass roof. For me it's one of the most magical places.

"They are still making satirical plays, you know?" Kasia asks Nina "But it's impossible to get tickets! They're are sold-out so fast."

"Something that Kraków can be proud of. Culture is the most important issue in this city. I like it this way, but..."

Daniel doesn't let her finish, "You must find a "but" in everything, don't you?"

"Constructive criticism is very valuable. You should learn it." Kasia retorts.

"Anyway, I would like to make Kraków more modern. Chanel boutiques, skyscrapers, underground. We are supposed to use the achievements of XXI century"

"Sorry, but Kraków will never would be like NYC, so don't try to make it like that. Culture has a great power. Theatres, old tenement houses, museums, cafés as this place where we're sitting. That's the real Kraków." I suppose.

"Guys, I would add one thing to our city." says Nina, "Or actually remove. Pigeons. They are a nightmare of many European countries." Everybody agrees. Our dumplings, baked rabbits and broccoli creams are served.

"I love Polish cuisine. No matter if it's said that it's too oily. Just look at our streets. There aren't many fat people. Girls, you shouldn't believe in calories!" summarizes Daniel and starts eating When we are leaving it starts raining again. There never was such a rainy June. "Bye everyone!" I say and ran to the nearest tram stop. My beloved red umbrella stays in one of Main Square's gardens and I get wet on the way home.

P.S. Please, don't consider Kraków a dangerous city full of pickpockets. The crime rate in Poland is well below the European average.

Glossary:

Avitaras - a Lithuanian dragon having features of a rooster.

Wawel dragon – the dragon from a Polish legend, his cave is one of Kraków's famous tourist attractions.

garden – a place in front of a café or restaurant when you can sit under garden umbrellas, usually surrounded by pots of flowers or a low fence.

DEATH, WELCOME TO POLAND

Natalia Maruta

18 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska

Kraków, Poland

Marcin was dead, which was kind of unfair, really. After all, he was alive through all insignificant parts of his life, and now, when he was finally doing something important, he was dead.

“Are you going to lie there all day?” said a male voice from above him.

Marcin opened his eyes to see the source of the voice and frowned. He was dead. He shouldn't be able to do that. He focused on the man standing above him. The man was young, maybe in his early twenties, with black hair curling on his nape. He was leaning on a black scythe.

“Look, mate, it's not that I mind you taking your time, but you're not the only person that dies today and I can't just blow the rest of them off because you don't want to leave your body,” the man said. “So, could you, please, you know... hurry up? I promise you, being dead is not all that bad.”

“I don't want to be dead.” muttered Marcin.

“People rarely do,” sighed the man. “I don't know why, really. It's not like your lives are so totally amazing or anything. Anyway, don't worry. Most humans actually enjoy being dead when they get used to it.”

“I can't be dead” said Marcin more forcefully. “Not after I finally found the thief we've been looking for over the last two years. I finally know where he is and I'm dead!? I solved the damned case and I'm dead!? How unlucky can you get!?”

“Well, if it helps, you're not the only one to die just before completing the work of your life. I once met this Gallus guy. Can you believe, he actually wrote the first book with the history of some country and died before he signed it? Now, that's unlucky. You're only experiencing a minor misfortune.”

“Minor misfortune!? I'm dead!”

“True, but so are a lot of other people.”

“Including you?” asked Marcin.

“Hmm? Oh, I'm not dead. I am Death. Hence the scythe” he tapped the weapon twice.

“You're Death” repeated Marcin.

“Yeah. I take people's soul into the afterlife. And on that note, are you ready to go?”

“Can you bring the dead back?” asked Marcin.

Death grinned at him.

“You sure work quickly. Most people start with questions about the afterlife and then ask about my

powers.”

“Can you?”

“I do have that ability, yes. But I'm also completely forbidden from doing it.”

“Forbidden? You're Death. How can anyone forbid you anything?”

Death's smile widened.

“Are you trying to play on my pride?”

“Came out too strong?”

“A bit. Don't take me wrong, it's working. You're actually interesting enough that I think I'll bring you back.”

Marcin frowned.

“It didn't take you long to come around”

“Yeah, well. I'm not very good with orders. I'll bring you back for as long as it'll take you to put away that thief. Are you ready?” he asked and before Marcin could answer, Death waved his scythe and the world exploded in white light.

#

“Hey, wake up.” Someone was shaking Marcin. “Dude, wake up. We have a thief to catch, no?”

At that Marcin's eyes snapped open. Death, kneeling next to him, smiled and stood up.

“Where are we?” he croaked, his throat dry.

“I have no idea. Since you were our way back, I'm guessing it's where you died. So, what now?” he asked turning.

“Now we have to find my partner. He should be at the station. Come on” said Marcin getting up.

“Don't you have any questions?” asked Death while they were walking down the stairs. “You know, I tell you I'm Death and you just want to get back. We get back and you just naturally start working. It's kind a freaking me out.”

“I'M freaking YOU out. You're Death!”

“So what? I can't get scared? I'm Death so I can't have feelings? You're so insensitive.”

Marcin stayed quiet, watching Death as they walked down. He never really wondered what the Death would be like, but even if he did, he certainly could never come up with someone as messed up as this Death.

So human, so... teenager-like.

“What did he take?” asked Death.

“Who?”

“The thief. It must be important, if you want to get him that badly.”

“He stole Cracow's most important artifacts.” said Marcin. “Some right from under our noses.”

“Oh God, please tell me he didn't take the dragon.”

“Dragon? What dragon?”

“You know, the one breathing fire. It's still there, right?”

“I said 'the most important artifacts of Cracow' and you're asking about a stupid metal statue?”

“It's not stupid when you have to listen for three days to a dragon, whining about disrespectful cobbler's apprentices and disgusting sheep.”

Marcin paused, staring at Death.

“I'm going to save my sanity and just forget that comment, okay?” he asked.

Death smiled.

“And my existence doesn't endanger your sanity?”

“Okay, save what's left of my sanity. Anyway, he stole some very important things. 'Lady with an Ermine', Szczerbiec. We're here.” he added.

They stood before a high tenement house with five police cars parked in front of it. The building was painted in a light, cheerful color, dirtied by years without renovation. They walked inside and Marcin nodded to the officer on duty. They continued up the stairs and then along a long dark corridor. Marcin stopped before one of the doors and walked inside. A dark haired man sat by the desk looking at a computer monitor. He looked up when he heard them come in.

“Marcin, where were you!? I've been calling you for hours! Did you find anything? And who's the kid?”

“The kid?” repeated Marcin.

“He means me” whispered Death. “I do look at least half your age.”

“Right. He is... our back up. He'll be helping us with this case. And, as to my disappearance, it's a long story. I do have good news though, Kuba. I know where our thief is.”

#

They sat in the car watching a warehouse, where the thief's hideout was supposed to be. It was old, rusty and was basically falling apart.

“You know, for a guy that's stolen things worth millions, he lives in a disgusting place” said Death.

“Those things are not exactly easy to sell. Most fences won't even try to sell something that easily recognized. And something so wanted by the police” explained Jakub.

“So why is he stealing that?”

“Prestige. And if he does sell it, he's gonna earn billions” said Marcin. “Something's happening.”

A car pulled up in front of the warehouse. Two men got out and went inside.

“All right, that guy is a known fence.” Kuba pointed at one of them as they disappeared inside. “Enough for probable cause?”

“It'll have to do” announced Marcin.

They exited the car and turned towards policemen waiting outside. “We're going in.”

#

They burst into the warehouse. It was huge, full of shelves ceiling high and arranged into alleys. Marcin heard two shots fired and one of the officers running before he fell over. Another two shots. “Clear!” one of

the policemen shouted.

They moved forward and reached a junction.

"Marcin, go left." ordered Jakub. "I'll go right."

Marcin nodded. Death followed him, five more policemen behind them. Another junction.

"This warehouse looked much simpler from the outside." muttered Death.

"We'll go left. You go right." pointed Marcin.

One of the policemen nodded. They continued on. A man came from one of the alleys and ran into Marcin. They both fell and Marcin felt a sudden, sharp pain in his arm. Then the man's weight disappeared and Death knelt next to him.

"Are you okay? Oh God, that arm does not look good."

It didn't. It was broken, already swelling. And it hurt.

"We should move you outside." said one of the officers.

"No, I'm fine. Let's go."

They moved forward, Death helping Marcin. There were more junctions, but they did not split anymore.

And then the shooting started again. Marcin saw a bullet grazing Death's cheek. He felt pain in his arm again and then everything went black.

He woke up in an ambulance, his arm pulsing with a dull pain. He could hear Jakub talking outside. He turned his head and saw Death sitting on a small bench, playing with a syringe.

"You're gonna break it." he said.

Death grinned at him. He had a large gash on his cheek.

"What happened?" asked Marcin.

"You were shot, blacked out. And then your partner swooped in and arrested all of them. There were five shooters, one of them turned out to be your thief. They found all of the artifacts as well. All in all, a big success. You and Kuba are the talk of the week, congrats!"

Marcin smiled. "Go to sleep." said Death. "You've got enough drugs in your system to knock down a mammoth." Marcin closed his eyes and drifted off immediately.

#

Marcin sat in the hospital's hallway, his arm in a sling. It really hurt.

"Of course it hurts. Your arm is broken in three places. And you were shot."

Marcin looked up to see Death standing over him. The wound on his cheek was bandaged.

"You're Death." said Marcin.

"How very perceptive of you."

"Then why are you hurt?"

"I'm not. But since the wound was supposed to be deep, I bandaged it."

Marcin nodded. They stayed silent for a while.

“So what?” asked Death, taking the seat next to him. “You're ready to go back?”
“Back?” frowned Marcin. “What do you mean back? I'm not going back yet.”
“Ummm, yes, yes, you are. I only brought you back...”
“To put that thief away. That's what you said. Well, I'm not moving until the guy's in prison.”
Death sighed.
“Okay, and how long is that going to take? A month?”
“Or two. Three. Ten years.”
“What!?”
“Well, Death, Welcome to Poland.”

Glossary:

Marcin – The Polish equivalent of Martin

Gallus Anonymus – an anonymous author of the first historic texts about the Polish kingdom

Wawel dragon (the statue) - a metal statue put outside the dragon den under the Wawel castle. It breathes fire every few minutes.

Wawel dragon (the legend) - A dragon lived under the Wawel castle. Many knights tried to kill the beast and failed. Finally, a cobbler apprentice, Skuba, left a sheep stuffed with sulphur before the dragon's den. When the dragon ate the sheep, it became thirsty and ran to the river to drink. It drank and drank until it exploded.

Lady with an Ermine – a painting by Leonardo da Vinci that hangs in one of Cracow's museums.

Szczerbiec - the coronation sword of the Polish kings.

Kuba - shortening of a name Jakub, the Polish equivalent of Jacob.

Fence – a slang term for a person who buys and sells stolen goods.

Probable cause – a credible reason that a person is guilty of an offense that enables the police to



Note : _____

A NEW HOME

Author: Anna Bąkowska, Alicja Koperska & Raivo Wasilewski

17 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Żaneta Dylağ

Kraków, Poland

Three teenagers from different Polish cities are facing the problem of leaving their country and starting a new life abroad. They have a few things in common. Not only are they reluctant to leave Poland, they don't want to renounce the life they knew and cherished.

Meet Kasia. She is a 17 year old girl from Warsaw. Extremely ambitious, she studies in one of the most prominent high schools in the city. Her gorgeous, enormous house is surrounded with a magnificent garden. Her mother works for a renowned international company. Recently, her mother got a promotion on the condition that she moved to Sydney, Australia. As we can imagine, Kasia is unwilling to leave her country and discourages her Mom to accept the offer. Still, the situation seems hopeless, and, the next month, the whole family arrives in the land Down Under.

The first two months appear to be the hardest time. She is feeling home-sick and her classmates treat her like an alien—a person from another planet. She has no friends and week by week she is becoming more and more introvert. The only thing that keeps her sane is the time spent chatting with her Polish friends on the internet. Not being able to speak Polish to anyone is unbearable. It is as if part of her identity is being taken away from her. The city is totally overwhelming, twice as big as Warsaw - bustling with odd people

One day she is relaxing on a park bench reading her favorite book "Pan Tadeusz" as she notices two people approaching her. Judging by the look on their faces, they naturally recognize the Polish title and say: "Cześć". Happy to see her compatriots, Kasia strikes up a conversation. After a while, it turns out that her interlocutors seem to be facing similar problems to Kasia's. Magda and Jacek invite Kasia to the minorities meeting, which is regularly held in their school. She has mixed feelings about it, but, having no other options, decides to give it a go.

Once the meeting starts, she feels funny. The concept of sharing her thoughts with others petrifies her. And then she listens to Magda's story.

"A few years ago, my parents were killed in a car accident. My only chance to start a new life was to move in with a family with which I was familiar. The problem was that this family lived in Sydney. I

decided to stay with them. It was a hard time for me, as you can imagine. I was severely depressed for months but, then everything changed when I met my soulmate-- Jacek."

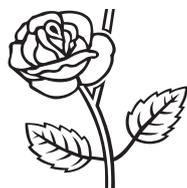
And then Jacek's story:

“My situation was slightly better. My parents, to whom I owe so much, had to face the fact that I was going to leave them because of a university scholarship. It was difficult to come to terms with moving to, what I thought, was the end of the Earth. Everything here was a novelty to me. I have been attending these meetings for a few months and I can see some change in how I perceive this country”

Kasia, deeply touched by Magda's and Jacek's stories, takes a risk and tells her story. Over time, the meetings helped her to overcome the problem of feeling like a stranger in a strange land. She did not feel as lonesome as she did at the beginning of her stay in Australia anymore. Thanks to Jacek and Magda, Kasia started looking on the bright side of things. Meeting inspiring people from all over the world and forming new friendships seemed to be a remedy. New possibilities opened up for her: practicing a different language, exploring new a new land, getting to know the new culture and tradition...Australia became her new home.

Glossary:

Cześć- Polish “Hello/Hi”



Note : _____

THE KING AND THE DRAGON

Tomasz Kubacka

18 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Żaneta Dylağ

Kraków, Poland

Far, far away there was an immense kingdom called Cracow, which was ruled by a great king named Tom the II. He was a wise leader and a fearless warrior, but there was one thing that he was afraid of: Mr Dragon. Two meters high, covered with green scales, with impressive teeth and hair-raising roar, the great lizard was certainly something to fear. But, it wasn't the appearance that the king was scared of; it was the dragon's popularity among the people, the king's subjects. Mr. Dragon bow-tie. When he was younger, he attended school regularly. Later, he started to learn carpentry. He was loved by the majority of Cracow inhabitants. What the king could not bear, though, was the fact that Cracow was widely known around the world but for the dragon, not for the king's splendor. On the day before the very special 11th of November—the king's birthday, the emperor decided to capture Mr. Dragon, and put him into the cave under the Wawel castle. Well aware of the consequences, he predicted that all of the peoples' attention would be focused on his great figure. No dragons or other creatures would divert the public attention from the king himself.

When the big day finally arrived a festival started in which people could drink recklessly and spend all their gold gambling as they had been given a day off. The marvelous festivities took place in the main square, the center of the city. Tom the II was pleased with the atmosphere, and when he was finally ready to give the speech, somebody stood up, and approached the throne. The man, one of his servants, pointed at the king and shouted: 'TRAITOR!!'. While the guards dragged him off the stage, he managed to shout one short sentence more: 'Give the DRAGON back!'. When the man disappeared, whispering followed. The crowd realized that Mr. Dragon was indeed gone. All the eyes turned to the King. Silence fell! Everybody stood still and, then, something unexpected happened. A tiny, blond-haired boy came near the king, small tear drops were rolling down his ruddy cheeks. The only words that he was able to cough up were: "*Give him back, please*". The situation overwhelmed the king. He stood up. After a few seconds he threw the crown away and, pointing at the castle, he burst out crying. The king felt repentant and he couldn't stand the violent act he had done. Mr. Dragon forgave the King his deed, and so did the rest of the inhabitants. Since that moment, the king and Mr. Dragon lived peacefully for a long time!

Glossary:

Cracow - former capital city of Poland.

Wawel – the most famous castle in Poland, for many ages, the residence of Polish kings.

Dragon - creature from one of the Cracow's fairy tales, there is a statue representing the Wawel Dragon in front of a cave in the Wawel hill.

Main Square – the biggest square in Europe, registered at UNESCO.

BREATHING METAL

Martyna Kulak

17 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Żaneta Dylağ

Kraków, Poland

In the XIth century things seemed simpler. When the Dragon came to Cracow, people still believed in magic; it was easy to convince them to give him shelter. The Dragon didn't even have to resort to eating sheep. People let him live in a cave under the king's castle as it was a common belief that the creature's presence would bring them good luck.

But, times changed. People changed. They forgot about the magic and legendary beasts. Once they forgot, they consequently stopped believing and although dragons could do perfectly without food, water and a permanent abode, they couldn't survive among people who didn't believe in them. They simply vanished into non-existence. So, the dragon knew he had to find his home somewhere else, to find a place where people still had faith in dragons. He decided to search for the city he learned to love through the years.

As many years had passed by, the dragon could hardly recognize once familiar surroundings. He noticed cars before when he watched the world from his cave. However, he didn't realize that there were so many. He finally understood why the sky was so dark these days: cars emitted so much smoke that the natural aftermath was the sky's blue changed to a different color. The fumes had affected the buildings, as well. The dragon remembered them as magnificent, now they looked... shabby, and ancient, just like the dragon himself.

He wandered through the streets, totally invisible to the people. What really surprised him was the number of tourists; crowds from all over the world walking around, admiring the monuments, taking pictures, eating pretzels and... having fun. The dragon had mixed feelings. He felt both pride and sadness. Pride, because it was still the city he remembered so well. All the buildings, even in their shabby state, were the same buildings he saw ages ago. He felt sadness – because somehow it wasn't his city anymore.

After a while, the dragon followed some tourists into the Saint Mary's Basilica and immediately felt better. Even crowded and visibly aged, the church with its candles, sculptures and a ceiling painted like the night sky made him feel at peace. The Dragon decided to get to know this familiar-unfamiliar city better.

He started by visiting other churches. He searched for altars and sculptures made of black marble – he remembered the king who loved that stone. Then he went to some art galleries in search of paintings. At first he was surprised with modern art, but then he saw strange beauty even in those works he didn't understand and somehow took to them. Hungry for more, he found himself in the Jewish district – and mourned the deaths of its former inhabitants as well as the devastation of its buildings. He found exquisite beauty and melancholy together with happiness – but he couldn't find anyone who believed in dragons.

Realizing he wouldn't find a home, he walked through the Planty park. He visited the Barbican for the last time and decided to say goodbye to his cave before he would fly away.

He looked at the dark, empty entrance, the familiar walls of the castle, the statue of the dragon, which was supposed to portray him. It was getting darker and darker but children were still playing around, climbing its back and screaming with excitement when it breathed fire once in a while. Suddenly, the dragon realized something. Adults didn't believe in dragons - but children did. At least they did here, in the heart of the old city, climbing the metal structure that looked just as dragons should.

The real creature walked past the children, invisible and ethereal like air - and then he went right into the statue. Its metal--once cold and still-- began to warm up; it took a lot of effort for the dragon not to move anything, even the tail. A little girl giggled, feeling the warmth, and hugged the dragon's neck, and then he really smiled. He found his place on earth.

Glossary:

Dragon - legendary creature, according to old tales: green, breathing fire and winged There is a legend saying that one came to Cracow and lived under the king's castle. The cave exists in reality, near the entrance there stands a black, metal statue of a dragon, which really breathes fire.

The Wawel Castle –residence of the Polish kings. Built in the Renaissance period, is one of the greatest Cracow's attractions.

Saint Mary's Basilica - most famous of Cracow's churches, built in the Middle Ages in the market square.



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WHAT WOULD WE BE WITHOUT FRIENDS?

Aleksandra Nikoniuk

17 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Żaneta Dylağ

Kraków, Poland

The weirdest thing about me is that I'm a huge museum buff. It is really strange. I know that. People my age, usually maintain that museums are incredibly boring. But I find them extremely fascinating! So when every year there is a museum night in my city, Cracow, I am the first in line. The idea of opening every museum in town during that one night has, obviously, its advantages and disadvantages.

What puts me off is the number of people coming. The lines are simply enormous. Two years ago, got into only two museums because I was standing in lines for five hours! Last year I was forced to go to my aunt's wedding that night. I was devastated. But this year is going to be completely different. I will go to every museum that I want to visit and no one is going to stop me! You probably wonder how I will achieve that? As four, very clever, British lads once sang: "with a little help from my friends", of course. I've already spoken with mine and they have all agreed to help me. They were quite skeptical at first, but I managed to convince them.

"Honey"-- said my best friend, when I touched upon this subject. "Don't you think that this whole museum obsession must stop?"

- "Please, help me and I swear that I'll never drag you to any museum again!"

"Well, since you put it that way... Agreed."

"Thank you! That can count as my birthday present." I said. And a huge smile brightened my face. The very next day, I met my friends right after school to work out a cunning plan. We decided that they would be standing in lines to five most appealing museums and I will somehow appear just before they entered. The plan seemed risky, but I was ready to take that risk.

The first museum I chose to go to was the Schindler's Factory. I was first in line when they opened the gates. I had heard unbelievable things about that museum, but I wasn't expecting it to be that extraordinary! A modern exhibition, gripping descriptions were but a few things that really amazed me. Perhaps, this could be accounted for by the fact that I am fascinated by the history of the World War II. Sadly, I couldn't stay there as long as I wanted (which would have been the whole night) because I had to run to other museums.

"What took you so long?" asked my friend when I arrived at the museum of Municipal Engineering. "I thought that you wouldn't make it".

"The Schindler's Factory is intriguingly impressive. Next year, you have to come with me!" I shouted with excitement.

“You promised me no more museums. I take your word!” he retorted.

Although I am not that much into engineering I honestly enjoyed visiting that museum. What made the exhibition even more attractive is the fact that its interactive: not only could you admire but also use displayed objects. Two other visits went smoothly as well. I met my friends when they were just before their entrance to the museum and then we enjoyed art, learned many fascinating stories about our city and had a remarkable time together.

After midnight we headed for Czartoryski Museum. It had such an extraordinary exhibition that I simply had to see. Even my friend whose attitude to the museum night is rather negative was keen on going. We stood in the line, which was unfortunately longer than we expected. Who would think that at this hour so many people would still be wandering about museums?! But we stood still and waited for our turn. Suddenly, I could hear concerned voices coming from the front door. The curator of the museum spoke loudly:

“Due to unexpected incident we need to close the museum tonight. We're very sorry for the inconvenience” The atmosphere changed suddenly. People started to feel ill at ease. They were wondering what had happened. Then, from every side of the city we could hear police sirens. I began to worry, so did my friends and everyone nearby. A girl in the crowd talking to her boyfriend said something which amounted more or less to the sensational news that “Lady with an Ermine” had just been stolen. The police commanded people to step aside and surrounded the museum.

“Do you seriously think that there has been a theft? On a night like this? - asked my friend incredulously. She simply nodded. We were completely shocked and unanimously decided to walk out from there and go straight home.

It turned out that “Lady with an Ermine” had indeed been stolen that night. After two days of investigation the thief still hadn't been found. When I reminisce about that evening, the daring theft is what I recall first of all. Still, what I appreciate most is that I had such an amazing time with my friends, who helped me fulfill my dream! I will never forget that.

GLOSSARY

Lady with an Ermine -- a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, one of his four portraits of women. Currently displayed in Cracow.

Czartoryski Museum -- museum located in Cracow in which Lady with an Ermine is being displayed. Founded by princess Izabela Czartoryska, who wanted to preserve the Polish heritage by storing her impressive art collection.

The Schindler's Factory-- another museum in Cracow, located in a former factory owned by Oskar Schindler, who saved thousands of Jews during World War II by employing them in his factories.



LOVE ON AIR

Piotr Leksander, Michał Lisowski & Mateusz Świdowski,

17 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Żaneta Dylağ

Kraków, Poland

Once upon a time there was a young boy with a great dream. He always wanted to become somebody who would change the world. Janek was his name.

Janek lived in Cracow, the city of kings and great artists. Even though he was living in such a beautiful town, he felt he was surrounded by people who did not believe in his prowess. That was the reason why he decided to leave Poland and emigrate to the USA—the land of great opportunities, where everyone supports you and cheers you up. So, he did as he decided. After a day or two of intensive preparations, he said goodbye to his country and headed for a new life.

Janek moved to Los Angeles—the so-called Paradise City where “the grass is green and the girls are pretty”, as one rock star maintained. He was trying to find a way to earn real money. He started by enrolling at the University of California.

One day he came up with an idea of setting up a private college TV channel. He involved his two best friends from the university in this enterprise.

A few years later, his business turned into a huge broadcasting incorporation and evolved into a commercial channel with a national range named CBS. He was famous all over the world and made really big money. Doing his business, he always remembered what his parents had taught him. He remained faithful and loyal to his friends. Janek was working really hard as he wanted to prove everyone that one could do anything if they believed strongly in their dream.

When people in Poland discovered that the owner of CBS is Polish, they invited him to Poland. He was to show up at the breakfast TV and share with other Poles how he had become that successful.

He had always been so occupied doing his business that the only way he could return to his fatherland was in his dreams. That was the reason why he agreed to fly to Poland immediately. So, he went straight to the airport and caught the first plane that would take him to his old country.

Once in Poland, he was struck by how Poland had undergone a huge transformation through the last 20 years of freedom, after the communist system collapsed. When Janek was leaving the country two decades ago, Poland was a backward country with a terrible infrastructure. What he saw now was a totally modern European country. Everything had changed – infrastructure, cars, and even people's mentality.

He got up at the break of dawn next day and drove to the headquarter of TVN. The journalists barraged him with lots of questions.

“Jan, how did you manage to do all this incredible work?”

It was easy to answer. He told them it was but diligent work, a belief in success and, oh well, the sheer luck of being surrounded with the right people at the right time.

“Living in America, have you ever felt homesick? Have you ever considered settling down in Poland after all those American years?”

And those were the questions he could not answer that easily. Janek started pondering. His childhood reminiscences haunted him. The eye of the camera caught his blank stare into the space. He took his ruminations to the hotel room as a heavy load. Lying in his bed, he tossed and turned until he decided to head to the hotel lounge to raise his spirits a bit.

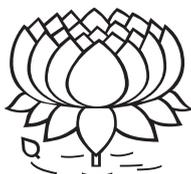
After a few sips of Johnny Walker, he noticed that his melancholy was leaving him and he began to feel better. Suddenly, on the other side of the bar Janek spotted a stunning woman staring at him from above her martini glass. A revelation dawned onto him. He made a decision.

Two years later...

Nobody would have thought that this happy man frolicking with his offspring in front of his magnificent house only two years ago was a lonely, miserable man immersed only in his work.

Glossary:

TVN – a Popular commercial TV station in Poland



Note : _____

MAGICAL KRAKÓW

Bartek Jaromin

14 years

VIII Prywatne Akademickie Liceum Ogólnokształcące

Teacher: Jolanta Jedzok

Kraków, Poland

My legs were completely sore. In addition, I had the burden of my little brother on my back. It was a long trip. I knew that it may be the wrong choice but it was the safest way. I was very hungry, but I never mentioned this. In fact, nobody knew what had happened. Maybe I am not a specialist in this domain, but I thought that it was another unpredictable Russian attack. We were already near Cracow.

A new day just started. I looked at my watch. 4:18am So early. I yawned. Now my eyes were directed towards my brother. I didn't want to wake him up, but, of course, I had to. The weather was the same as always – grim and somber. We walked through a forest.

"I think I saw a light," my brother said. I started looking around.

"Oh, I see..." I answered. We went towards it. That was an old wooden house. It was coated by moss and ivy, and it looked abandoned. We went in. There were a lot of cobwebs. I brushed them, and I saw a rocking chair moving. I approached it. Suddenly, a black cat jumped on me, scratched me, and it began to run. It ran under the chair, through a hole in the wall, and disappeared. I looked at the interior. Nothing interesting. I called my brother. He stood right behind me.

"We must go." I said. He looked at me. I saw in his eyes a request.

"Sorry." he replied with a nod. I was sad because I guessed what it was like to live as a kid in these conditions. We had already gone out, when I felt a weak breeze. I looked around. Only one window was closed. I went near the hole in the wall. It looked deep. No, I thought, and we left this spooky house. We passed a lot of forests and small villages in which we slept. Soon we reached Cracow. We met a group of people. They looked friendly.

"Who are you?" one of them asked me.

"My name is [...], I am from Cracow, and this is my younger brother [...]."

We were in a small town called Szczyrk, and when we were coming back, something strange happened.

"Have you any documents?" he asked again.

"Eeeem, yes" I gave him my passport. He looked at my picture and looked at me. My brother passed the border without control.

"Come" one of them said. We were a bit scared of those people, but we had to trust them.

We went to the Wawel Castle, to the dragon's cave. It seemed that there was their hideaway. We sat on

blankets. He gave us some water and some bread.

"We must hide from other attacks." He said "We must get gas masks, because, apparently, the Russians soon will have a new delivery of chemical weapons." He looked at us. If you want to stay here, you must work. "Sure" I thought. We heard a voice calling the man. He left the cave. I looked around. I leaned against one of the torches. Suddenly, I heard a strange noise. I saw a door hidden in the rock. Slowly, I went to it and I opened it. I saw an old tunnel. My brother ran to me, and we went to the mysterious place. We had been walking for 4 minutes when we saw something that dumbfounded us. It was a dwarf in a suit. It was a bit funny.

"What do you want?" he asked me. I didn't answer. I was shocked, and I didn't know what to do.

"At this moment we don't have any exclusive apartments, but maybe we will find something." he said.

"Who are you?" I asked him.

"Do I look like a fairy? No, so why are you asking?"

"It's a dwarf..." - my brother whispered to me.

"Ok sorry, dwa..."

"No," my brother shouted "they don't like it when someone says to them 'dwarf.'"

"OK, so what's your name?" I asked him.

"My name is Biorin." He answered "so you haven't any house in these dungeons, right?"

"Yes, but we don't have much money."

"Renting doesn't cost a lot, only 40 merms." he said.

"Are 'merms' your currency?" I asked.

"No, merms are little worms which live in the ground."

"What do they look like?" I asked again.

"Boy, don't you know what sarcasm is?" he started to laugh.

"Sorry, we only have zloty."

"Ok, let's see what we have here..." he pointed to my bag. I showed him all its content.

"Give me this glowing stick – and the house is yours." I agreed with Biorin. My brother had a second torch in his backpack. We went through the dark corridors, and when we came to the Dwarf's city, I couldn't believe my eyes. I thought that it would be a small village, and everything was made of stone. The city looked like Warsaw in 2016. It was beautiful. I was surprised that Biorin didn't know what a torch is.

"Nice place, huh?" Biorin said.

"I thought that your city would not be so big!"

"Boy, sometimes things are not as you imagine them."

We came to the house in which we had to live.

"Have a pleasant stay," the dwarf said and he went out. Suddenly, I heard a noise. I ran out of the house. I saw a smoke rising outside the window in the next house. I entered there, and I saw a Dwarf-scientist.

"Everything is fine," he told me and he coughed.

"Are you sure?" I asked him.

"Yes," he answered "definitely not."

"What's your name?"

"My name is Sinnoch, I am a scientist, and actually I am working on a time machine. But my plans don't work. I think I need an assistant."

"I am not a mechanic," I said.

"I don't need someone who will do my job. You will just give me tools and things like this. I will pay for work. How much money do you want for 1 hour?" the Dwarf asked.

"I just want some food and something to drink, for me and my brother." I answered firmly.

"All right then, tomorrow I will come to you, and I will wake you up. You must be tired. See you tomorrow."

"Bye" I said and I went back home. My brother was playing with a ball. He looked at me.

"How much time will we stay here?" he asked. I knew that he wanted to stay as long as we could.

"Go to sleep, it's already night." I said him.

"You can't know when it is night because we are underground" He began to argue.

"I have a watch, good night." I said. I was a bit angry. He wasn't my brother at all. I found him when he was young, in a desolate school, and he "stuck" to me. He is a clever kid. I fell asleep.

"Hey, wake up." Sinnoch shouted. "Today it's a good day."

"Ok, ok, wait a minute." I said, as I stretched. I don't like getting up early. I knew that I had to.

In the Dwarf city we spent about 1 week when there was a breakthrough.

"Could you give me this wrench?" The Dwarf asked me.

"Yes, sure." I answered his question. Suddenly, a big round gate started to make a strange sound.

"That's it."

"Good job." I praised him. Sinnoch gave me something and he pulled me into the portal. I stumbled on the frame and I fell down across it. Nothing happened.

"What are you doing?!" I shouted.

"I am just testing the protection. It works!" He said. I was angry and I felt relieved. "I had to do it because you wouldn't agree to do this."

"Do you want to test this gadget?" he asked me.

"No, thanks."

“Ok, I must find a volunteer.” Sinnoch said disappointed.

“Are you sure that this machine will work?” I asked. Suddenly Biorin entered the workshop. I looked at Sinnoch. We knew what we had to do.

“What is this? What are you doing?” he shouted. We pulled him into the portal. He disappeared. A moment later Biorin entered this room again.

“What is this?”

“It works!” the scientist shouted. He looked at me.

“Do you want to try?” he asked me in a friendly way.

“Yes.” I answered. “I have been trying to escape from here for some time. I entered the portal, and I left it across.”

“Oh, I forgot to give you this.” I said, and I entered again. I appeared on the small path. I saw myself walking towards Cracow. And this is the end. Because of meeting with myself, space time was broken and I was imprisoned in one of the parallel worlds. Here is a normal world with no living things. Right here I am writing my story. Maybe someone in future will be able to read it.



Note : _____

RUSSIA



OKSANA PETROVA
Gymnasium №22
Barnaul, Altai Krai, Russia

I would like my books to help people become better, obtain clearer souls, discover a love or another person... If I managed to do so, I am very happy
~ **Mikhail Aleksandrovich Sholokhov**

It is essential that a person beginning from the very early age could not only be a successor or recipient of cultural heritage, not only its deliverer but also creator and producer. Storytelling is like a small talk with universe to what's important, a way to express secret feelings and perceptions, showing personal vision of the country unique culture. It is great to try to create the story of a place where you feel happy, show the world the feelings through vivid original description, open up a world of entertainment and inspiration in the language you are learning.

Storytelling is a key to understanding between young people of other cultural backgrounds. The earlier a child defines himself as a definite culture-bearer in a multicultural community, the more actively he will share the knowledge of life he has learned at mother's knees and will accept the same handsome gifts from the kids living in different corners of the globe. The result of this cultural exchange will be mutual trust, respect and understanding between people of different countries in the future.

The book will collect stories from many countries and, of course, we understand that each of them will feel like a journey to different parts of the world and will leave us asking "what's next?" The final compilation of the stories will be only the key to continue the story of happy coexistence in the world. I hope these experiences, inspired by the international student writers, will create unforgettable emotions along the virtual trips to world culture!



Tatyana Bilan

Lunocharskogo Secondary School
Shipunovo, Altaiski Krai, Russia

Write only of what is important and eternal. ~Anton Pavlovich Chekhov

Why use storytelling? I think launching this activity is really valid for reasonable changes in the everyday routine of the English language class. It's such a delight to organize and watch hard and exciting work of children's "grey cells!" in the process of storytelling. Nothing can push them to work the hardest at reading, writing, listening, enriching their vocabulary than their desire to tell the world about things that are really important for them. What's more they learn appropriate words to attract readers' or listeners' attention, to sound nice, accurate and rational. It's a true challenge for students of far off places lacking authentic language environments. This project is a happy chance for my students to prove their creative talents, language skills, to share ideas that have lived deep inside their brains before with their peers round the world.



Dina Dmitrieva

Gymnasium №22
Barnaul, Altai Krai, Russia

Time passes, but the word remains. - Lev Nikolaevich Tolstoy

In my childhood, in the village where I was growing up, there was a tradition of gathering together and telling stories to each other, remembering the past, the good and the bad, the dead and the living. I have carried them with me through my whole life, and at times I cannot but envision a picture of my grandfather remembering something that happened to him. Our students are the children of the new epoch, and for them a simple friendly talk often seems to become a luxury. Thus it is only through real-life stories that they can learn about the true worth of most things in life and possibly find some advice they never dare to ask for.



Elena Shevchenko
Secondary School 78
Barnaul, Altai Krai, Russia

Poetry is like a bird, it ignores all frontiers. ~ Yevgeny Aleksandrovich Yevtushenko

Today we live in the global world. And we almost always can get enough information about different countries and nationalities. Most of the information is written by grown-ups. Because of their maximalism teenagers believe only in their mates. So we are looking forward to the news that the book of teenagers' stories is published! It will provide the opportunity to familiarize children with other cultures and countries. Writing stories about native cultures helps young children develop love and tolerance to their own country. What is more important they can love and have a better understanding of their motherland only if they learn and understand other cultures. Storytelling is a new and exciting way of learning a language. Today teenagers forget the beauty of written language. Writing stories is a way to help students find friends from all over the world!



*I love poetry and my country above all else in the world.
~ Fyodor Ivanovich Tyutchev*

Valentina Kovalenko
Secondary School №68
Barnaul, Altai Krai, Russia

Hi! My name is Valentina. I am a teacher of English. I do not like the idea of globalization but my students do and as the teacher I must support them. That is why I inspire them to write a fiction story about the country they live in so that other children can read them and imagine how beautiful Russia is.

I like the idea of creating the book with children's stories about the culture of their countries. Such a book might unite the teenagers and get them closer. Moreover, I think that well educated person must know the history and the culture of his/her own country as well as of others.

THE UNIQUE SIBERIAN WINTER IS THE SOUL OF RUSSIA

Olga Kachesova

14 years

Secondary school № 78

Teacher: Elena Anatol'evna Shevchenko

Barnaul, Altai Krai, Russia

Hello, friends! I'd like to tell you about a unique thing. No other place in the world has such a thing. It's the Siberian winter. It is the real truth that every season is beautiful in its own way. But the most wonderful season in Siberia is winter. It is very snowy and cold. Just look at it and you will see the empire of snow; its reign is as far as your eyes can see. It makes you blind for a couple of seconds, but after that you will distinguish the details of the landscape.



It's a merry time for both children and grown-ups. How much joy winter brings to children! They can go skating and skiing, sledging and have a fight with snowballs or making a snowman. Adults, like children, find a lot of interests for themselves in the unique Siberian winter. These interests are skiing, skating, playing hockey and snowmobile riding in the forests.

But sometimes it's very frosty. Last December the temperature dropped to - 35°C and the only thing to do at that time is to stay at home in your bed with a book or sit by the fireplace. Sometimes I watch TV, chat with my friends and of course, do my homework. The most interesting thing to do is to listen to my Granny's stories about the past. She lived in a small beautiful village not far from the woods. Together with her sisters and brothers she often went to the river to fish. As real Russians, they caught a very big fish which was about one meter long. I see that's only a joke but my Granny always makes me smile. I love her!

For people from other countries our Siberian winter is frightening and dangerous. They are afraid of coming here in winter. They cannot even imagine how we live in such conditions. Our fur coats, warm mittens and hot Russian hearts save us in the frosty Siberian winter. My granny knits mittens for every winter. And it's the best present for me for every holiday. Even such word as "valenki", "shuba" make me feel warmer during cold evenings. The colorful "polushalok" is a traditional women's clothing for winter. The bright flowers on it are like small suns on white snow.

The best time in winter is New Year. New Year is the most wonderful, cheerful and favorite holiday. Children begin to write letters to Ded Moroz (Grandfather Frost) to ask for or other presents. Only our Grandfather Frost has a granddaughter – Snowmaiden or Snegurochka. She is a beautiful and kind girl, and every child loves her. They love to sing a song about the beautiful New Year tree. Ded Moroz and Snegurochka bring New Year presents for good children and keep them under the New Year tree. Children sing a song and tell poems to make Father Frost happy.

The traditional fancy costumes for the New Year children's party are those of hares for boys and snowflakes for girls. And of course I was a snowflake in my early childhood. My town is usually decorated with ice and snow palaces, towers and the New Year tree (Novogodn'aya Yolka) is in the centre of the town. It is topped with a bright star and decorated with various sweets.

Russians also follow the tradition of listening to the New Year speech from the President on New Year's Day. There are some more fascinating traditions we keep at the time of New Year and the most popular one is the tradition of fortune telling. Many people, especially women and unmarried girls, are excited to know about their future. The main point of winter holidays is to invite guests. When Russians invite guests for a meal, the table is usually overflowing with food. The most popular traditional dishes are borsch, lovely salads, blini, pelmeni, kissel and many others which are the best dishes in the world.

Only in my country there is such a holiday as the Old New Year. It's on the 13th of January. We can get presents again, cook tasty food and have a lot of fun.

In some countries snow is a New Year's dream but we usually have a lot of snow. Everything is just sparkling with snow! Riding a troika is the best entertainment during winter, little children ride a donkey.

Sun, wind, snow and frost! I love it! Many famous Russian artists such as B.Kustodiev, I.Shishkin, A.Plastov and many others represent the beauty of winter in their works of art. A lot of poets have written beautiful poems about the Russian winter and among these poets is my favorite one.



A.S. Pushkin. Only in Russia could he create such poems! Everybody knows that the Russian winter is very long, cold, and frosty, but I would not like to live in a place where there is no snow in winter at all.

The winter months are December, January and February. But it's not about Siberia. Even in May we can see snow in the streets and in the trees. I would never change the beauty of the Siberian winter for having summer all year round. Come to our place and you will admire all the beauty yourself. First of all, don't be afraid of Russian frosts. Buy warm clothes to protect yourselves from the cold. You will get unforgettable winter experiences. Isn't Siberian winter beautiful? We are waiting for you! You are welcome!



Note : _____

THE RUSSIAN PUPILS DO NOT DAWDLE

Liza Kardash
12 years
Secondary School № 103
Barnaul, Russia.

We know that every child likes to be busy with something interesting; in other words every child has his own interests. And I can say that Russian pupils do not dawdle time away, we attend different studios and extracurricular activities. Children choose extracurricular activities according to their interests, skills and their parents' and friends' recommendations. We spend our leisure time differently. I would like to tell you about the most frequently attended studios.

The first one is the art studio. If you are fond of drawing and painting – this occupation is for you! Here the pupils learn various styles of art. Also, they create the pictures for exhibitions and competitions. It is very interesting for us to be engaged in the art studio. It is a really exciting occupation!

I would also like to mention the beading studio. Here the children learn to weave beautiful decorations: necklaces, bracelets, rings, brooches – a lot of different things! We also create the works for the competitions. Our teacher says: «The beading studio develops many skills, perseverance and patience». It is a jeweler's work, but a very interesting one.



One of handmade masterpieces

Most pupils attend the children's music school. They learn how to play musical instruments. Some children prefer to learn to play string instruments. They are the balalaika, the guitar, the dombra, the violin. Some pupils learn to play the winds: the cello, the saxophone, the flute, the fife. We also learn the keyboards: the piano and the accordion. We make school ensembles and try to play different musical compositions. It's very impressive. Not everybody can sing using the right notes, that's why the vocal studio exists. The songs are divided into folk and pop. The usual vocal is pop. The folk vocal shows the traditions and customs of the nation. Usually the ensembles wear national clothes and have national instruments. We take part in concerts which are very exciting.



The Drama is the most interesting studio. Here the pupils act out plays and stage performances. For successful performances we should be able to sing and dance, and, of course, we should be hard-working and have great fantasy and imagination. That's why the vocal pedagogues, the drama pedagogues and the choreographers teach us. This occupation develops your memory. We attend this studio with great pleasure because here we can develop our skills, show our talent and feel like real actors.

There are a lot of sports sections: football, volleyball, basketball, wrestling, boxing, athletics and figure skating. To become a professional sportsman, the children begin to attend these sections when they are 5 or 6 years old.

Another exciting occupation is swimming. Coaches teach you to swim. Swimsuit, bathing cap, glasses and sometimes flippers are the necessary equipment for any «sea» sportsman. We train in the pool. Sometimes we take part in different competitions, win prizes, and get cups. To swim like a fish in water is a blissful thing. It helps you to become strong and healthy because it develops the respiratory system.

Our boys like to attend the studio with the title «The safe wheel». Here the small boys learn to ride bikes; older boys learn to ride motorbikes and carts. The professional instructors explain the Highway Code. They also explain how different mechanisms work and teach the students how to handle the vehicles.

In conclusion, I would like to say that studios help children to define their interests, identify their talents and get new knowledge and skills.



Note : _____

THERE IS NO PLACE LIKE HOME

By Dar'ya Kuznetsova

14 years old

Gymnasium 166

Teacher: Irina Gennadevna Vidanova

Novoaltaisk, Altai Krai, Russia.

***My country, your country,
Travel East or West.
If North is good and South is better,
Which place is the best?
My country, your country,
Travel East or West.
Learn to live with one another...
One world is the best!***

My name is Kuznetsova Dasha. I am an eighth grade student. I am from Russia, from Novoaltaisk. You may believe me or you may not, but I am proud of my small town. When I was a small girl I thought of my hometown as the most beautiful place in the world. But then at the age 12-13 I began to realize that there are other places, cultures and values. The life of big cities started to attract me because of the influence of TV and Internet. I was sure that the best place to live would be a big city! Good education, new friends and places of entertainment attracted me. All my opinions have changed, after I spent my summer holidays far from my town.

Do you like to travel? Have you ever been far away from your native town or home? We begin to understand the meaning of a well know proverb "East or West, home is best" more perfectly if we leave our home for a long time or if we come back home after a long interval. Usually our daily life is full of troubles. When I say "home" I mean my family, my dearest and nearest: my mother, my granny, younger sister and brother and my great-grandmother and of course, my hometown.

I would like to say few words about my great-grandmother and you will understand me. My great-grandmother is a Hero of Socialist Labor. Her family moved to Altai in 1929. She started work in 1937, she worked as a farmer for 53 years. She has earned a lot of state awards and medals for her heroic and hard labor. She is an honorable citizen of Novoaltaisk.

We, the people living in Russia, love our country and are also proud of it, and we would like other nations to understand and love our homeland. It's very important to speak about ourselves. Most people living in small provincial towns and villages are shy of their native places. As for me, I am proud of Novoaltaisk. My town has great historical background! If you are interested in Russia and its people, you will have a good chance to visit my native town and learn more about Siberia and its people.

I think it is very important to be open toward foreign cultures, to be tolerant to other beliefs, values and nations. It is also important to read as much as you can about other cultures. I have understood that I don't

want to live anywhere else but Russia, in my native town. I was born here and I am not going to leave this place. If I go abroad, I will go there as a traveler. I will only visit new places, I'm not going to live there. There is no place like home. I can't imagine my life in another city or country without my friends, the Russian language, Russian frost and Russian cuisine. My personal story comes to its conclusion and now I want you to read a story of my native place.

Novoaltaisk is my native town. It is located in the northern part of the Altai region. If compared with such big cities as Barnaul and Biysk, Novoaltaisk is a small, modest, provincial town. It was founded as a settlement in the first half of the 18 century. The mention of this settlement can be found in the chronicles dated back to 1717. At that time a small fortress was built near Beloyarsk. It was dangerous to live there because of warlike neighboring nomadic tribes, living nearby, so a fortress appeared around this place. For a long time the fortress was both a fortification and a place of living. The first settlers were impressed by the beautiful scenery of this land. They noticed pine forests, different valuable animals and a deep river. Such a combination of natural components attracted other people who came from the Urals and began to settle on the banks of the rivers Cheremshanka and Chesnokovka. The other settlement was called Chesnokovka due to the name of the river it was built on.

The first settlers were not only brave soldiers, they were good farmers, fearless hunters and skillful foremen. Discovery of polymetal ore fields gave a push to the active development of the Altai's industry. A well – known manufacturer A.N. Demidov, obtained a permit to work ore resources in Altai. In 1729 the first plant called Kolyvano – Voskresenski was built. A. Demidov chose a sight at the mouth of the river Barnaulka to build a copper smelting plant. It was a new way for Beloyarsk people to earn their living. They began to deliver people and different useful goods to Barnaul.

When in 1915 a railroad was built, the life of the settlers changed. From year to year the settlement was growing and changing its image. In 1934 a wood manufacturing plant was put into operation. The origin of our town was industrial, but became a real industrial city during the years of the Great Patriotic War, when defensive enterprise was evacuated to Novoaltaisk from Dneprodzerzhinsk. The plant provided the front with engines and military equipments.

In 1942 the status of the town was given to the settlement. So, we consider this year the birthday of our town. The original name of our town was Chesnokovka. Then the town was renamed into Novoaltaisk in 1962.

Today the population of Novoaltaisk is about 75 thousand people with its suburbs: Beloyarsk, Bazovo, Novogorski and Tokaryovo.

There are some big plants and some smaller enterprises in our town. The largest plants are: a cardboard rubberoid plant, an iron – concrete items plant, a construction material plant, a carriage – building plant, a bakery and a creamery plant.

Despite the difficult economic situation in the country, housing construction is carried out in Novoaltaisk. Every year new buildings and modern blocks of flats appear in the town.

Specialized medical centers operate in Novoaltaisk, using modern equipment and facilities: cardiological, diagnostic. In 1995 a church was built in our town. Many Novoaltaisk people can recover their health at a health resort.

Trade has been booming in our town for the last few years. Private shops are appearing in the town, one

can buy any goods including those of well – known foreign trading houses. There is a great variety of food, vegetables, fruit and goods at the markets.

The present – day Novoaltaisk has a lot of schools, nursery schools, libraries, an art school, an art – college, a technical college, a vocational school, a department of the Altai State Technical University and an Extra – Mural Institute of Railway Transport. These educational establishments provide preparation in different professional fields.

Dozens of sports buildings are at the disposal of our sportsmen: stadiums, sport halls, sport grounds. Novoaltaisk is divided into several districts. Novoaltaisk is an important railway junction. The transport system is developing nowadays. The railway today still carries the bulk of passengers and goods. Bus routes are steadily expanding inside the town. It has become easier to get to the centre from the outskirts. Town transport carries a lot of passengers and goods.

Novoaltaisk is surrounded by a picturesque countryside. A unique band-type of pine forests of birch, pine, and spruce stretch for dozens of kilometers.

What a pleasure it is to gather a full basket of mushrooms and berries, to watch a squirrel cracking nuts, to come across a hedgehog, a hare or an elk, to listen to the songs of birds, the rustling of leaves underfoot or the silence of nature.

The history of my town is not very old, but I can be proud of it. Six thousand Novoaltaisk people took part in Great Patriotic War. Every third of them perished for their Motherland. The impressive memorial with a grey granite pillar in the town square is dedicated to the soldiers of the Great Patriotic War. The walls near the Eternal Fire keep the memory of citizens who perished in the war. Their names are written by metal on the walls. I.I. Grigorev, G.N. Chernov, A.E. Zemlyanov had the titles of the heroes of the Soviet Union. Many people come here to put flowers on their memorial. In 2012, we celebrated the 70th anniversary of my native town.

I would say that wherever I go to another country, to a big city or to a small town I understand that Novoaltaisk is the best town all over the world! If you don't believe me, come to Novoaltaisk and make sure of it! Knowledge of the Russian or English language will give you a chance to exchange information with people.

Learning English helps studying culture, history, literature and people's way of life. It is always exciting, personally rewarding and intellectually stimulating. The mix of cultures and backgrounds provides young people with an unforgettable awareness and a lifelong appreciation of each other. There is no better way to learn about another country, its customs and its people's way of life than by experiencing it firsthand. Going East, West, North or South will be easier to understand that there are many nice places, but it is always important to live in the place that makes you feel at home!

Note : _____

SEE REMOTENESS FROM A NEW PERSPECTIVE

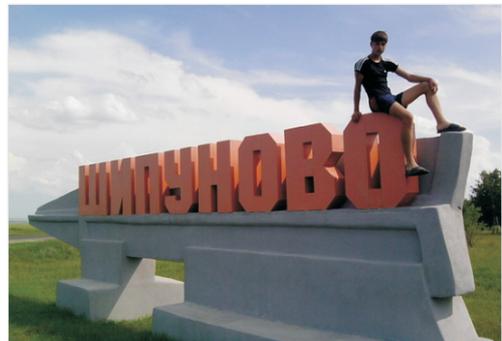
Polina Tretyakova

16 years

Lunocharskogo Secondary School
Shipunovo, Russia

In a world where we are buffeted with alteration, where “progress” seems to be clearing land to build another large parking lot ... there is a corner of quietness and stability where everything takes place at its own speed, little by little, bit by bit. There are no ruins of historical castles and towers, no modern skyscrapers, no luxurious vehicles, no super service here, but...no noise, no haste, and no polluted air.

Three hours' coach trip across 180 kilometers of flat steppes to the southwest, off full-of-life regional city Barnaul, and you are in the geographic heart of Altai, a wonderful oasis of emerald grassy sloping hills, 56 blue-eyed lakes and 11 sparkling rivers of the Shipunovsky region.



The tender charm of this quaint place embraces the visitors almost immediately. It is covered with modest field flowers: forget-me-nots, bells and lilies-of-the-valley; full of the magic songs of nightingales and skylarks; the roarings of first thunderstorms in spring; filled with unforgettable smells of wormwood, ripe crops and milk in summer; watered by the longest Altai river the Alei (882 km) and rich in the fish Charysh. It will help you see remoteness from a new perspective.

Some people say that the word “Shipunovo” originates from the last name of its first settler, others affirm that it was called after a rare species of wild geese inhabiting our lakes centuries ago.

Who is right and more correct? I prefer the second variant. It is more romantic, isn't it? This area is a cradle of my childhood. A rather spacious «cradle» I would say: 24000 square kilometers! The six European states: Monaco, San-Marino, Liechtenstein, Luxemburg, Andorra, Malta and some more could make themselves comfortable on its territory.



Here you'll be amazed by the beautiful simplicity of warm, tidy and cozy log-houses built at the edge of the birch-groves. The traditional white-legged Russian trees wave

their tender green branches -"arms" inviting you to walk barefoot along its soft grassy paths.

...Imagine a long winter evening! The logs are merrily crackling in the stove; it is warm and comfortable in the room. Breathe in the smell of baking bread! All its ingredients: wheat flour, sugar, sunflower seed oil, hop are grown in the fields of my area by my countrymen. Help yourself to tasty and healthy food: a mug of milk, a loaf of homemade bread and golden honey! Take granny's spindle in your hands! Don't be afraid! Move it! One, two... One more attempt! The spindle can make miracles, masterpieces in the hands of Russian handy women. During long winter evenings they are busy with fine-needle work, embroidering the green leaves of birches, red sunrays, blue clouds on the towels, pillowslips, bed-covers that turn the rooms into flourishing summer meadows. Their men are very skillful in carpentry, carving, and fretwork. You can see the best woodworks of Nikolai Rudnikov, Peotr Romanov, the finest paintings of our local artists Alexey Gikal, Sergey Bozhenko, Alexander Rusakov in our museum of Culture and Lore that is located in the center of Shipunovo. It worth seeing! When I was a child, listening to my granny's songs and fairy-tales, I was also taught to knit, to make clay toys etc. Thus skills of my forefathers, their love for Motherland got passed on to me.

Welcome to Shipunovo! Enjoy an unforgettable place of safety, beauty and craft!

So, what is the real treasure of my native place? It's not a secret! If at first you arrive here to make out new places; you'll come back soon because of your interest of the special talented faces of my countrymen. We always keep lights on for our guests!



Note : _____

WITH ALL MY HEART

Sofia Valova

13 years old

Gymnazium 22

Teacher: Oksana Petrova

Barnaul, Russia

You cannot understand Russia with your mind ...- Fedor Tiutchev

I sometimes think that our life is like a big bag of presents, and you could never guess what you can take out of it next time. Life should be lived, and as you do it, you pull out one thing after another. I can be very happy with what I get, but I can also wish I had never come close to this bag. For us, Russians, there is something very special about this bag of surprises: it is what we feel when we receive our small «gifts». Every time something positive happens in my private life, I get a feeling that I am the luckiest person who is ready to kiss everyone around and cannot stop smiling. When a misfortune is on my way, I am the first to cry and ask the destiny why it has chosen me.

It seems to me, Russian people feel some things in their life very sharply. We say everything to heart, although we do not show it. If you come to my city, Barnaul, do not expect to see only the smiling careless crowd. You will watch the faces, which seem to show that every person has a very heavy load of problems on his shoulders. However, if you have a chance to notice a smile, be sure, you are lucky, because this smile is a rare case and it will be really sincere. It can be funny, but some people blame it on the climate, others say this is the national character. I am not a specialist, but I am a Russian, and I suppose, for better or worse, we are a nation that is riding on a swing of true emotions.

When people feel emotions, they usually want to express them. Maybe, that is why Russia is a motherland of many writers. So, the world is proud of Pushkin, Dostoevsky and a long list of authors whose literary heritage we study at literature classes. Time goes by, but the feelings we experience do not run out, especially the feelings of young people. I have an idea that writing is the best and the least dangerous way to express them. Some of my friends are fond of poetry, and I prefer to write stories. I know that my fiction stories are an opportunity to get free of something inside me, and try to create a better world in the form of a text.

The Russian language is also a language of great emotional contrasts, and I have seen it in many situations. Imagine, a person knocks with a hammer on the finger, suddenly sees an old friend, sees a not very skillful young driver on the road or watches the match when the favorite hockey team wins. What common things can you find in these situations? Right, it is the interjections and words of emotions. I do not want to write them all here, but you can believe me, that there are so many of them. Without them it is very difficult for Russians to live their lives fully. If you ever get a wish to learn what we really feel, you should try to learn the Russian language or at least these emotional words.

But you do not need to go too far and learn one of these literary phrases right now. This is the title of my

story, and Russian people do everything *with all their heart or from the bottom of their heart*. I often notice that this phrase is the best characteristic of my friends, family and even of the passers-by. As a matter of fact, people usually say this phrase in Russia when they really want to express their sincere feelings. They can want to congratulate somebody or wish something good to a person they love. Wishes can be different, like people, and every time they are also with all one's heart. However a great number of people in Russia are quite kind and friendly *deep in their heart*, and I recommend you not to judge us by our appearance.

I have already said that Russian people are sincere in everything. There are some emotions that you can feel in any country, and any place, but for Russians these are the feelings that make sense of life. The first feeling is certainly love. When Russians love with all their heart, they do not see the reasons or borders. They love, like it is the last day of their life. So, we have a lot of women who marry once, twice and even seven times because they want to find their true love and feel for men with all their heart. I can give endless examples of how we show our feelings. The brightest of them is often on my way to school, right on the pathways. These are the phrases under somebody's windows, which are often written in capital letters that say *I love you, my dear Jenya! or Marry me!* When I see them, I always smile, as I think how pleasant it is to open your eyes and see that someone is in love with you. You can often see these phrases in English!

Feelings can be different. Love can become hatred very easily, just at one moment. Then it is very difficult to cope with. It may be a mistake, but I have seen that envy is the negative emotion that some Russian people share. It is not on the surface, and it is not aggressive, but it is, and I do not think there is any sense to deny it. We are all humans, and when someone gets what a person wants, he feels offended, lost and, after all, very jealous of success.

This can be very elementary. For example, when a student studies well at school, his or her classmates often do not forget to remind about this, thinking they can do anything. In Russian school this is also very common, but there is a good old tradition of cheating, when the students copy the homework before classes. In my school there were some situations when I did not give my completed homework for my classmates to copy, and the feeling of offence was so deep, that I could see bunch of hatred and envy together in their eyes at the moment. I do not support this Russian tradition, and I do not recommend it to other people.

Russian people feel with their heart, and they feel sincerely deep inside. When we happen to fall in love, for example, we cannot sometimes be sensible to solve problems, see the truth or understand what is what. Maybe, it is our greatest problem and mistake. I want to ask you to try to understand and take us as we are. If you make a friend with a Russian, you will make a friend with a person you can visit any time and at any moment.



Note : _____

USA

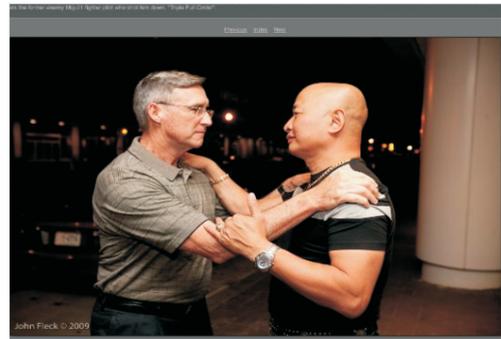


Allyson Daly
allysondaly@wcps.org
Eastern Wayne High School,
Goldsboro, North Carolina
USA

You are the hero of your own story. ~Joseph Campbell

Although stories are important because they teach us about culture, although they teach us what it means to be human, and although they pass down history from generation to generation, these reasons are not why we love them. We love them because they hook us and make us feel more alive. That is their power. I love stories! I have always loved them, especially because I had the most wonderful storyteller in my family. As a little girl, my dad would tell us stories that made the hair stand up on the back of my neck. The hero in his stories was often running through the jungle, getting chased by someone who wanted to hurt him. As he was running, he was hit in the face and body by plants and bugs. My dad would make slapping sounds against his chest to make the story come alive and my brothers and cousins and I would be spellbound. To be spellbound means that what he was doing seemed like magic to us; we couldn't look away. I thought at the time that he was creating these stories from his imagination I did not know it when I was eight, but my dad was a reconnaissance navigator for the F-4, fighter airplane in the Vietnam War. Reconnaissance missions were those where the guns were taken off the airplane and in their place cameras were put to take pictures of activities on the ground. While he was trying to take pictures over Laos in his airplane, he was shot down by a North Vietnamese pilot, who was flying a MIG, a Russian made fighter airplane. As his airplane was breaking apart, exploding and twisting, he and the pilot were separated over a deep valley. His parachute caught at the top of the jungle, about 130 feet above the ground. As he was dangling in the tree, his plane was burning beneath him. His seat had fallen all the way down breaking branches in a column, creating a chimney effect. The smoke, birds, and bugs all tried to escape through the path his seat had created and were hitting and choking him as they escaped. After he got to the ground, he was chased through the jungle and had to hide so as not to be caught. As the enemy soldiers fired their rifles into the jungle, the buckshot sprayed out and he could hear them patter on the leaves around him. That is how close he was to being caught! He was rescued by a helicopter pilot at the same moment that an enemy soldier found him and watched him jump to safety. Now I know that the stories he told us when we were little were his way of sharing the scariest experience of his life, in a way that was safe, because until recently, he never talked about what happened to him in Vietnam.

I am sharing this with you because what has happened to him in the last three years has been the most amazing story that I have ever witnessed. Thirty-seven years after my father's rescue, he got a call that the Vietnamese pilot who shot him down wanted to meet him. At first my dad was not sure that he wanted to do that. He hadn't wanted to think about it at all, and now he would have to talk to the person who almost took his life. The pilot's name is Hong My. this is what it looked like when they met: In that moment, both Hong My and my dad, John Stiles, felt a flood of relief—relief that they had both survived, relief that they could meet in that moment and



forgive each other, relief that they could build a new friendship. And they have. Hong My has said, “We were never enemies; we were just soldiers doing our jobs.” Together they have told their story to many people in the United States and some people in Vietnam. Through the power of the story, the fear of that moment has been released and a profound healing, joy, and friendship has entered my father's life. The more he tells his story to the public, the more soldiers come up to him and say “thank you.” Facing his fear and talking about it helps other people face and cope with their fears. Whether our stories are true or the fiction that leads us to the truth, we know that when we face our fears, we open ourselves up to new possibilities. In these three stories from Eastern Wayne High School students, two of the stories are set in the time of kings and queens, but you can see each student's real concern within them. In Tomeeka's story, a young man feels that his parents are too strict and he wants to be free, so he breaks their rules. His parents jump to the wrong conclusion too soon. In Mary's story, a simple man cannot think of a story to please his ruler, a queen who will kill him if he does not have a good one. Doesn't this sound like a student who is worried about thinking of a good story for a good grade? (The character of the queen was greatly exaggerated; I do not scare my students into being good writers, but I do sometimes laugh at their devices.) The third student, by Chinese student Minyi He, shows a young girl who has moved from one school to another and how she must open herself up to new people and experiences to feel the “warmth from real friendship.”

We offer a special thank you to Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska, Mamta Kanti Kumar and Julia Perkowski; by creating this volume you have made a space where we are all speakers and listeners, storytellers and members of the audience. Only epic heroes take on the impossible task (managing nineteen international teachers, their students, all 12-17 years old, and finishing the end of the year chaos) to bring back a boon, or gift to the community (civilized, educated children). Take a bow, epic heroes.

Individually, we created our own stories, but together we are also a part of a collective, larger story, one that moves us from viewing people as other than ourselves to participating in shaping our future. We are writing a new story, one of discovery and mutual respect. The gift you have given us by connecting us together is a powerful story that gives me hope.



CATHERINE MEIN
Ballard High School
Huxley, IA

I think story writing is a brilliant way for students' to share their lives and their cultures with others. We all tell stories, about ourselves, our friends, our families, and so writing a story is an extension of what we do every day. Yet, it is in those everyday actions, those everyday stories, that our cultures can be seen and better understood.



JULIA PERLOWSKI
Pompano Beach High School,
Broward County, Florida
USA

Because there is a natural storytelling urge and ability in all human beings, even just a little nurturing of this impulse can bring about astonishing and delightful results. - Nancy Mellon



Denise Ghiloni
Remington Middle School, Franklin, MA
USA

Storytelling's Rewards

Getting middle school students to read can be a challenge at times, which is ironic because they love to hear stories. Although it may be their way of getting out of a few minutes of class time, students' ears genuinely perk up when teachers incorporate a personal anecdote or human interest story into the course of the class. Although it can be a challenge bridging the innate desire to hear a story with the implementation of reading the assigned pages of homework, the benefits cross into so many avenues of life.

It starts at an early age- who doesn't recall a favorite childhood story being read to them or the first book that they were able to read alone? Listening in as adults read followed by the magical moment of putting words together independently are stepping stones that we don't always realize are happening at the time; it is often when we look back that the full impact of these characters that we met and their adventures are appreciated.

Students recently cited books such as *Harry Potter*, the *Magic Treehouse* series, *ChickaChicka Boom Boom*, and, of course, anything scribed by Dr. Seuss as stories that conjure up powerful memories and emotions. When asked why these stories stayed with them, students said that they were taught life lessons from them, their emotions were unleashed, and, perhaps best of all, they were entertained by them. Storytelling's power transcends time, both on a personal and global level.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

Mary Thornton

17 years

Eastern Wayne High School

Teacher: Allyson Daly

Goldsboro,

North Carolina, USA

Prologue

"Madame Eglantyne, it is your turn to start" stated the Host.

The nun gathered her thoughts and softly spoke,

"My story will base around nature's present

To save a man of gentle temperament,

So gather 'round and listen well

For I've a tale that I must tell.

It stars a man, on a journey he must go

And it starts in the fourteenth century or so.

The Nun's Tale

In a land where the Queen ruled with an iron fist,

Lived many people with a lack of bliss

For every year at the beginning of spring

A man was chosen to have a story to sing.

The Queen demanded a good tale to be told

Or on a stick your head would mold.

On this spring, the lottery did spit

The name of a man with little wit;

Poor Mr. Jenkins the plowman.

Mr. Jenkins was a simple man

With small ideas and little plans.

The man was virtuous, but very shy.

He always stayed out of the public eye.

It is no wonder this man could not tell

A tale that could save him from this Queen's hell,

So off he went into the woods

To find the tale that would save him for good.

Mr. Jenkins searched far and wide,

Asking all the people who would confide

The magic behind their tales' compel,
But all turned up to no avail.
Always practicing his virtues, he did persist
Until the day came when he was forced to desist.
The time to tell the tale had finally arrived
And he could either tell a tale or lie down and die.
Slowly, he walked back home in despair
While the wind gently ruffled his hair,
Then around him the leaves began to dance
And told him a story of great romance.
The leaves twirled and glowed in different hues
And the wind came together to form a muse.
The muse came in the form of an angelic little girl
Who said "Worry not for you are a pearl.
The world is not going to let a good man die,
This romance is a story the Queen cannot deny.
Go and tell the tale we sang for you
And you will live your life, pleasantly too".
Then off Mr. Jenkins ran to the Queen
To sing his story of nature's scene.
He spoke of his journey to find the perfect tale
And how when denied, he did wail
For he knew his life was coming to an end,
But the world did love him and stepped in.
It taught him the tale that he was now speaking
And to the Queen he had come leaping
For he knew that his life was saved
And the Queen was sure to be amazed.
The Queen was so pleased with the story that was told
That she paid the plowman his weight in gold
And often did the Queen want the tale retold,
Until they all grew very old.
And on quiet days, when the man sits alone,
The wind blows around him and calls him home
For a virtuous man is a gift to the earth
And nature always celebrates their worth.
Well my friends, as you can see
If you are virtuous as can be,
Your life can be truly free

Because the earth is rooting for thee”
Finished Madame Eglantyne
And due to the tales’ moral theme,
Not even the Reeve could find something negative to say,
The story told the one true way
To live and that is virtuously.

Glossary

“Ruled with an iron fist”: is an expression that means the ruler shows no mercy and is very harsh.

A plowman: is an old word for a poor farmer.

To be virtuous: is to be patient, generous, pure, kind or loving, temperate (or balanced), humble, and diligent. To be virtuous is to be a good person in these ways.

To root for: something is to support it, like how a person would root for their favorite team



Note : _____

CHARM OF THE NIGHT

Inspired by- The Canterbury Tales

Tomeeka Spruill

17 years

Eastern Wayne High School

Teacher: Allyson Daly

Goldsboro,

North Caroline, USA

Gather round, for this knight has a tale,
About a young prince who with no avail
Escaped the palace walls
And became a victim of night and its calls.
Beware of the night, my listeners
For it calls and it whispers.
Flaunting its charm.
Forever doing us harm.
The son of a king, a hard life to bear.
Sit up straight, maintain a noble air.
Hair kept neatly, clothes tight and stiff.
At times it was a hassle to even shift.
Boring meetings of war and policy.
Dull subjects to him in all honesty.
He lived a life of solitude within the castle.
A lack of freedom was his main hassle
Of his life, a story so sad
Under the constant watch of his royal dad.
When he asked for freedom, to travel, and explore
The king responded the same as before.
“My son you know that father knows best.
I would be full of shame if you joined the rest.
Stay with me and do as I do,
For when I leave this earth it will be you
Who leads these people and sits on the throne.
They will look to you and you alone.”
With his shoulders slumped, a look of dejection
He was fed up with this over protection.
Turning on his heel, he retired to his chamber.

It seemed that the world would forever be a stranger.
But this prince had a plan up his sleeve.
Tonight, this night he would take his leave.
A plan so great, it could not fail.
Over their eyes he would pull the veil.
It didn't take long for night to come
To dance a jig to the constant hum
Of the crickets who sang a song of love,
Heard only by the stars above.
All was silent, asleep in the town.
Except for the figure on the castle grounds.
Tonight, this night, he was finally free.
From his parents, the guards, and his nanny.
Tonight, just this once, he could have some fun.
As long as he returned before the sun.
It wasn't long before he cleared the wall.
None too agilely, he took quite a fall.
Despite this, his heart felt great.
He could have never imagined being out this late.
To his surprise, there were people everywhere.
He hoped it remain unnoticed that he was an heir.
He would surely be troubled if word reached the King.
How could he have his fun, yet not be seen?
Soon, he noticed someone calling his name .
If he was caught, it would surely ruin his game.
Only, it wasn't a guard or a member of the court.
It was an elderly woman, portly and short.
Slowly, she beckoned him to come close to her.
Her voice coming out in an eerie purr.
"You wish to go out and explore this place,
But you can't do so with such a recognizable face.
Wear this, a charm for you,
So that just this night, you will be new.
Take the appearance of another man.
Wear it as your own for a short span."
At first the prince was wary of this.
He had been warned about such a temptress.
Despite his fears, he wore the charm.
One night wouldn't do him any harm.

When he looked up, the woman was gone.
Leaving him to his adventures until dawn.
He attended a festival, danced a jig
And ate the apple from the head of a pig.
He visited a tavern full of drunken fellows
And laughed earnestly at the jokes they bellowed.
He tossed back ale with other young men
While winking slyly at the women who came in.
The fellowship lasted well in to the night,
The prince never forgetting to watch for signs of light.
It didn't take him long to notice the approaching sun,
As the remaining men left one by one.
He quickly made it to the walls of his home,
Sneaking in before the guards' roam.
Full of mirth, his night had been the best.
But he was completely exhausted and needed rest.
So tired, in fact that he failed to notice
The secret charm that resembled a lotus.
It hung around his neck, the flowered pin
And as the night wore on, it locked beneath his chin--
Giving him the permanent appearance of another's face.
No more was there a trace
Of the young prince that use to be.
No one had noticed until around half past three.
The nanny came in to prince's chamber,
And broke out in alarm at the unknown stranger.
In a flash, the guards were at her aid.
The wide eyed prince confused with their charade.
Before he knew it, the prince was seized.
The guards ignoring his cries and pleas.
He remembered the charm from the previous night
Recalling its effects in great fright
"I am the prince." he shouted in confusion and fear.
And started to panic when the necklace wouldn't tear.
It wasn't long before the King arrived
To discover the news that his son had died.
Murdered by a stranger who slept in his bed.
For this, the king would have his head.
The next part, it seems, may be hard to swallow.

For the king, in rage sent him to the gallows.
Without a second thought, the lever was pulled
With the king and the viewers' unknowingly fooled.
However, no one noticed the flower charm that fell,
Instead, they chose to watch the pale
Lifeless body swing, though the king couldn't help but gawk
The face that twisted, eyes frozen in shock
Was that of his young son.
The unthinkable he had done.

Glossary

chamber: a room, especially a bedroom

eerie: a strange feeling

charade: a game; here the prince is confused because he cannot see that his face is changed.

Gallows: a place where criminals were hung as a form of punishment.



Note : _____

VIVIAN'S GROWING DIARY

Minyi He

17 years

Eastern Wayne High School

Teacher: Allyson Daly

Eastern Wayne High School

Goldsboro, North Carolina,

USA and China

Vivian was born in a rich family in New York; her father is a famous high-end jeweler. Because her birthday is the same day as her dad's, she is showered with superior material gifts. Vivian studied in a private high school which required a high tuition fee each year. Moreover, the other students who also studied in that school all came from rich families. Vivian wore valuable necklaces and changed handbags every day. When she went to school, her friends were jealous of her and they always complimented Vivian on her expensive jewelry and accessories. However, students liked gossiping about Vivian behind her back. Even though Vivian knew that the "Gossip Girls" were talking about her, she still wanted to be friends with these people because she thought nobody else has the qualifications to be friends with her except her schoolmates, whose families were also quite rich.

Unfortunately, a financial crisis made Vivian's father suffer from bankruptcy. Her dad lost most of his wealth so they moved to a small town to restart their lives. Trying to save face, Vivian told her friends that she wanted to travel instead of studying at school. Her friends felt this was a strange reason for her to leave school, but they did not really care what happened to Vivian because they thought they just lost a person to gossip about rather than a friend. Ten days later, Vivian moved to a really small town called Roseland. A river ran peacefully through the edge of town, although it had little pale yellow sand in the water, you were still able to see the fish that were swimming and hiding behind the rocks. The fields melted into dense forest, then rose into sharp peaks. A few farmers were working on their lands. Everything was slow and steady. Everyone was happy in this atmosphere, but, Vivian did not like it at all. There was no large shopping mall, fancy restaurants, or rich people. She wanted to leave and go back to New York. Tomorrow would be her first day in a new public school. She did not sleep all night. She lay awake with her nervousness and restlessness.

"Hey, what's your name?"

"My name is Emily. Where are you from?" Emily was Vivian's classmate. She felt excited about seeing a new student.

"My name is Vivian." Vivian said coldly, and then turned away. She did not want to talk to Emily.

At that time, Emily's friend came close to them, and he said, "I am Ben, nice to meet you girl."

Vivian just smiled a little constrainedly and did not say anything.

"Why is she so cool? It is weird . . ." Emily and Ben were whispering quietly.

"Ling, ling, ling!" It was time to begin class. The teacher began to tell students they would have a soccer competition next month and she hoped everybody would participate in it. All the students were planning for

the competition and expecting it to be good fun, except for Vivian. She did not want to join them because she thought that it would be stupid to play with them.

“Do you want to go to soccer practice with us this afternoon?” Emily said.

“Um . . .” Emily hesitated.

“See you at 4 o'clock on the playground.” Emily packed up her books and got ready to leave, not giving Vivian time to reply to her.

“Ok, I mean . . .” Vivian decided to go because she felt lonely and helpless.

The other students seemed to keep a distance from Vivian since they felt her to be arrogant, but Emily and Ben were good to her. They really wanted to help a new student to blend into the new environment. Everyone was ready to practice. Some of them practiced passing, others practiced catching balls that were aimed directly into the net. Meanwhile, Emily and Ben were teaching Vivian how to beat the defenders.

“Try to juggle and step over the ball. You can do it!” They encouraged Vivian to stick with them.

“Ok, I'll try.” Vivian slowly threw off her airs and put herself into the practice. She felt an extraordinary feeling—the strength of friendship.

The setting sun sank lower and lower in a lazy manner, and soon it was time to go home. “Alright, let's practice the endurance running tomorrow morning. I will meet you guys at 6 o'clock.” Ben said.

“No problem!” Vivian said cheerily. Her attitude had changed a little bit.

As the competition approached, the practice times increased in frequency. The players felt more and more nervous. While running, Vivian fell down on the ground and twisted her foot. Emily, Ben, and the rest of her classmates all came to her aid. Vivian was picked up by Ben at once and carried to the school clinic. The nurse checked Vivian's muscles and bones determining whether or not they were hurt. Luckily, Vivian just needed to pack her foot in ice, but she had to rest and could not participate in practice for a while. Seeing the sweat on Ben's forehead, Vivian suddenly felt her pain dissipate. By this time, her classmates had come to the clinic to ask if Vivian if needed help. This behavior touched Vivian's heart deeply. She was on the verge of tears as she said thanked them. At that moment, she realized the meaning of real friendship. She began to reflect on her manner when she first came to the school. She felt regret and hoped she would have time to correct her faults. Her values changed totally. After a few days of icing, Vivian's foot recovered and she rejoined the practice immediately.

Next week was competition time. During the competition, Vivian and her classmates coordinated in harmony and really did a great job. Vivian even scored a wonderful goal which helped their team win the competition. Everyone was so excited and congratulated Vivian on her good shot. They jumped with joy and surrounded Vivian to dance and sing. Vivian smiled from ear to ear and gave everyone a high five! That day was the most memorable day for Vivian.

From that day onwards, Vivian knew that what was important was not luxuries but friendship between her and her classmates. She knew that in order for someone to be a friend, that person must be kind and supportive. A friend is a person who shares your happiness, anger, and sadness, and is there when you are in need. Vivian was glad that her dad had brought her to Roseland so that she could know what real friendship is. She would be happy to live here always.

Glossary

To save face: is a phrase that means worth in the eyes of others; dignity.

STEREOTYPING THE SCHOOL

Raveena Dookhan

Teachers: Denise Ghiloni & Emily Ambrose
Franklin, Massachusetts,
USA

Today was just like any other spring day at my school. Kids walked in wearing light jackets of all different colors as they chatted aimlessly with their friends by their sides. Girls are making wild gestures with their hands to exaggerate their points while boys simply high-fived each other as they passed by. There were all sorts of students; some were tall, some were short, some fair and some tanned. They all wore different brands of clothes too, the basic outfit was the same, but the shirts were proudly displayed with known names such as Abercrombie and Fitch or American Eagle. The school itself was the natural red color of the bricks that made up the walls and it had floor-length windows all throughout the second story of the building. There was a normal concrete walkway leading the way to the door from the small, separated area of the parking lot where buses dropped off more and more kids.

Entering the glass door that lead the way into my school, I stayed to the left, taking the stairs two at a time. Dodging the students entering the seventh grade hall from the left, I made my way down to my locker at the very end of the hall. Shoving some elbows out of my way and trying my best to avoid stepping on the kids kneeling on the floor, I finally reached my locker. Automatically putting in the three digit combination, I swung my backpack off my shoulder and shoved it into one of the few blue lockers that contrasted greatly with the regular grey ones. Grabbing my books, I rushed off to my first class as I practically leapt down the stairs and rushed into the cafeteria. Making my way onto the stage, I took my normal seat at the back of the class and scanned the crowd of people goofing around with their friends instead of waiting for the teacher.

The first group of people my eyes caught was the over-achievers. They were the ones that took singing classes outside of school as well as drama classes. No matter what went on in the school, they were always the first to volunteer and were always the first to donate when it came to fundraisers. They are the ones you will see in the student council and in the stage crew for any show, whether they are in it or not. But they were also very social in my school. They could talk to anyone and everyone. They know how to joke around and be silly as well as they know how to be serious and helpful. They wore the same types of clothing as everyone else in the school and were hard to pick out of a crowd at first glance. You would have to have talked to them at least once to know what stereotype they would fit into.

The second group of people I noticed was the four boys of the seventh grade chorus. They were all talented and were all exceptional when it came to singing. They could match any notes given to them as long as it was in their range. The only problem was that they didn't like to listen to the teacher. She would lecture them every day about not distracting the others or being so loud in the class, but it always fell on deaf ears. They joke and played pranks whenever they could and they weren't afraid to make fools of

themselves in public. When there was an up-beat song we sung or on those rare occasions we got to sing a pop song, they would dance as they sung. They would create new beats to add on to our songs and they were always up for a challenge when it came to the chorus. The only fault about this group was that they only hung out together in this chorus class, and that was it. When the teacher entered the classroom, kids quickly took their seats and before I knew it, the class was over. My next two classes flew by and soon, I was heading towards the cafeteria again, but this time for my lunch.

Close to the entrance of the lunch room, there was a group of they shy kids. They weren't the only ones that didn't like public speaking or didn't much care for crowds, but this group of kids had certain qualities different than the rest of them. They loved to read. And they liked to write. Actually, they liked school in general and didn't mind waking up every day to learn. They loved the different experiments in science, and the new equations in math. The weird thing about this group though, was that none of them were willing to spend hours on end to get good grades like the "try hards" of the school. Sure, they studied and brought their homework in on time, but they didn't actually get high grades like most would expect. Their grades were average, and that was the end of the story.

About the "try hards" of the school, well, most people refer to them as nerds. They are scattered around in multiple groups and none of them actually stick together. They studied for hours on end on every subject, even the ones they don't like. Matter of fact, most of them don't even care for school, but all want to get good grades. This quirk about them probably comes from the fact that most of them have a parent who is a teacher or who values good grades. The thing about this group is that everyone that could be classified as a nerd has different personalities. Some of them are soft spoken and don't like having the spotlight placed on them. Others are talkative and are not afraid to say what they think or answer any question. Some, you wouldn't even think would be considered in the same group as the others as they always get into trouble and never actually get the good grades that they strive so much for.

Another group of kids well known to the other students at school are the misfits. They are the ones that have many different qualities that one would think someone couldn't have some of them at the same time. Some of them are shy in school. They don't answer many questions and they never say what they think unless called on. But what some don't know is that, when it comes to friends and family, you can't get them to shut up! They talk and laugh much more than any average kid does with their friends, and their bonds are much closer than that of any of the others in the school. Some of the kids also have hidden talents. I know of a few of them that are great at writing, and some that are great at drawing. Some of the kids in this group are actually more creative than one would think. Some are athletic too, while some are lazy and love to read. This group includes anyone that cannot be described in few words, the ones that have the characteristics of almost any group included in at least one person.

Another group that is very popular is the troublemakers. Most schools have at least one trouble maker who is always goofing around and not paying attention. One thing I have noticed about this group though, is the fact that most members are boys. Not all are boys though, as I have seen girls fool around and tune out the teacher too. This group doesn't just cause trouble in my school though. To most, they are the ones that keep things from being boring and can always lighten the mood. They know when to make a joke, and they know when to back off, making them likeable to the majority of the population at school.

A seventh type of group is the ones that are easy to spot. They are the popular kids. They are the ones that dress in clothes that are pushing the rules. The one thing about their attitudes though that is common in

most of them, is that they feel like they are everything. They think they are the best. These kids are not popular for being cool or really nice; they are known by everyone as the ones to stay away from. Not many people like hanging around them for long, but most could still have a decent conversation with them if needed.

The thing about stereotypes though, is the fact that, after awhile, they tend to cloud ones judgment. You tend to associate looks or actions with certain groups, and then automatically judge that person. It is also true that some people don't just fit into one group. Some people can be categorized into many groups, maybe even more than two or three. Some people can seem like they fit into one group, but actually belong to another. Some might even be in a group of their own. No one can know someone enough to just place them into a group when they have never even talked to them. No one deserves being thought of wrongly for being in a group that they fit into though. You never know, your next friend can be one of the members of a group you don't actually like. Besides, stereotypes are just something we use to get a feel for the people around us. Not using them, could actually bring everyone just that much closer to each other.



Note : _____

SUMMER VACATION

Catherine Giacalone

Age 14

Teachers: Denise Ghiloni & Emily Ambrose
Franklin, Massachusetts,
USA

I woke up on the first day of summer vacation with the sun in my eyes, still very tired. The music coming from iPod that I left on all night was barely audible for the noise from video game that my older brother, Sebastian, was playing downstairs.

I grabbed the pillow that fell off my bed last night while I slept and put it over my face to try and drown out the sound, but it didn't work. To make things worse, my six year old sister, Sofia, burst in and starting poking me. I lifted the corner of the pillow to glare at her.

Today, her wavy, shoulder length blonde hair was down, so the sun made it look like a golden waterfall. She was wearing a pink fairy costume; wings included, and was holding a silver, star shaped wand, which was what she was poking me with.

"You dead?" she asked me in her annoying little voice.

"If I say yes, will you go away?" I groaned in response.

"Yeah."

"Then yes, I am dead."

"Mommy, mommy! Jenny's dead!"

I decide that was the best moment to get up.

Mom walked in with a frown on her face and her grey-streaked, red brown hair tied back in a green scrunchy. Her purple t-shirt and black work out shorts were already wet with sweat from the 90 degree weather.

"Will you stop telling your sister you are dead?" She asked in her serious tone.

"But I am dead," I responded. "Dead tired."

Her glare, which felt like a hundred knives piercing my skin, shut me up.

The phone rang downstairs, so Mom left Sophia and me alone. "Great, "I thought, "she's going to ask me to play with her."

"Let's play ballerina!" Sofia started jumping around and pretending she was a ballerina, but she couldn't stay on her toes for more than five seconds.

I left the room and made my way through all the toys that Sophia had yet to put away. When I finally got downstairs, I was greeted by a loud ka-boom from grenade that had just exploded in the game Sebastian was playing. I jumped and almost knocked over my great-grandmother's lamp. Cursing, I stood up and kicked Sebastian hard in the thigh.

"Ow!" he yelled. "What did you do that for?"

"You deserved it for making me jump."

"What, you mean when that grenade exploded?! It's your fault for not being prepared."

We yelled back and forth for about ten minutes before Mom finally intervened.

"I was trying to talk to someone on the phone, but I couldn't with the two of you yelling!"

I glared at Sebastian before wandering off to the kitchen for breakfast. I opened the cupboard to pull out my favorite cereal, but all that was left was the box and the empty bag inside. I slammed the door closed and went off to find my laptop. At least Tumbler wouldn't upset me.

Tumbler was my favorite website and the place I spent most of my free time. I needed Tumbler more than Sebastian needed his video games and Sofia needed her fairy costume. Tumbler was my life.

When I finally found my laptop, it was covered in pink paint and glitter. Sophia was written across the middle of it and a cup lay on its side next to it. The entire table was wet with water, as well as my laptop.

"SOPHIA!" I yelled, my anger evident in my voice.

While I waited for her to come, I tried opening the top. The paint had dried and acted like a kind of glue, so it took a lot of strength to pry it open. The top wasn't the only thing painted. Sophia had also painted over the keys and even the screen was covered in a thick layer of purple paint.

Sophia finally came running into the room but ran away when she saw my angry face. I did what anyone else would do: I chased her. Since I am so much taller and faster than her, I caught her within the minute. I yanked her hair and had her screaming for what felt like five minutes before Mom finally came down and broke up the fight.

"Jenny's trying to make me dead!" Sophia whined.

"Sophia destroyed my laptop!" I yelled back.

"Jenny, she is only six. She doesn't know better." Of course Mom was taking her side. She always spouted the I am older nonsense and expected me to be the perfect role model, but she never yelled at Sebastian about any of that. It was obvious she hated me.

I stomped away to find Sebastian's laptop. He would never let me use it, but he was too busy playing his video game right now, so he wouldn't notice.

His laptop was on his bed, crushed. It was covered in soda and I doubted it worked anymore.

"Stupid brother," I thought. "Can't keep anything working." I stormed out of his room and found him. He was still in front of the television. I finally noticed what he was wearing. His navy blue sweat pants were rolled up to his knees and he had on a grey t-shirt. But what stood out the most was the pink headband he had around his short, chestnut hair. A closer examination revealed that it wasn't a headband at all.

“Hey, is that my blouse?!” I yelled right in his ear. He jumped and hit me in the face so hard I fell to the floor and felt warm blood streaming out of my nose. I stood up and started yelling at him again.

“Why are you wearing my blouse around your head?”

“I ran out of towels to wipe away sweat after a quick jog around the neighborhood, so I used this.” He yelled back. We almost had another yelling contest, but Mom was fast enough this time to stop us. This time, Sebastian was the one to leave. I turned to leave too, but was stopped by Mom.

“You've got to stop fighting with your siblings.”

“But-“

“No buts,” Mom interrupted me. “Start acting your age or there will be consequences.”

I walked off to the kitchen again. Noon had already come around, and I was hungry. I opened the fridge to pull out my lunch, but just as I went to grab the rest of last night's dinner, Sebastian pushed me aside and took it first.

“Give it back!” I reached for the pasta. He pushed me back.”

“No. I had it first!”

“Uh! You're so mean!” I ran off again and found a book I promised Mom I would read. I had nothing better to do, so I read for the rest of the afternoon. The book was actually pretty good. It was about a rebellious teenage girl who was trying to overcome her problems with her family and get along better with them.

There was a knock on the door. Sophia and Mom walked in. Sophia looked genuinely sorry and Mom led her to my bed. She grabbed me in a loose hug.

“I am sorry for trying to make your computer pretty,” Sophia apologized.

I hugged her back and she left. I also left and went to eat dinner. Dinner was more pasta and it tasted terrible because Mom used canned sauce instead of the sauce from the jar. After dinner, I was tired, so I went to bed.

Going through my day, I realized it wasn't so bad. Even though I never actually got to go onto the Internet, I got to read a book that was actually really good and I got Sophia to apologize. All in all, a great start to summer vacation.

Glossary:

Tumbler: A website in which you look up things and can talk to people who like the same things as you.

Scrunchy: hair elastic with ruffles on it. It was very popular in the 1970's and 80's in America.

Blouse: a nice shirt

Note : _____

THE REAL LIFE OF AN AMERICAN TEEN

Will Melfi

13 years

Teachers: Denise Ghiloni & Emily Ambrose
Franklin, Massachusetts,
USA

As Jonathan Hardin sat patiently waiting for the bell to ring, he constantly tapped his finger to some distant beat that was steady in his head. He couldn't wait, just couldn't, to get out of the hot stuffy class room and get to his baseball game.

"Jonathan? Are you paying attention?" He immediately looked up at the sound of his full name – everyone just called him John – but when he did look up, he regretted it because he looked up to see the entire class staring at him. He wasn't paying attention, his attention had lapsed the moment he entered the classroom, but now he was faced with a question, but he wasn't sure what it was. He looked at the board for help, but it was blank. He looked into the cold eyes of his eighth grade math teacher, but they were even blanker. He was losing this and he knew, so instead of resigning, like any sensible person would, he decided to do what he could and answer the rhetorical question presented to him.

"Yes Ms. Goldberg, I was paying attention." She gave a strange *hmmph* sound and starred disapprovingly down at John. Because John was not a sensible person but instead a teenager, it was then and there that he decided to improvise. He quickly glanced at his neighbor's homework assignment and saw two check marks next to their corresponding questions. He dared another look below that question and saw the number three circled clearly marking it as an answer.

"Three!" he spluttered quickly, "The answer is three." Ms. Goldberg made that same unnerving noise again and walked away shaking her head. John sighed and leaned back in his chair. He knew he had got her this time. He knew he was correct. But then why wasn't the class continuing? Why didn't they go back to their work? Horridly, he looked to his teacher, who was bending over her desk with a pink slip in her hand. Oh crap.

"Detention, Mr. Hardin. For the answer is not three, it is four, this which you would have known if you had thought to look at your own paper and not Ms. Simon's." Ms. Goldberg had returned to John's desk and handed him the slip. "Thursday at three, Principal's office." Thursday! Oh thank God! That was years away! Two whole days, in fact! John smiled up at his math teacher and bit back his fresh retort. It was at that precise moment that the bell rang dismissing the students and John shot out of his desk and swiftly left the room.

Once he got to the cooler hallway, he immediately began to crane his neck looking for Julia, his long time girlfriend. Well when he said long time, he really means two months. Although in Julia's mind, the first month didn't count because it was full of long, awkward moments and little to no talking. But they were far past that, or at least John hoped they were because it was the hardest month of his life.

He picked her out in the mass of kids and grabbed her hand. It was unusual for eighth graders to show

signs of affection in school, but Julia insisted on it. Although they've done nothing but hold hands John thought to himself each time she reminded him.

"Hey Johnny," said Julia, smiling at him. Then she noticed the pink slip. John wished he had put it away because she immediately pulled her hand away.

"Not again, John!" she said and he noticed the formality in his name.

"It wasn't my fault! She just doesn't like me, I swear!" John said in defense as Julia made a similar noise to what Ms. Goldberg made.

"When is it? It had better not be Friday!"

"It's not. It's Thursday which is good because tonight I have baseball, Wednesday I have a concert and Friday I have a wonderful night planned with the most amazing person on the planet." He slipped in that last bit hoping to melt Julia's sudden cold approach. He wasn't quite sure why she got so upset when he got a detention, but he suspected it was because of her past life as a 'bad' student. "Trust me, I'm the best person you are ever gonna meet." John nodded his agreement and they went to their separate lockers. John had to go straight to the locker room to get ready for a baseball game and he did so. Once there, he put on all of his uniform and took off all of the stress the day has caused; he needed to be fully focused for the game.

Today, they were playing a game against the other middle school in the district. That team was better than his, but he was confident in his teammates. The game started and as kids were slowly dismissed, they meandered over to the fields to watch. The kids looked despairingly at the scoreboard to see that they were losing. The innings dragged by and signs that were made for the game were forgotten in their backpacks. The ninth inning came and John was reluctant to give up now. He stepped up at bat and got ready to hit whatever came at him. The bases were loaded and the pitcher faked a throw to the first baseman but at the last second turned his momentum towards John who was waiting for this exact trickery. The ball came fast at him and smacked into his awaiting bat. The ball surged forward past the stunned pitcher, but John didn't care, he was running as fast as he could. The person on third was already home as he rounded first. The lackadaisical outfielders stood in shock as they watched the ball drop behind them. John rounded second and now everyone was at home. If he got there they would win the game. In the stands, the crowd was going wild. One of the outfielders regained his mind, picked up the ball and threw it desperately to the pitcher, but the pitcher was too far away. It dropped again right beside him. John rounded third. The pitcher regained the ball and got into position to throw it to the catcher. John was almost there. The pitcher released the ball and it soared towards home for the last time. John was three yards away. No, two yards away. The catcher caught the ball. The crowd went silent, but soon picked up again once they realized that the catcher, whoever he was, was not on the plate. But John was and John knew it. Julia was the first to embrace John and for the first time ever, they kissed. It was a good kiss as far as first kisses go. John was smiling triumphantly. He was king of the world. No, he was king of the universe.

The students' merry making lasted all night as they went to a McDonald's Restaurant to celebrate. And even the next day, they kept on cheering as John passed in the halls holding Julia's hand in reassured confidence. Even Ms. Goldberg congratulated John, even if it was a rather cold congratulation. That night was John's band concert. He was the first chair trumpet and he felt as if his solo couldn't have gone better. He even got a standing ovation from students present in the audience, and, afterwards, many parents John didn't even know came up to congratulate him on both the performance and the past baseball game. His mom had stood waiting for him to exit. He was disappointed that his dad couldn't have been there, but he understood; his dad had been working overtime ever since his mom was fired from her job. They could

just barely support themselves and their two children.

The next day of school was just as boring as the past two days have been and what was worse was that he had his detention. But at least he could look forward to his date with Julia. He was hoping it wouldn't rain. He had planned an awesome picnic and the two of them were going to go the state forest. Ever since his family had lost a lot of money, he had started to walk around in the forest more. His parents had become tired and irritable and he sometimes just needed to get away. While he went exploring, he came across this peaceful clearing that he enjoyed to be in, so that is where he planned to bring her.

He slowly made his way to the principal's office and sat in his assigned seat. He was the only one in detention. To pass the time, and instead of staring at a blank wall, he thought more in depth about their upcoming date. And everything would go according to plan.

John eventually ran out of things to think about and by the time detention was over, he was long past ready to leave. He looked at the principal, and he nodded. John stood.

"Congratulations on the game, I heard you had an excellent hit," said the Principal, Mr. Schwartz. John nodded, not looking at the man for fear of retribution. He was in detention; his Principal should not be congratulating him.

"And I saw you at the concert, you play very well. And I should know, I once played the trumpet in my middle school." John, although he promised his feet a long conversation looked up at his principal. This man, tall and built, did not look friendly, and subsequently did not look as if he was in band, but Mr. Schwartz nodded his head as if understand what was going through John's head.

"Um, I need to get going... sir," said John. Mr. Schwartz looked taken aback at the use of 'sir' but let him out nonetheless, and once outside, John practically ran for freedom. But, Mr. Schwartz managed to slip in a 'do your homework,' before John was out of earshot.

John walked all the way home. It wasn't too far, but it wasn't exactly close. He passed many neighborhoods all consisting of big, fancy houses, with fancy cars parked on fancy driveways. It was sickening to look at. The houses were huge and all had the same rectangular window with a large chandelier showing off. Again, sickening. By the time he got home, he had had enough of big fancy houses to realize that he wanted one too. He was disappointed to see that during his time at school, his house was still the same. It was small, one story with one window and one door. No showy chandelier. No shower car and a gravel driveway. He stepped inside to the usual disaster. Where there were floorboards, the creaked. All along the walls, insulation was visible. Trash and dust littered just about everywhere. The only clean room was John's. It was immaculate with fixed up walls. The rug wasn't stained and there was no dust to be found. In the corner was his bed and in the other, a crib. He walked over to it to see his cute baby brother. He picked him up and rocked him for a while, then took him downstairs to the kitchen. Dirt was sprayed across the floor. John put the baby down in his highchair, which seemed wildly out of place because it was so clean it was almost shiny. John then took some baby food and spent the next half hour trying to feed the reluctant baby.

The baby was John's brother, Josh. The two of them were the only two ever home since his dad was always working and his mom was always looking for a new job. John was always taking care of the baby and he never dared complain once. If his parents didn't work to raise money to support him, then they would be taken away, which is something John would never allow. He loved his family and he loved his life. They would make it work, somehow.



DON`T WORRY, IT`LL HAPPEN AGAIN

Claire Noonan

13 years

Teachers : Denise Ghiloni & Emily Ambrose
Franklin, Massachusetts,
USA

On Thursday morning, I woke up to the sound of my phone alarm. I hit the button to turn it off and rolled groggily out of bed. I didn't mind school. I liked learning and seeing friends, but I would rather sleep. I quickly ran to the bathroom before my sister could get to it. She was in sixth grade: two years younger than. I stuck my tongue out at her and closed the door as she came down the hall from her room.

I heard a muffled, "Hey!" but I knew she was too tired to argue with me. She wasn't used to getting up early. I quickly washed my face and ran a brush through my wavy, light brown hair. There was a knock on the door.

"Hold on!" I said. A few seconds later, the person knocked again.

"What?" I asked, teeth clenched as I wrenched the door open. I came face to face with my mom.

"Hi there. Would you like to control that attitude of yours?" she said. I wanted to let you know that I'm going to need you to take care of Luke for an hour after school."

"Fine, but I have a project due on Friday so no longer than an hour, right?" I asked, walking past her. Luke was my four year old brother.

"No longer than an hour. I'll be back from work soon enough. It might not even be an hour. Hurry up and get dressed so you can eat something before school," she yelled after me.

"Okay, Mom. I'll be down in five," I said, my voice muffled by the door. I quickly pulled on a pair of jeans and a t-shirt before sitting down on my bed to pull on my pair of black Converse sneakers. I walked upstairs and into the kitchen. I had a quick bowl of cereal before grabbing my backpack and running to the bus stop.

When the bus arrived at school, the first thing I did was search for my best friend, Cat. Her full name was Catherine, but we gave each other nicknames. Mine was Mels, short for Amelia. I spotted her in the throng of people trying to squeeze into the front doors all at once. I waved to her and she made her way over to me.

"Hey! How was your weekend?" she asked. We both started walking to the school.

"Good. I have to take care of Luke after school again today," I said.

"Ah, well. At least you have an excuse not to start homework right away" We laughed as we made our way up the stairs and down the hall. I was so caught up in our conversation that I walked right into someone. The someone happened to be Jenna. Jenna is... a friend. She used to hang out with Cat and me, but then she and Cat started to fight. It started over some boy (he moved away) and even now it continues. They

fight over the stupid things, like why I happened to walk in to Jenna by accident.

“Hey! It’s not nice to push people, Catherine! Especially into other people!” said Jenna.

“I didn’t push her. She walked into you. I’m sure it was an accident. Right, Mels” asked Cat.

“Okay, let’s not start a fight! It was an accident. Cat didn’t push me, no blaming, no fighting!”

I said, trying to stop it before it started. But it was no use. They just kept bickering. I started walking to my locker. Something would have to be done about them. This had gone on long enough.

The next day, I invited Jenna over for a sleep over. I invited Cat over too. The catch! Neither knew the other was coming. I sure hoped it would work.

When Cat arrived, I brought her up to my room. A few minutes later, the doorbell rang again.

“Who’s that?” asked Cat.

“Just wait here,” I said.

“Oh, you did not!” she shouted after me. I ignored her and ran down the stairs. I opened the door just as Jenna rang the doorbell again.

“Hello!” I said hurriedly.

“Um, hi. You seem in a rush,” she said.

“Uh yeah, sure. Come here.” I led her upstairs. Cat stood in the door frame.

“How could you do this to us?” asked Jenna. “You know we don’t like each other.”

“Yeah, that’s just mean!” said Cat.

“WE are leaving!” said Jenna.

“Yeah!” Cat said, walking beside Jenna to the door. Then they walked out. They really just walked out. Just goes to show you that middle school isn’t what grownups make it out to be.



Note : _____

THE DEATH OF A HERO

Emma Rosentrater
Ballard High School
Teacher: Catherine Mein
Huxley, IA
USA

Part One

"Are they here yet?" Abigail asked, peering out the window, searching for the white minivan that would bring her favorite person in the whole world. She pushed back the gauzy curtains as far as they would go, and pressed her eye to the glass.

"Not yet, sweetie", her mom said, caressing her hair. Unable to sit still, the little girl shuffled her feet and fidgeted. She turned when a car door appeared in the driveway. Abigail was out of the door in a matter of seconds, letting the old screen door slam behind her, and went skidding across the weathered concrete of the driveway to tackle the blonde boy who had just climbed out.

"Todd!", she screamed and ran towards him. He laughed and hugged her back. A girl about Abigail's age came around from the other side of the car, and Abigail tackled her next. "Megan!" Abigail's mom came out from old farmhouse behind them and hugged Abigail's uncle.

"Mama, can we go play in the orchard?", Abigail asked excitedly, jumping up and down with excitement.

"Sure, honey, but Todd's in charge." He looked pleased, and took off, leading them down the lane. Megan and Abigail linked arms and skipped after him.

"How old are you now, Abbey?", he asked, turning back to them, his vibrant blue eyes sparkling with laughter.

"Six. How old are you, Todd?", she asked, even though she already knew the answer.

"Me? I'm seven." He picked up a stick from the ground and twirled it like a baton. "And I'm a wizard. And-let's see... Megan, you can be the princess," he handed her a branch shaped like a scepter and tied his jacket around her neck like a cloak. "And...oh! I've got it! You can both be princesses.

You're sisters, and that over there," he pointed to a huge dead oak tree in the distance, "is the palace of the evil sorceress. She's captured your father, the king, and as the royal wizard, it's my job to protect you."

They had reached the orchard by now, and they hurried to clean up all of the fallen apples into neat piles to free the ground for running, and to use as ammunition if necessary. Todd instantly claimed the big willow tree in the middle of the orchard as his fortress, leaving Abigail and Megan to squabble for several minutes over the only two remaining climbing trees. A decision was finally reached, and they hurried back over to Todd to see how their game would progress.

"Okay, first we have to avoid being captured by the sorceress' army, and we must flee to safety."

They began to run about the orchard in no apparent order, randomly weaving through trees, slipping and sliding, and pulling each other along as if their lives really did depend on it. Finally, Todd led them to his "fortress" and they all hurriedly climbed it, scraping their knees in the process.

"We made it. Thank heavens you two are safe. It's tragic that I could not save your parent too."

Abigail giggled.

"You use such big words, Todd!" he looked scandalized.

"That's 'cuz I read a lot. I got some really awesome books for Christmas, and all the good writers use big words. I've even started writing some stories myself." Abigail looked intrigued.

"Really? You write stories?"

"Oh yeah," Megan piped up. "He writes really good ones. You should read them sometime. Todd looked down and shuffled his feet.

"I'm not very far, but I'll bring them next time. It's great writing my stories down. It's like they suddenly become real. Just like that evil dragon! Duck!" He pulled their heads down, and they huddled together in the tree, hoping that the evil sorceress' dragon would pass them by.

"Oh no! It's got its claws around the tree! It's going to rip the entire tree out of the ground and eat us!" They scrambled down the tree.

"Your father's only hope is if we storm the evil sorceress' castle!" Todd yelled, lifting a branch like a sword and charging into battle. Abigail and Megan followed, all three of them screaming war cries at the top of their lungs. At first Todd aimed for the old dead oak, but soon changed course, heading for the tree house in the backyard.

"Oh no! The evil sorceress has sent her army of magicians to defeat us! "Now, we have to fight our way through this army."

They then proceeded to make short work of the army, slashing and hacking with their sticks. It was a total rout, and within minutes, the enemy was wiped out altogether. Todd the wizard then led them from the bleak wasteland of the battlefield, through the backyard and up to the tree house.

He led them up the ladder. He stopped suddenly, and turned back to them with a wicked smile on his face.

"You fools! You are just like your father! You believed me when I said I would protect you!

ahaha!" Abigail gasped.

"You'd turn us in to the evil sorceress!" A look of great sadness crossed Todd's face: he was an excellent actor.

"You have no idea what she's promised me. She's sworn not to hurt you."

"But she does." Megan whispered, nudging Todd to signal a change in the storyline. He gave a huge, dramatic gasp.

"You liar! Traitor!" He began to beat at the air with his staff. Then, his body gave a great jerk, as if it had been struck, and he jabbed his staff upwards, into the very heart of his imaginary enemy, and toppled slowly off the tree house platform, landing softly on the leaves below with a dramatic flourish. Several seconds

passed, then Todd jumped up, and bowed elaborately.

The rest of the afternoon was spent in a similar way, acting out fairy tales of their own invention, with Todd as the main author. He was, after all, the master of tales. As the afternoon faded into soft evening twilight, they lay on their backs in the downy grass and watched the clouds roll past.

"You should write yours down, Abbey, you have such great ideas. We could get our stories published together!" "I'm gonna be an author when I grow up. Yep, that's the job for me. What else could I be? Can you see me doing anything else?" Both Abigail and Megan assured him that, no, they could not. "It's a great job, being an author. They pay you to come up with stories, and I do that anyway. We could all be authors together. Wouldn't that be great?"

Abigail thought about that. Writing stories for a living. And suddenly she realized that there was nothing else she wanted to do with her life. Todd was better at it, of course he was, he was better at everything, but she felt that she was good enough to make a living. And who needed the money, anyway? What did she care if the whole world hated it? She would write because it was fun, and she would start the very next day. She had some very good ideas to work on. And besides, it only mattered if Todd thought they were good. "Kids! Suppertime!" They heard Abigail's mom's voice drifting down the lane. As they reached the porch, they looked out into the deepening twilight. It was just another day of summer for them. In a couple weeks, summer would be over, and they would not see each other for another year, but that was alright, because nothing would ever change between them.

"There's the old dresses in the chest in the basement. We could have a ball after super." Abigail suggested. "Oooh, yes!" Squealed Megan, "I get the red dress!" Todd grinned.

"I think there's was a pretty cool suit just my size. And the basement is perfect for a castle dungeon."

They hurried inside, the old screen door slamming shut behind them.

Part Two

Ten years passes faster than anyone expects. Abigail stands on the old porch and waits for the white minivan to come, as it always does. Nowadays, she only sees her cousins once a year, it has been that way for the last four years. She leans her head against the hot siding of the house, and thinks about a complicated twist in the story she is writing right now. She's got writer's block, but she hopes Todd will help her iron that out. He always has in the past. Or he did; she hasn't asked him about writing in a few years, but she's confident he will help her now.

A shiny new black SUV pulls silently into the driveway, and Abigail leaps off the porch to greet her cousins. Her uncle and aunt get out, but the back doors stay closed. Finally, there is a muffled exclamation, and Megan leaps out, and runs to hug Abigail. She has grown taller, and her body is no longer a flat line, but she is just the same as ever. Slowly, Todd gets out, holding hands with a strange girl Abigail has never seen before.

"Abigail, meet my G.F. Casey." Todd gestures towards the girl. His hair is no longer blonde, time has faded it to a ginger, and his eyes are more gray than blue now. Casey is blonde with an unmistakable air of a cheerleader about her. She pops a bubble in her gum.

"Hi." An attitude of 'I-could-care-less' hangs about her like a cloud.

"Hi." Abigail shuffles her feet, wishing Todd would let go of Casey's hand. It just makes the whole situation more uncomfortable.

"Oh, you're here!" Abigail's mom comes bustling out the front door. "Mike's lighting the bonfire out back. Megan, Abigail, why don't you set up more chairs? Todd brushes past her, leading Casey into the backyard, without so much as a backward glance, still gripping tightly to Casey's hand.

Megan and Abigail set up more chairs, Abigail muttering under her breath, but not daring to ask the question she desperately wants answered. 'What happened to my Todd?' They go and sit by the fire, taking seats near Todd and Casey, who are discussing one thing or another, but abruptly stop when the girls sit down. There's an awkward silence.

"So, have you read that new book I was telling you about?" Abigail asks, fishing for conversation.

"No. I really don't have time to read anymore.

"Really?" Abigail asks taken aback. "What are you working on writing right now? You haven't been responding to my emails."

"Oh, well," He rubs the back of his neck, "I don't write anymore."

"What?" Abigail demands, trying to steady herself with her hand gripping the arms of her folding chair, and her world shifts on its axis. Casey leans across Todd.

"He's not an author anymore. He's an actor. He's in all the school plays." Abigail stares at him incredulously, while Megan shuffles her feet in the dirt, Casey looks at Todd adoringly, and he pokes her nose.

"Oh yeah, you know after high school, he's going to Broadway. Can't sit around and write all day. Can you actually imagine someone doing that?"

"Shh, Casey, that's a secret." He pokes her stomach. There is another awkward silence. Suddenly, as if he can't take another second, Todd gets up, pulling Casey with him, and they go to stand by the fire.

Megan turns to Abigail. "Come on, let's get out of here. Megan pulls Abigail towards the house.

As they go, Abigail turns back to glare at Todd's back, wishing she could scream at him. All of the things she longs to say bubble in her throat. But she says nothing, and chokes back her tears, looking as

unconcerned as ever, even though she is dying on the inside. The screen door slams with a bang of finality, and Abigail hears it crack and break. She casts one last look at the boy who was once her hero, then slams the inside door, hiding him from view.



Note : _____

ATMOS AND VOID

Emily Soley

Pompano Beach High School

Teacher: Julia Perlowski

Broward County,

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At some point, he careened off the track and into space. All he felt, all he was, was atoms and void, as it was meant to be.

But that's not how the story started. That's how it ended--in cold, empty air, air that lacked the definitive quality that made it air, air that was at once less and more than it should be.

"I'm so glad you're doing this," she said as she hurried him into the lab, smiling at him in what he imagined was a private way. "Not many people would dare--" "Dr. Hayes?" someone called.

"Just a second. Saul, strip down, the experimental garb is right beside your chair." *That's why I love her*, he thought. *She can use strip down and experimental garb in the same sentence.* He strolled over to the chair, which was wired to sense everything about him, shoving his shaking hands in his pockets. The researchers ignored him, scurrying past with clipboards and snub nosed pencils and deep lines of experience carved into their faces. As he stumbled out of his clothes, she peered at a computer leaning over the shoulder of some tall, gray-templed--

I can't love her, he kicked his tangled jeans away morosely. *She likes tall men. Other men.*

"You can remove your shoes," Gray Temples rumbled as he approached.

Saul hurriedly finished buttoning the glorified hospital gown and stepped out of his shoes, settling into the rigid backed chair. It smelled metallic, like blood. She caught his eyes as he rubbed his forearms and shrugged apologetically.

"You're a trooper," she said, and they began to wire him up to the blinking, whirring, buzzing machines. The heartbeat monitor beeped helpfully. He pretended not to be ecstatic.

Gray Temples began: "This experiment is an attempt to postulate--" She put a hand on Gray Temples' lab coat shelled shoulder (she never touched *him*).

"Basically, we want to know if the soul exists in any measurable capacity. We're going to simulate death on your body and see if anything changes between then and when the antidote is administered. You won't feel a thing."

An orderly with bloody cuticles taped the final tube in place on his left arm and stepped away. She smiled. "This is actually a major part of history: the first human trial of simulated death."

Her eyes glowed. He swallowed his fear.

“Safe trial,” Gray Temples corrected. “Well, as far as we know.”

Alarmed, he snapped his head around to stare at the researchers. “Wait, wha--”

“Saul, are you ready?” she asked, stepping behind the control board.

“Well, yeah, but--”

“Good,” she flipped a switch and green liquid seeped into his arm. “Saul? I love you. Just in case.” *Oh my God*, he thought, and then, nothing.

It was like lying in bed in those last moments before sleep, just aware enough to wonder what skulked invisible to closed eyes, teeth flashing, eyes sharpened, breath shadowed, ready to cross the expanse of the universe to lay one cold talon on his heart. He waited for his eyes to open so he could tell himself there was nothing waiting in the darkness pushing against his eyelids. Nothing happened. His heart quaked. Had he lost control of his body? What if they had really killed him? He had to open his eyes, know he still could. He focused all of his energy on his eyes with the simple imperative: *open*.

Nothing happened; he had no eyes to open. Before he could process the realization, he felt the darkness disappear and was suddenly in his body, his eyes wide open and his limbs shaking.

“Good first run,” she said. “Ready for trial two?”

“Uhm.”

“Three, two, one--”

He was back in the nothing. Not nothing in the way it had ever been but actual, literal, lack-of substance-and-space nothing, so total there was no chance there could ever be anything. There was no darkness, only lack of light. Never had he realized how indisputable *something* was. For the first time in his life, there was no monster blowing bitter breath behind him. Nothing to fear but his own mind: the most terrifying of all things. He prompted his arms to stretch forward, and found that he had no body to direct. Immediately he was aware that he was at once everywhere and nowhere. The essence of him was not confined but free to expand infinitely into the nothing.

Again he reached, but this time, he focused on the only thing he was entirely sure existed, his mind, and directed it to find the something in the nothing. The pure force of thought combusted. It flew out nucleicly, powered by only his mind, which was no longer in his brain and had nothing to do but think. Tentatively, he reached for speech, for surprise, for awe but found he had no way to express what he knew.

All sensation was in fleeting images and faint impressions of impressions. Language, and with it the need to conform emotion to definitive parameters, had fled. All he was was aware. Aware that he should have been terrified, but what was there to fear? There were only thoughts.

And then there wasn't. He fell bodily into the chair, his thoughts staggering clumsily from images into words and he had many for his situation: confining, suffocating, *unnatural*. His spine arched and he screamed, reveling in the purity of it.

“Saul!” she said, shaking his body and he wanted out, out, out-- His eyes flew open and she was staring at him, glowingly human, her face stretched to accommodate her unfiltered giddy excitement. He had done that. Made her feel that. *She's beautiful*, he thought, but he knew she had taken him to that place and

pulled him out of it just as quickly. All in the name of science.

"We saw something we didn't expect, that's why we did the second trial, to make sure it wasn't a fluke. We still aren't sure if it was your body reacting to the serum or just death."

Gray Temples was pale. "Eerie."

Saul struggled to find his voice, forcing his crippled mind to connect with his body. "Let's do it again," he croaked. "See what happens."

The researchers exchanged a glance.

"What do you think?" she asked Gray Temples.

"We don't know what the effect of three doses will be. It would be interesting to see."

"What happened?" Saul asked.

"Your mass dropped--it was like something left your body," she was still glowing. It hurt his eyes. "Everything in your brain went on one hundred percent power for an instant right before shutting down. But we can't know for sure."

"On the second trial, we had to administer the antidote twice before you came out of simulated death," Gray Temples mused. "There is the potential that your body is building a resistance to the effects."

"Most likely not," Dr. Hayes said.

"Most likely."

"Ready when you are, Dr. Hayes," the orderly said.

It occurred to him that no one had asked if anything happened to him. Maybe they didn't want to know. His mind was not one of their instruments; they could not control him like their computers. His experiences were not the variable being measured. He would tell them, but what if they didn't let him go back?

"Go," she said.

This time, he closed his eyes and waited. It felt like freedom. In a flash of time he went from weak to strong, from body to mind. In the totality of nothingness, he knew how foolish humans were to spend so much time taking care of their shells and so little appreciating their substance. He went to the gym most days out of the week, but when had he ever stopped to observe his thoughts and marvel that they existed at all? And there, in that place, was the chance to fix it. He had to look. Not for the invisible creatures that terrorized him, that clawed doubt into the deep scores of regret and desire in his heart, but for the truth that had quietly awaited him since his birth, legs crossed in the depths of his mind, whispering: *come*.

He focused on taking the expanse of his consciousness and pulling it in, away from the nothing and into the *something* that was his mind. In a rush, he collapsed on the floor of... definitely somewhere. There was no discernible color or dimension to it, but there was a woman nearby--he felt her--and as he turned his mind toward her, he could feel her shape within the glowing orb of energy resting in her place. He did not know her.

"I am whoever you want me to be," she said.

But really, there was no language. He felt the tendrils of her mind touch his, a rush of images of women

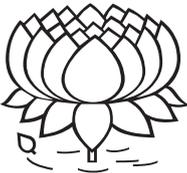
layer over his awareness of her, and then a gentle jab against his awareness of himself. His mind thought it was familiar. Hungry, he mimicked her, finding her awareness of herself and letting it see Dr. Hayes. She took the image and changed it so that it was Dr. Hayes but somehow inherently not Dr.Hayes. It was what he wanted her to be: aware of him.

He found her awareness of the room and imagined what it might be--heaven, hell, her mind. In response, she touched her awareness of the room to his, and suddenly he knew all that she knew. There was no barrier of language to create questions, misunderstanding. All there was was truth. He knew that she knew it did not matter. Their being there did not have to be explained. He was still thinking like a body. He needed to think like a... what was he? She seemed to sense the doubt and sent him an image of a mass of glowing light, pure energy pulsating colors he had no names for.

And he knew. He knew she knew, too, and in the same instant, they directed the force of their minds on each other, and the two orbs touched. It was more intimate than anything he'd ever done or dreamt of doing. He knew the entirety of her, and through her, himself. He knew all there was to her, to him, and then knew love as it was meant to be. Boundless and blind and *true*. He loved not what he imagined her to be, or what he wanted her to be, but what she was.

Their minds were one. Their separate consciousness layered over each other and bled together, and he understood what it was to be human, what no creature combined to a body could ever know. He knew. He knew that he knew, and that was all it took to be alive.

So when the pull of Earth came, he simply refused to follow it. He held onto her consciousness and together they moved into the nothing. He was no longer searching for the monsters. It did not matter if nothing was all it was. All that mattered was that they never stopped looking. And all it was atoms and void.



Note : _____

FOR ME

Phelan Kenyon-Jones
Pompano Beach High School
Teacher: Julia Perlowski
Broward County, Florida, USA

I started writing today. The words found themselves dwelling behind my quivering tongue, ready to burst forth. I wrote about the first time I saw you and how I didn't say much and regret it to this day.

I told you how much I hated you for those weeks and months of silence. I forgave you. I put you up on a pedestal, and then firmly withheld that I love you for being so down to Earth. An angel could never love the wind that caresses it as much as I thought I loved you.

I just wanted to let you know how I felt. How I trivialized my emotions because I assumed you could never be interested in me. All those hours spent listening to heartbreak in 2-4 minute intervals plagued my thoughts and swallowed up the possibility of happiness. Your smile was my sun, your eyes were my map and your laugh was just plain goofy and hurt my ears, but I still loved it. I thought I loved the idea of you, and everything you stood for, but when I told myself I stopped loving you the world caved in and the roads lost their surface. I fell.

I even depicted a scene where I threw out all my possessions and built a cabin in the woods for you. I've always wanted to live out in the woods alone. I've always wanted to live for myself. I committed adultery in that message. I turned a blind eye to my love for warm beds during winter, to my romance with running till my nerves prevailed over my anxious mind, and to my marriage to life in hopes of winning your heart. I admired your faults and downplayed what everyone thought to be your perfections. In so many words, I painted you to compete with the Mona Lisa, the unattainable girl with a smile I'd sell my soul to know the reason behind, and my heart pulsated openly behind every line.

My beating heart, and my sober eyes failed to notice my racing mind, realizing: I didn't need you. I wanted to love and to be loved. I wanted to smile. I wanted to laugh and walk with you. I fantasized about seeing you naked for the first time and how I would make you feel so content. I longed to probe under concealing blankets, to find your hands. I planned to craft handwritten letters delivered to your window, with a cute envelope and childish hearts, containing all the desires that look so good on paper.

You were the perfect girl in my misguided mind because I so desperately wanted to love. You weren't perfect, no one is perfect. I jumped the gun and I feel so sorry about it now.

I said farewell to my pen with a firm, punctuating stroke, grabbed my sweater and walked out into the dim, chilly air. My feet found their way and the sun's shine seemed brighter than usual. I started writing today, and I'll thank myself as I go to sleep tonight.

Our previous book is available at www.book.annakrzeminska.pl

Below **Mariam Bedraoui from Casablanca, Morocco presents a book review**

on *Images of International TEA Teachers and their Students*, published in 2011.

Dear Readers,

Coming across occasional alumni teachers' recollections of their best moments and understandings in an exchange program may refresh some old memories and motivate some other aspirations for a future chance to have access to a similar experience. Yet, hearing about the experience from different international voices can have a deeper impact. Going through a collection of reflections produced by an international group of alumni teachers and expert educators thrusts one into the unlimited scope of the exchange experience and allows real possibilities of sharing its instructional outcomes. Such is the force of *Images of International TEA Teachers and their Students*, a book edited by Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska, a Polish 2010 TEA alumnus, and written by her international colleague participants and their American professors and mentors. Bringing together these diverse backgrounds and perspectives, the book offers a rounded picture of an international network of educators probing new ways of improving students' learning in their different world classrooms.

Leafing over the reflections of international teachers – who come from Armenia, Bangladesh, Colombia, El Salvador, Georgia, Peru, India, Poland, Russia, Senegal – one cannot help hearing their different English accents over dinner gatherings, feeling their commitments in the micro-teaching sessions and sensing their enthusiasm over their project group works. One also gets strong visualizations of different world classrooms in Bangladesh, Senegal, Peru and Poland, and appreciates the teachers' persistent concerns about how to sustain success among their home students. The teachers' reports about both their university coursework and school internship reveal their newly-picked faiths in project work, service learning, differentiated instruction and alternative assessment as potential methods and strategies to bring innovation and creativity into their classrooms.

References to particular instances of students' work enabled and fostered by the application of some of these teaching practices in home classrooms builds up confidence in the pay-offs of international interaction and cooperation in educational issues. The correspondences launched between the Peruvian, Russian and American students suggest the readiness of the 21st Century students to go global. The impressive reports of Polish students about the service experiences related to the geography class testify to the considerable personal growth that students can achieve when their school work and community engagement are bridged together into one learning-friendly environment.

Another remarkable student activity reported from Poland is the engagement of urban students, whose English language level is relatively advanced, in training their rural peers to develop their English language through a summer camp program. This was one of the projects funded by the small grants projects, which IREX offers for both TEA and ILEP alumni so as to share their expertise with their home colleagues and students.

These images of striving teachers and students are accompanied by sound theoretical support. Three American professors and mentors contribute to the collection with lucid articles on general methodological issues. Charles A. Morgan shares a detailed day-to-day unit plan of how to help students develop their geographical literacy and analysis skills. Delwyn L. Harnisch and Shannon Cooley-Lovett outline in highly understandable ways the important connections between the major aspects of instruction—teaching, assessment and evaluation—and generously expounds on them by providing hands-on strategies and practical tips to help teachers find their ways in the implementation process. This theoretical review is fittingly rounded out by Terence Janicki's focus on the techniques of drafting professional action plans and on the skills needed to put these plans into effect.

Some American teachers contributed also with their actual presence and active participation in invigorating international classrooms. Fruitful connections and enriching interactions seem to have taken place during the visit of two US teachers to two different Polish high schools in Krakow, as they report in their contributions to the book. Over a two-weeks' journey, they had the chance to share their educational concerns and practices with different subjects teachers during workshop sessions and sometimes even in the aftermath informal talks. They were also immersed in the students' work, which at a certain time took one of the teachers down to the street to observe how the students were conducting interviews for their survey task. Students' dynamism and initiative spirit were also communicated through the video project conducted by three American students about their school to be shared by their teacher with the Polish host students. The sojourn is reported to have been a great experience with an impressive impact on the visiting teachers' visions. Besides their reinforced confidence in the young learners' abilities to creatively face the challenges of their time, both teachers emphasize the need for American curricula to incorporate more global perspectives and extend the students' interests beyond national borders.

Teachers, either in America or any other part of the world, have little chance to develop their teaching philosophies when kept constantly within the walls of their classroom. International exchange experiences of such a sort as reported in *Images of International TEA Teachers and their Students* provides teachers with vital opportunities to grow and help their learners thrive both as local and global citizens. And books of such a sort do a great favour by documenting these educational enterprises and catching the energy of wonderful persons dedicated to learning and collaboration.



Funneling [the] curiosity into the narrative is what actually releases the emotions that wrap around the facts and create the story.

~ The Dalai Lama

When children create and tell a story in their own or a second language, the language becomes theirs.

~A.Wright

The Power of International Stories: Coming of Age in the Global Village is a sequel to the 2010 book "Images of International TEA Teachers and their Students" edited by Anna Krzemińska-Kaczyńska. Whereas the first book shared the experiences of TEA international and American teachers in the program, the sequel provides a collection of short stories written by ESL students of the TEA teachers from their respective classrooms.

The book is fascinating because it not only demonstrates the international students' ability to communicate very well in written English, but also the high degree of creative talent demonstrated by them. The stories are captivating, some happy and some sad, but all are great reads.

Lawrence J. McNulty, Ph.D.

Publishing *The Power of International Stories: Coming of Age in the Global Village* was made possible by an award from the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs (ECA) of the U.S. Department of State, through a program administered by IREX (International Research & Exchanges Board). None of these organizations is responsible for the views expressed herein."

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