

Fresh Perspectives

DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH

Nancy Johnson, Chair

Matthew Newcomb, Coordinator, Composition Program

EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITY PROGRAM

Antonio Bonilla, Director

Rita Celariste, Assistant Director & Faculty Liaison

FACULTY

David Alfieri

Pat Corbett

Penny Freel

Peggy Hach

Malorie Seeley

Rachel Rigolino

WRITING CENTER COORDINATOR

Landan Gross

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Intonation by Kylie Francis



On the first day of school, my heart pounded as a boom box would during a block party. I had skipped both pre-k and kindergarten and gone directly into the first grade at Sion Hill Government School in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (a small island in the Caribbean). I smiled as I entered the class because I knew first impressions were everything. My teachers knew about me because my mother was a head teacher, so they knew my ability. As my classmates and I began to get settled, our first grade teacher asked, “Who would like to volunteer to read the first couple of

sentences from this paragraph?” My hand flew up in the air. I was a star at reading, pausing when there were comas, and stopping when there were periods. I pronounced every syllable as I was supposed to, and after I read, my teacher said, “Thank you very much, Kylie.” As a young child I enjoyed reading out loud, but soon after my journey to New York City, I would grow to dislike reading and even speaking in public.

When I was about to enter the third grade, my mother wanted me to go back to New York so that I could get better acquainted with the American culture. She believed that I would blossom in the New York City public schools since I was doing so well. She was wrong. At PS 181 in Brooklyn, my peers spoke with a sort of twang that I had only heard on television, and they acted differently around the teacher. When they greeted each other, they did a little handshake or gave a kiss on the cheek, which was new to me. When they would greet each other it was just “hi” or “hey” unlike in Saint Vincent where one would say, “wata gwan” (what’s up). My first class of the day was English. The first thing Mr. Alba, my third grade teacher, did was to take attendance. This was strange for me because on the first day at my old school, the teacher had already known who the students were because s/he had already met with parents. From this moment my heart started to pound harder.

Mr. Alba finished the list of students, and he had not mentioned my name. I raised my hand and said: “You did not say my name.”

“What is your name?”

I responded, “Kylie Francis.” I heard a few people chuckle behind me. At that time I did not understand why they were laughing, so I just carried on. My teacher did not hear me and asked me to repeat myself. I stated for the second time, “My name is Kylie Francis.” Not only did he not understand me, but he also mispronounced my name as “Kyle Francis.” Teachers pronouncing my name incorrectly happened more than once that day.

When it was time for math we had to say our multiplication tables out loud. In St. Vincent I remember my mother teaching me a song to go with my

tables. As soon as my teacher said, “Recite tables” my eyes lit up, and my hand was the first in the air. My teacher picked me to recite my times tables. I stood up, head held high, and started saying them, keeping in mind what my mother had taught me. More of my peers began to laugh and this time they pointed. I realized that they were making fun of me because I spoke differently. I did not understand; just because I had an accent they thought it was okay to tease me. I could not wait to get out of that class, so I asked to go to the bathroom, taking my backpack with me. I ran out and headed straight to the bathroom with tears dripping down my face. I sat in the bathroom with the door closed, crying. I had no idea how much time had passed, but the next thing I knew, the bell rang, and it was time to go home. I had missed both my social studies, and my science classes. Going home that day, I was thinking about what my mother would say. Would she go to the school and talk to the teacher or what?

Weeks passed, and I had yet to tell my mother what had happened to me. It was as if I was living a double life; I went from being a happy, loving, outspoken child while I was home to being a quiet and shy child at school. My teachers knew that I had potential because I initially scored high on the tests and quizzes. Soon I was no longer receiving good grades. The work that I was learning in third grade I had reviewed when I was back in St. Vincent. I no longer had the motivation to succeed because no one understood what I was saying, so I just became mute. When teachers asked me a question, I would not answer unless I could shake my head to say “yes” or “no.”

[. . .] Within a couple months eventually I learned how to speak like the children at my school. However, even to this day I find myself slipping up while pronouncing a few words “wrong.” The emotional scars that I received throughout those months did not go away as fast as my accent did. Furthermore, my tendency to speak low brings back moments from elementary school when I was ridiculed because of the way I talked.

As a Caribbean native, I have learned saying hello may be just a plain “hello” or it may be “wata gwan.” Although I was born in New York, I was raised to speak a different way in a country called Saint Vincent. My accent brought many challenges as I embarked on a new life in New York. To overcome those challenges, I started to act differently and speak differently just to fit in with the social norms. However, I now understand that there should be no reason for me to change the way I was brought up just to fit in. My struggles and the wisdom that I gained from these life experiences have made me the person that I am today.

Spanish Illiteracy by Charni-jah Clarke



My hatred of Spanish class began on August 30th 2012, my official first day of college-level Intermediate Spanish. Everyone was in a pleasant mood, including me. The sun shone in the classroom, which created a positive energy. As I took my seat in the back, I inhaled the fresh air, eager to rejoin my wonderful journey with this language. When the professor arrived

and began to speak, my mood turned from relaxed to frustrated. “¿Cómo te llamas?” she said.

I stared at my professor absent-mindedly as I tried to break down her question. In Spanish, “Como” means “How?” At least I thought so. My peers stared at me with curious eyes, waiting on my name, but the words just would not come. Seconds later I spit out, “Charni-jah,” remembering “llamas” means name.

Professor Martinez looked at me as if she was expecting more. “Charni-jah, that’s a beautiful name, but how would you say that in Spanish?”

I stared back at her, this time with a knot in my throat. “How do I introduce myself in Spanish?” I kept asking myself. Seconds, which felt like hours, passed, and she kindly moved on to the next person. Everyone giggled as if I was not there. They probably thought it was a mistake for me to be in Intermediate Spanish, but it was not. In fact, my placement was far from a mistake; I had mastered the language, or so I thought, before arriving at college.

I was introduced to Spanish in junior high school, 7th grade to be exact, although I never took it seriously. I cheated in my Spanish classes most of the time. Spanishdict.com was my best friend. Whenever I was given homework, I turned to this website, which translated English sentences into Spanish sentences. Up to this day, I am unsure if my teacher took note; if she did, she most likely did not care. However, cheating myself in class would later come back to bite me in freshman year of high school.

In 9th grade, I cheated on the first homework assignment that my teacher assigned. I used the Spanish translator to describe five sentences about myself:

Mi nombre es Charni-jah Clarke. Yo soy de la Ciudad de Nueva York. Me gusta escribir poesía y pasar tiempo con mi familia y amigos. Tengo dos hermanas y un hermano menor. Me encanta mi vida.

I do not know how, but my teacher knew I had used a Spanish translator website. Perhaps it was a teacher’s intuition. Whatever it was, she found out the truth. The day the assignment was due, my teacher pulled me to the side after class and gave me an ultimatum: either hand in my assignment and receive an “F” or rewrite the assignment without outside help. I reluctantly chose the second

option. I explained to her that I was horrible in Spanish, and that I would fail to make sense without using Spanishdict.com. She simply smiled and said, "If you review your notes from this lesson, you will be fine."

Annoyed by her optimism, I went home with a pessimistic attitude. Before I started on the assignment, I stared at the task for thirty minutes. After I realized that I was not getting anywhere, I pulled out my notes and studied them for an hour. After reviewing my notes, I began to write. To my surprise, I enjoyed writing about myself in another language. When I went to Spanish class the next day, my teacher checked my work and said "Great job." That is when I realized I was capable of mastering Spanish.

By the time sophomore year of high school came around, I was engaged in the material. My teacher even began teaching the class in Spanish, and I understood every word. Going to Spanish class now felt like going to history, my favorite subject. "¡Hola Professora! ¿Cómo estás?" is how I greeted her every day. When we did class work, she even appointed me to help others with the material we were learning. It felt great to help others in my class who were struggling. When junior year came, I was completely bathed in my new language, Spanish.

As a junior, my mastery of Spanish was increasing exponentially, to the extent where I could have survived months in a Spanish-speaking country. I even spoke to some of my friends in Spanish for fun. "¡Hola Ashley! ¿Qué haces después de la escuela?" No situation intimidated me. I knew the conjugation rules for both regular and irregular verbs in the indicative mood, including the past, present, and future tenses. This explains why I did so well on the Spanish Regents. I breezed through the questions as I remembered the vocabulary and conjugation rules. Looking back, I am shocked at how much my knowledge of this language has vacationed.

Now, here in college, every day I walk into Spanish class, I distribute negative energy. My peers, who are mostly sophomores, are engaged in this language like I once was; they raise their hands, and laugh at mistakes my professor makes. I cannot help but envy them. However, since I have not taken Spanish since junior year of high school, I do not recall much. I cannot remember conjugations for regular verbs in the present tense, let alone conjugations for the past tense. We recently had a review on the past tense conjugations for both regular and irregular words. With a straight face, I slump over the desk every class period, annoyed, "How can I ever learn to love this language again?" I ask myself repeatedly.

I wish I had continued studying Spanish after junior year. If I had, I would have been prepared for Intermediate Spanish I. I would now be engaged in learning and joining my peers in laughter after witnessing my professor make a mistake. Of course, I have thought about dropping Spanish, but my Educational Opportunity Program advisor, Clare, told me to exhaust all my options, which includes getting a tutor and studying twice as hard. I was never one to give up; therefore, my main goal is to get at least a B+ in this course to satisfy my GE requirements for a foreign language.

The sad truth is I have lost my desire to love Spanish again. I do not care and I hate being forced to be proficient in it. Once I feel like I am being forced to do something, my interest goes away. I would have never thought I would end up in this predicament. Spanish, my old love, has now become like chemistry, a subject I have always hated.

The Horror of Reading by Unique Airall (Essay Excerpt)



“Unique, read the next paragraph for me please,” my 3rd grade teacher, Ms. Howe, asked me in class. I wanted to tell her no, but I did not know what her reaction might be. I looked around the class, and then looked at her, and they all were looking back at me. That is when my stomach knotted up. I started to get really nervous, and my body started to shake. “Today, Unique!” she said. I had not read over the paragraph beforehand to see if I knew all of the words like I usually did. Many thoughts started to pop up in my mind: What if I mess up? What if I do not know how to pronounce that word? Will the students think I am dumb and laugh at me? Will Ms. Howe never call on me again because she thinks I cannot read? My heart was beating fast as I started to read.

“Jake then put may-may-may, umm what is that word?” I asked.

“It’s ‘mayonnaise,’ Unique.”

“You don’t know how to say mayonnaise?” one classmate asked. Then the students started to laugh. I felt so stupid; I knew what mayonnaise was and how mayonnaise looked, but I never paid attention to how it was spelled. So I did not recognize the word “mayonnaise.” Also, what made matters worse was that I was (and still am) terrible at spelling and pronouncing words. I was so embarrassed that I wanted to cry, but I knew that would make the students laugh more. I knew I was terrible at vocabulary and reading out loud, that is why I rarely raised my hand in class to read next, but I never thought I would be embarrassed like this. On that day in third grade, I decided I would never read out loud again without looking ahead.

Although I swore to myself that I would not read out loud again, teachers continued to call on me. This made me feel as if they were picking on me because they knew I hated to read out loud. Sometimes when I knew we were about to read in class or if I felt that the teacher was about to choose me to read, I would ask to go to the bathroom and stay out for a long time until I believed that they were done reading. If I could not escape the classroom, I would either just say “No” or act like I did not know where we were in the reading. Another strategy I used was looking down at the reading to show I was following along with the class. When teachers looked around, I knew some teachers would pick students who looked like they were not paying attention. None of these techniques were 100% effective, but sometimes I would get by. When I did make mistakes, I would laugh because it would help me feel like less of a “dummy.” [. . .]

As I got older my problem got a little more complex because teachers expected me to know more advanced words. My problem also set me back reading in general. The only time I would read was if I knew it was an easy book. Unfortunately, I was not challenging myself, so I was not learning. My lack of

reading led to a decreased vocabulary, since I did not read I was not learning many new words. [. . . .]

In my senior year of high school, I had to take earn an 85 or higher on the English Regents in order to graduate. Because I knew I would have to write two essays, I was worried during the weeks leading up to the test. I was scared I was not going to be able to graduate. On the day of the exam, my hands and legs were shaking, and I even prayed that day and put holy oil on my forehead. Two or three weeks later, everyone received their scores. I received an 87 on the exam, and I was ecstatic even though my grade was not in the 90s.

Although I am proud to have received an 87 on my English Regents, I have not yet conquered my fear of reading out loud, which I know is going to affect me in the future because I plan to be a businesswoman and open up my own businesses one day. I will have to be able to network with people and make presentations in front of potential clients. Also, I have to read my future plans for my business to others if I want to gain investors and have a successful career. One day, I hope I will conquer my fear of reading out loud.

b=d 6=9 E=F 3=8 by Hannah Linder

When I was in the eleventh grade, going to sixth period English always made me nervous. We were reading *The Great Gatsby*, and my teacher always randomly called on us to read aloud.

Usually, because she knew I had trouble reading, she never called on me. However, for some reason, one day, she called on me, thinking I should get over my fear of reading in front of the class. When I heard her say, “Hannah would you please read

next,” I automatically said “No.” For the next five minutes we argued. She did not understand why I wouldn’t read. Eventually I gave up and thought if I read quickly and quietly then I would be fine. So I read as fast as I could and as quickly as I could, but it wasn’t what she wanted. [. . .] She then had me stand up in front of the class and read. I froze. I opened my mouth but no words came out. All I wanted to do was run away and scream. I was a sixteen-year-old girl in an English class with a bunch of my friends: I was very secure with myself, but at that moment, I felt like I was six all over again in the first grade when my parents realized I had trouble reading.

Every night my first grade teacher would give us homework to read. This homework took most students about a half hour to complete but for I spent two hours on it. I would sit on the couch with my mom and read the book out loud but even simple words such as “cat” and “bat” were always a struggle. My mother would ask me to sound out a word when I didn’t know it but I would end up saying other words, and seeing other letters. I would add an “r” when there was no “r” or a “t” when there was no “t.” My mother worried as did my father, so they hired a tutor. When both of my parents saw my reading wasn’t getting any better, they decided there must be something wrong. Then one day my father told me I was going to be taken into a different room during school with a teacher, and they were going to have me read certain words. I did as I was told. A few weeks later, we got the results: there it was, I was dyslexic. I remember my father saying to me that was the one test he was happy I had failed because now I was one step closer to getting help to solve my problem.

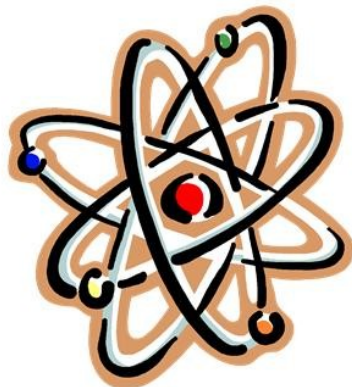
[. . .] In the eleventh grade, all that people would talk about were college essays. The common question that parents and friends asked me was, “What are you going to write your college essay on?” When I left for camp in 2011, my mother told me to come home with ideas for my college essay. All summer I thought of ideas, and when the day came, my tutor and my mother told me to read my list out loud. For every single idea I had, they had a comment. They thought I could do better or didn’t like something about my idea. I was shaking. I wanted them to be proud. I wanted my essay to be amazing like each of my siblings’ essays. I knew they had high expectations for me. Then it came to me and I screamed, “How about the fact that my name is a palindrome? and I’m dyslexic, but I do not look backwards on life?” I remember the look on my

mother's and my tutor Mrs. Brown's faces like it was yesterday. They screamed and loved it; I was so happy. When I went into school that September, I went over to the kid, Keith, who used to make fun of me and thanked him. I remember saying to him "Because of you I have a sick college essay, so thank you."

$6+10=16$. Anyone can do that math problem, but my answer may come out to be 19. Why? Because my 6 looks like a 9. Teachers used to feel bad for me because simple problems like $6+10$ would come out wrong.

When people hear I have dyslexia, the first thing they say is, "I feel terrible for you" or they ask how hard it must be, but growing up with it, I know no different. I have adapted, and I think positively about it. It has made me unique and showed me that I can become just as successful as people without dyslexia. I have discovered that many people have dyslexia: Tom Cruise, Leonardo Da Vinci, John Lennon, Cher, Bruce Jenner, John F Kennedy. Their achievements have showed me that I can be just as successful as them—all I have to do is work.

The Education Excitation by Dany Ramdhanie



Walking into my physics class, I could feel the anxiety in the air. My peers were biting their nails and nervously tapping their pencils. As I sat down, my friend asked me, “Did you study?”

“No, but I did watch four episodes of *Super Nova* last night,” I responded.

Overwhelmed with excitement, I could not wait for my first physics test to be handed out. Physics was my favorite subject, mainly because I could apply the concepts and laws to everyday life. For instance, I learned how gracefully gravity kept cars on the ground and how we could use our simple televisions to perform atomic experiments. I would often watch videos and shows about String Theory and the universe. To me these videos and shows were like studying. Catching the basic concepts of the laws of physics, I very rarely depended on my textbook or notes.

The first three weeks of physics class made me fall in love. Physics was different from all of my previous science classes. Biology, which I had taken in freshman year of high school, was interesting to me because I could apply it to the real world as well. I understood why everyone got the common cold, why trees changed color, and where babies came from. My sophomore Chemistry class, however, made me hate science. Chemistry class tried to explain biology, but just confused me. I lost interest in the subject because I could not imagine how molecules so small make up everything around us. I just barely passed the class and the Regents. Physics made me enjoy science again. I loved the class because it explained everything; physics governs the worlds of both Chemistry and Biology. Even if I was sick, I would not miss a single day of class, especially not on lab days.

That day of our first test, my friend gave me a look of surprise and said, “You call *that* studying?” My teacher began handing out the test; I nodded and thought to myself, “*Super Nova* taught me everything I need to know.”

The first three rows had their test already and were busy scribbling away; my row was next. As the test got closer, I thought about how the universe breaks its own rules. If the speed limit of the universe is the speed of light, then how is it that the universe is expanding faster than the speed of light? Bam! Six pages back and front, slapped onto my desk. As I examined the first page of the test, I could not believe it. . . I was lost. The only two things that I understood were “Name” and “Date”; after that the rest of the test was written in gibberish. Right there I began to understand how wrong I was about the test, this class, and school.

For the duration of the test I sat planning new habits. I had to become a better student if I wanted to pass the next test, pass the class, and graduate. I had

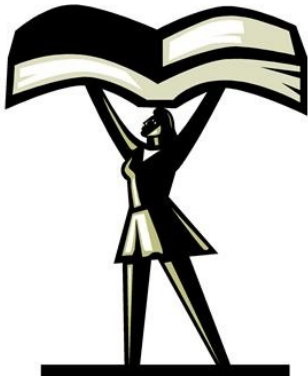
to take detailed notes and review them every day; watching *Super Nova* and all the other science shows was not studying.

I ran to my teacher as soon as the test was over and asked him for some advice. Busy collecting tests and scantrons, he gave me a short response: "You need to work harder." His advice was true; I had to stop just getting by in my classes, and start putting more effort into high school. By the time my midterm came around I was more prepared but nervous, which was a good thing. My time and nerves paid off the day I received my midterm back with a big ninety on the front.

The more I learned in physics, the more I could see its concepts and laws at work all around me. Having helped my school's technical theater department for a semester, I also applied my knowledge of physics in the theater. I used simple circuitry to repair and test out electronics, focus lights, and create new ideas for our shows. I learned quickly and my knowledge of physics gave me the edge over the other stage hands, so much so, that I was asked to supervise a private show for a decent wage. After a couple shows I became captain of the lighting and electrics crew and was responsible for teaching and training underclassman. I encouraged all of my pupils to take physics and to work hard in all their classes.

My teacher's advice to work harder, and my love for an academic subject helped me succeed in both physics class and the real world. Physics class made me realize that hard work pays off inside and outside of the classroom. It helped me become more focused in high school and taught me academic discipline.

She Who Influenced and Inspired Me by Paola Vargas



The imaginative narrative essay, filled with words, started with: “bitch.” The word was quickly crossed out and replaced with “beach.” I stared up at the woman who was marking my paper. Slim with black, messy hair, and wild blue eyes, she stood six feet tall. My English teacher’s pen was moving at the speed of light, not hesitant at all, and I noticed that Ms. Free had almost managed to either mark or cross out every single word on my essay. She looked up at me and our eyes met, but then her face grew concerned. At the same time, she moved her

hand from my notebook to my face. Then I realized that tears were streaming down my face like an unexpected storm; I could not do anything to prevent them. Instead of being enraged for letting myself show emotion, I cried like I had never done before. That is the moment when I discovered Ms. Free was going to be someone special in my life.

When I began middle school as a newly-arrived student from Dominican Republic, I was immediately enrolled into an English as a Second Language (ESL) class. I was placed there along with other international students who were in the same or similar circumstances. My school career began in Joseph Pulitzer IS.145. This middle school was divided into five various academies. One of them was the “Bridge Academy,” which is where I was placed. This academy was specifically designed for recently-arrived students. [. . .]

The transition from the educational system of my country to that in the U.S was difficult. There were days when I wanted to give up, especially because I was always taken out of classes like science and math. The purpose was to teach me English and immerse me into the American culture rapidly, yet this only caused me to feel excluded. Instead of being part of a middle school classes, I was stuck having learn the alphabet, numbers, and basic grammar all over again. The same routine continued throughout the whole year.

The next school year, while my English teacher was going through the attendance list, my principal walked in and commanded me to take all my things with me. I had been moved to a different class, a higher level, class 651. That was the event that led me to meet one of the most influential people in my life.

As I walked in to the classroom side by side with the principal, the first thing I saw was the whole class staring straight at me. It was if they were looking right through me, and I instantly blushed and turned to look at the books that I still held in my hands. The next thing I heard was a very happy sounding voice telling me, “Hey and you are Paola, right?” As I looked up, I laid my eyes on Ms. Free. I instantly thought, “She looks so mean, this is not good.” As I sat down, she said: “Everyone put everything away except a piece of paper and your pencil; we are going to be writing your first imaginative narrative essay.”

A second thought then flew into my mind, and I wanted to flee. All I

could think was, “What did I get myself into? I want to go back to my class.” I hated writing as much as I hated art, and I always thought that I had no imagination. I knew at that moment that this was going to be my least favorite class. I was just going to try to pass with a C.

Yet the most unexpected thing happened as Ms. Free was giving back the papers the next day during class. She gave me a concerned look. When I looked at the paper it was completely blank. As I sat there confused, the bell rang. My first thought was, “Should I be concerned or happy?”

As I prepared to walk out, Ms. Free with a very sweet, yet firm voice, said, “Paola you stay.” My heart raced so fast I felt like it was going to pop out of my chest. She told me that she [. . .] knew deep down I was capable of doing so much more, and advised me to always start with the ending of my story, and not be afraid to pour my soul and thoughts into the paper. [. . .]

Writing was no longer a hardship; it became an exciting outlet to express my thoughts and feelings. By the end of the seventh grade, I was being raved about as one of the school’s best writers. In fact, I was one of the students who showed the most improvement at the end of the year.

As I look back and reflect on my journey, I realize my middle school teacher, Ms. Free, changed my life. Towards the end of my middle school career, I was offered the chance to be placed in another academy of my choice, yet I declined the offer and decided to stay. The Bridge Academy was where I had started and where I felt I belonged, but most importantly, it was where I met the teacher who helped influenced me to be who I am today. Ms Free’s love for teaching, her enthusiasm, her patience, the way her eyes lit up when I gave a correct answer or just participated really inspired students to want to participate and achieve their goals. Ms. Free managed to make me feel free, just like her name. She disciplined my writing, but also, encouraged me to never be afraid of expressing myself or making mistakes. She taught me my thoughts were valuable, and I should be proud of them.

The last memory I hold of Ms Free was during one of those days when I was frustrated and was in the middle of a writer’s block. I remember her telling me, “It is going to be OK. Paola always remember that wherever you go in life that I believe in you as much as I believe in myself.” After that day, I realized I would always look up to her ,no matter where my life’s journey took me. She influenced me to pursue a career, one in which I will have the chance to influence youth in the future. I want to work with recently-arrived students, who, like I once was, are lost and in need of a helping hand.

What is Success? by Nearlyse Dandas

“We must remember that we’re going out there in order to be successful; the fun will come after.” My best friend would always say this to me whenever I explained my fears to her of not doing well in college. I never really asked her what she meant by “successful.” Was she referring to simply graduating from college with good grades, or was she referring to earning enough to extract ourselves from the daily horrors and segregation in Crown Heights, Brooklyn? What did she mean? What exactly is success? Does the meaning differ based on the life experience of each individual?

Through the eyes of the media and society’s expectations, success is all about wealth; success is about having a great deal of money so that one can obtain their needs and wants. It is being a well-known figure and possessing the power to influence the lives of others, as well as having a well-rounded education with a high status in communities or even the government. Many of us live our whole lives trying to fulfill these expectations without allowing ourselves to take note of and be pleased with our current achievements. Why is it that it becomes so hard for us to see the smaller steps in life such as graduating high school or being “accepted” into a college—whether it be an ivy league, private, or a community college—as achievements or success?

Every individual has different expectations from family members and the community in which he or she lives in. The financially stable parents of a senior in high school, living in an upper class neighborhood surrounded by others who are living society’s definition of success, might not consider getting into college or graduating high school an accomplishment. To such a person, this would simply be an expectation fulfilled. On the other hand, a young person from an unstable home and a community where others have given up on life who simply graduates from high school can be seen as a success. Different life experiences can create different meanings of the word “success.” Who is to say that a person should only be referred to as successful if s/he becomes one of the few to actually achieve all of society’s expectations? I believe success is strictly what we make it: anything we can be proud of, no matter how insignificant it may seem to others.

So thinking of what my best friend indicated as success, I am challenged to form a definition of this word. Different challenges and different expectations can all contribute to what a person contemplates as success. It is now clear that what she was referring to was not becoming a millionaire after four years in college, but making sure I take the next steps towards graduating college. We can make society’s expectations become a burden on our shoulders, or choose to make our own expectations and create our own success. Regardless of what society promotes, one should be pleased with their achievements, whether small or big.



I Wonder If It's that Simple . . . by Adjoa Ghansah

For as long as I can remember, I have dreamed of living a good life and having a good career. I always saw myself as a doctor. Just something about that white lab coat and the authority it brought always made me want my future career to be a doctor, particularly an obstetrician. Just the thought of helping to bring a new life into this world makes your job worthwhile. For as long as I can remember, I wanted to be someone important, someone that people will respect and look up to. Now I wonder if it is that simple. Nothing in this life comes easy. If you want the best things in life, you have to work extremely hard to reach that goal. Also, to get to a higher place, you need people who support you a hundred percent. I have my family to show me this support, but sometimes their support can be overwhelming. I wonder if they think it's simple for me to reach this goal. I wonder if they realize that I am doing this so that I can make them proud. On top of that, I wonder if it's that simple for me to reach this goal. My biggest fear is failing to make myself proud, as well as my family.

I wonder if it's that simple to get an advanced degree. That to me is like saying, "I wonder if it's that simple to go to the moon." Nothing good in this world comes without hard work and struggle. All the hardships and struggles will be worth it in the end when you are living your dream and can look back at your life and say that you have achieved your goals. As a first-year college student, I am starting to experience some of these struggles. For example, being away from home for such a long period of time for the first time is hard because I can't have some of the behaviors here that I would have at home. I can't depend on anyone to remind me of my projects and work but me. Learning to manage my time and realizing that everything has a time limit is also a struggle. All of these are just beginning struggles that will lead to greatness one day, and I wonder if it's that simple to get used to all of these new elements in my life.

Behind every successful person is someone who has always believed in them and has supported them. My family has always been like my support system. They always stand beside me, but sometimes I wonder if it's that simple for them to understand how hard my goal is and how hard I try to succeed. I understand that they want me to succeed, but the pressure that I receive from them just makes my goal even harder to reach sometimes. But at the same time, I try to use that pressure as motivation to keep me going and try to get to the top.

Failure is never an option. That's one thing I have learned so far in my lifetime. No matter how hard life or a situation gets, never give up, always keep in mind that there are better days ahead. I wonder if it's simple to fail. If you accept failure, then it will always come your way. Ever since August 27, 2012, I have made up my mind to never accept failure because the career that I have chosen is a very difficult and hectic one, but if I keep the support of my family and keep in mind that this is what I really want to accomplish someday, then indeed I will be successful. This journey is something that I want to look back on and be really proud of the struggles that I overcame. Being an obstetrician will be a very hard process and a tough road, and if I keep fear in mind, then I may not succeed. So instead of letting this fear keep me down, I allow it to motivate me to do better and overcome that fear, because the best way to prove to someone who thinks you can't make it is to work ten times harder to show them that you can absolutely make it.

Slow and Steady Wins the Race by Liat Friedman (Essay Excerpt)



Picture a cute young girl all cuddled up on a big comfy couch curled up with a book. When I was little I never wanted to be like that girl. I hated reading. Everyone always told me I hated reading because I was bad at it, but I just replied, “No, it’s boring and stupid.” Now I realize that reading books can transport you to places you could never go by foot. As a young girl, I did not understand why reading was seen as a fun past time.

During reading time in second grade, my class was split up into reading groups based on each student’s reading level. The advanced group read books as long as *Harry Potter*; the intermediate group read books like *The Magic Tree House*; and my group, the beginners, read books like those by Dr. Seuss. I was embarrassed and confused because everyone had always told me I was such a bright girl, so I never understood why I could not read.

One day in second grade, I came home from school and my parents were waiting there for me. They told me we were going to try a program called Hooked On Phonics, which would help me learn to read. I sat down that day in my cluttered basement to try the program. The program, a set of DVDs, basically reviewed the vowels and their different sounds. Then the program would start to create words. But for me the program moved too slowly; I did not understand how this would help me read. I hated it! I already knew how to make words; I just did not know how to read them. Eventually, my parents gave up and assumed I would just learn to read at my own speed.

Since I was so late in learning how to read throughout elementary school, I was at a reading level far behind the other students in my classes. When we would have to choose a book for a book report, I was always assigned the easiest option in the class. While other students chose from a list my teacher assigned me a “special book.” When I was assigned an oral report I was too ashamed to present because my book was so easy compared to the other students’ books. I dealt with this feeling of embarrassment throughout elementary school and I am still dealing with it today. [. . .]

Sometimes even today I doubt whether I can write an essay or read a long text, but I have learned over the years to just take a deep breath. I always try and tell myself, “What’s the worst that could happen? I do not finish? I do poorly on a test? It is one test; one class. Do not stress yourself out.” To come to this point has been difficult. Sometimes I still have anxiety attacks and think I cannot do particular assignments. But that is life; it happens to everyone.

Being here in college amazing. In middle school I never thought I would get to college or, even if I got in, that I would never be able to keep up with the work. Now that I am here, at SUNY New Paltz and keeping up with the work, my success is blowing my mind. I got over all the small stumbling blocks throughout middle school and high school so now I know I can get over them in college.

Journal about Malcolm X by Toni Starks



Malcolm X was inspired to continue his education independently on the day he picked up a dictionary. He began looking through it, and he became fascinated by all the words he never knew. So he began by copying the entire first page, and it took him a whole day. Then he read the words out loud over and over, and when he woke up the next day, he was fascinated by how many of the words he still remembered. He read over the words he had forgotten until he learned them all. Malcolm X not only learned new words, but he also worked on improving his penmanship because he wanted to be like Bimbi, a man who was also in prison, but a man who had so much knowledge.

Malcolm taught himself by reading book after book. He would read anywhere at any time. Reading was more important than his sleep in some cases. He was fine with only getting four hours of sleep, and he didn't mind lying on the floor at night when it was lights out and trying to catch the little bit of light so that he could read.

Malcolm X believed that white people were "devils" because of everything that he had been through. The Ku Klux Klan (KKK) killed his father, which drove his mother insane, and she had to be put in a mental hospital. So imagine a little kid growing up and knowing that a group of white men had destroyed his family. Also Malcolm read book after book on the histories of various nations and how the white man acted like devils emptying the world of non-white people.

Malcolm X's narrative style reveals that he was deep in thought and did a lot of research. If Malcolm X were alive today, I would be drawn to him because he spoke about topics that few people had the courage to talk about, and he did not say things unless he understood and truly believed them. Malcolm X is a compelling figure because, even though he might have done some bad things in life and did not attend college, he grew from his failures and he did the hardest thing anyone could do—he picked up a book and educated himself.

2012 Version of Langston Hughes's "English B" by Indira Larancuent

Professor Rigolino said,

“Go home and write

a page tonight.

And let that page come out for you—

Then, it will be true.”

I wonder if it's that simple?

I am seventeen, different than the average, born in Santo Domingo, Dominican Republic,

I went to school there for eight years, then moved to New York where I graduated High School, then ended up here to this college in a small village in New Paltz.

I am one of the few Dominicans in my class.

Walking through the pathways, up the stairs into the Residential Areas of Campus,
Walking pass the Humanities building, pass the Coykendall building, Up the stairs, through the trees, I set forward my ID to open the doors to Gage Hall, where I finally reach my room, 223 to sit down and write this page:

It's not easy to know what is true for you or me at Seventeen, my age. But I guess I'm what I feel and see and hear. New Paltz, I hear you: hear you, hear me—we too—you, me, talk on this page, (I hear New Paltz, too.) Me—who?

Well, I like to eat, sleep, be with friends and mostly feel the love.

I like to be stress free, learn new things and live an anti-anxiety life.

I like jewelry for Christmas presents, or just money—something valuable that makes me feel important.

I guess being Dominican doesn't make me not like the same things other folks like who are other races.

So will my page that I write be filled with my Spanish race?

Being me, it will not be white.

But it will be,

A part of you, professor.

You are white—

Yet a part of me, as I am a part of you.

That's American

Sometimes perhaps you don't want to be a part of me, nor do I often want to be a part of you.

But we are, that's true, I guess you learn from me—although you're older—and white—and sometimes more free.

This is my page for English B.

Equal Interests by Esther Castro (Essay Excerpt)

Over the years, a lot of judgments have been made regarding the Latin community in the United States. People in America believe that Latinos are different from them, when in fact, we are very much alike. Langston Hughes wrote, “I guess being colored doesn’t make me not like the same things other folks like who are other races” (Hughes). It is disappointing and unacceptable to know that minorities are still being categorized, and it will continue to be that way. My ethnicity does not make me any different from any American who lives in the United States or elsewhere.

Most students go to college to seek more education and opportunities. [. . . .] We attend college because we want to succeed; we want to be professionals. The majority of the students in college have a passion for what they do, and in that aspect I can say that we are all equal. There are plenty of American writers and painters as well as Hispanic writers and painters. For example, author Ana Castillo states, “I always loved to draw and I always liked to write. I’ve written since I was very little. I wrote poetry and wrote stories and drew on whatever I could, painted on whatever I could--anything, any piece of paper that was around” (Saeta).

[. . . .] Latinos, Hispanics and European Americans are equal in terms of music. Everywhere I go, there is American music. I enjoy and adore all of the American artists. I listen to American music more often than I listen to Latin music. In the United States the youth of all races listen to American artists like Katy Perry, John Mayer, Taylor Swift etc., but they also listen to Latin artists like Jennifer Lopez, Selena Gomez and Ricky Martin. It is once again proven that white people and Latin and Hispanic people share the same interests in music.

Although there are major differences between dishes prepared by European Americans and Latinos, we have some similarities when it comes to fast food. When at work or at school, people cannot wait for their lunch break. The majority of people in the U.S eat at a fast food restaurant like McDonalds, Taco Bell, and Dominos Pizza. Every time I go to one of these restaurants, it is filled with people from different cultural backgrounds. White people have learned to eat, cook and cherish tacos, burritos and guacamole, while Latinos and Hispanics love to eat hamburgers, fries and hot dogs.

Americans often lose themselves trying to categorize us without realizing our similarities. They criticize and discriminate against us not knowing that we share equal interests in almost any category. I want them to know that “You are white—yet a part of me, as I am a part of you” (Hughes). Americans are often too busy searching for our faults rather than searching for our friendship. I guess that being a Dominican does not change the fact that we all are equal, with similar ambitions and interests.

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A Peacock Adorned in Krishna's Headdress by Stephanie Echevarria



As if a peacock was not extraordinarily garnished enough, I went and put Krishna's headdress on it. This is the best way to describe my writing. My writing is loud. It is powerful and has a mesmerizing coolness with a history that many readers will not be aware of. I have come to the conclusion that this will serve a purpose, and that purpose is to be mesmerized. I have set out on a journey to fill my writing with purpose. The purpose of my writing is to find readers and capture their attention, if only for a moment, so that I may

fascinate them. The peacock is a glorious bird. Actually, the peacock made Darwin change his way of thinking about evolution. He stated, "The sight of a feather in a peacock's tail, whenever I gaze at it, makes me sick!" (39). A peacock's feathers hold the purpose of becoming the beauty in the eye of a beholder, and this was simply too complex for the natural selection theory. My writing has always followed a poetic route. The way I write is to not only tell the reader whatever it is I need to say, but also to captivate the reader. Many eyes have touched my writing, and they have not all found it beautiful, but by continuing to flourish ink to paper, I have given it purpose. My writing seeks readers who were meant to read it, just as a peacock is meant to flourish its feathers in search of a mate.

Even with all the feathers, my writing has a headdress on top. This headdress is meant to symbolize that piece of writing. Every piece of writing is different, and just like Krishna, each headdress is different. A headdress changes only by the rearranging of jewels, or by adding a small flower bud (Packart). This became a very tedious task for devotees who served Krishna, which is where my writing differs. I am the one who is serving my writing. Every draft needs a new headdress, whether a "but" is becoming an "and" or if only the first sentence remains the same. The jewels of my writing are the paragraphs that lie atop one another and the flowers are the letters that fill the gaps.

Above all my writing is immortal. Both the Peacock and Krishna represent this. Krishna is a deity of the Hindu faith and is an incarnation of the past, present and future (Packart). My writing comes from the incarnations before me because they are all a part of my soul. I believe in reincarnation and that our lives are not only influenced by the experiences we have given to our soul, but by the experiences given to us with this soul. The skin of a peacock was thought to not decay (this idea came around in the eleventh century), and so the peacock became a symbol of immortality (Moore). The combination of the thought of immortality and reincarnation come together delicately. My writing not only holds the power from past lives, it will carry its own power and grow power through the lives that have yet to be lived.

My writing holds three distinct characteristics; it is free, expressive and poetic. My writing holds the characteristics that I want to emanate every day. Its freedom is its everlasting life. Its expression flows through its poetic tones of thought and communication. I used to think that my writing was that of a delicate flower, or a beautiful place that has been deemed an oasis for all. That was until I began writing this paper. There is nothing delicate about my writing, except maybe the way I need to double check the grammar. My writing is not a place that is used as an escape; instead, it is a work of art that is used to transform and captivate.

My writing is a peacock adorned in Krishna's headdress. It is beautiful and flows with a magnitude like that of a leader who knows all too well the importance of personalization. My writing is my open heart to whoever can relish in its beauty, living forever in my soul, and in theirs.

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A Photographer's Point of View by Danny Perez

When I am writing an essay, there is a process that I follow. While some have a specific method of writing, everyone has a different style. The same goes with photography; there is a process used to capture a picture. When I first began, I had to learn the basics of photography such as camera types, depth and distance, focusing, film, etc. To an expert, the process becomes natural and inspiration is always constant, to capture the special moment. But there are



incidents where the natural structure of the moment is too difficult to capture. This is where a photographer must think of unique methods to capture it. The photographer takes everything he or she has learned and applies it. The picture is the final product and while others see and critique it, there is a unique process for each photograph (Langford 11). My style of writing is like a camera's lenses, able to capture the significant moment of the writing process.

Within my writing process, I have different types of writing. The same goes with photography. There is a process but there are also different camera types. The main point of a camera is to capture the image and create memories. On the market place today, each camera is designed for a specific audience, for the professional or for the amateur photographer. The prices range from inexpensive to expensive. The portability also matters as if it is a point-or -shoot camera or a DSLR (Digital Single-Lens Reflex) camera. Each brand has its own unique features (Langford 102). Just like my writing type can change, depending on the assignment that was given. It mostly depends on the situation, but I might have a different direction for a structure. My usual structure consists of topic sentence, evidence, analysis, and a closing. I write to a specific audience, such as someone who does not know the information or to someone specifically. Similar to the requirements of a research paper, specific information is required to explain a point. Then there are journal entries, where I am writing to just one person. My writing is organized throughout, but depending on the situation, the structure can change. Each camera has its own special features like my writing has different styles and types.

When I write, I take my time. Everyone has a pace. Photography is the same, different methods are used to capture an image such as digitally or through film. Film is a "flexible, transparent support, coated with photosensitive material" which is used to capture the picture ("Film"). With digital photography, it is instant. Film takes many steps to finally have it developed. In order for film to be developed, it needs to be in a dark room. Chemicals are used to develop the film. When film is rushed, there is a risk that the image will not come out clear. With film, some pictures look great while others do not. This makes it easier to

improve and select the pictures to print. Lastly, when almost done, the film is left to be dried. My writing is a film, waiting to be developed. When I begin to write, I need a place that is quiet, similar to the concept of a dark room. I also must have my thoughts outlined so I can think of what else is needed and what can be taken off. I have to take my time. When I rush, I cannot express all my thoughts. Finally, the final edits are done and I reread everything and check for mistakes. The end result is better than rushing. My writing style is to take my time and to think critically about my thoughts. With film, patience is needed to finally develop the perfect picture.

During the moment of writing, sometimes the main idea gets lost throughout the body paragraphs in the process of explaining a point. For a camera, focusing a particular function helps to make images a more meaningful picture, to a photographer's eye. (Langford 114). Focusing is used to help bring the attention of a certain object or place. The object that is focused is clear and easily seen. The position depends on where the photographer wants it to be. It centers the object to the viewer's eye and shows the main subject in the picture. My writing is the same with the camera's function of focus, being able to center my ideas to be the main point. As I write, I make sure to relate my evidence back to my main point, the thesis statement. Each piece of evidence used is important but the critical thinking aspect is also important to me. I write more depth and go into the analysis. This is the part where I do not want the reader to get confused. I want the reader to see my perspective and think critically about it. I stay on the topic and focus, similar to the camera's function. I want to bring the attention to a certain aspect or idea. Focusing helps my writing to be more organized and to help the reader understand what I am trying to prove.

Photography takes years to master to take beautiful and breathtaking pictures. The same with writing, for it takes year to finally develop a unique writing style. For my writing, it is a camera in many forms. A camera has many types as with my writing. Also, my process of writing is a film, taking its time to be developed properly as well as the focus of a camera, to be able to place important information as the main idea. Writing takes time and dedication, but only I can control what goes on within it, as with a camera.

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My Superman by Rebecca Shapiro

“I’m not leaving. It’s too long to be away, I just wanna stay home and play with you,” I cried.

“Take this with you to camp and hang it above your bed. He’ll protect you at night when you’re afraid,” my brother Sam said to me while handing over his Superman pillow case.

Eleven years later and thousands of miles farther apart, I still have my brother’s Superman pillow case fastened above my bed. Most people who visit my dorm room just figure I love Superman, which is very true, but they don’t understand that the pillow case holds my childhood, my innocence, and my brother. Sam was right; as long as I had that pillow case, I would be protected from the world. However, neither of us knew how true his words would be at the time he first gave it to me.

This blue rectangular piece of fabric with a comic book character flying across, cannot bring my brother and me back together. It cannot warn me if someone has broken into my room and taken something when I was not looking. What it can do is bring my mind back in time. With every glance above my bed, I am brought back to our front yard with the garage opened as our magical toy box, never failing of giving us new games to play and balls to throw. It brings me back to the time when I never had to worry about what people thought of me because my older brother was always there to scare them away and comfort me at night. It was the time when I felt most stable. My Superman, Sam, now lives 5,693 miles away, but with his pillow case, he is always here for me. Last fall when I became bombarded with college applications, essays, and deciding my next four years of my life, I had this constant feeling of drowning. Every time I thought I had finished one assignment, I turned and several other things were piled up waiting for me. In the middle of all the chaos, I found myself looking up to my pillow case as a reminder that everything would be fine. I took a few deep breaths and remembered that all of these essays and applications were just small steps to my big goal. “The only thing stopping you from reaching the stars is your heavy feet,” my brother always told me.

I truly believed Sam when he told me his pillow case would protect me on nights when fear flooded my body. I was just some four-foot-three little girl with a blue Build-a-Bear bow in my hair. I believed the tooth fairy flew around at night and collected every one’s teeth. I believed my mother had little elves all over the house to tell her when I was being bad. I believed that my brother told Superman to watch over me and not let anyone hurt me. I still believe that pillow case protects me at night.

Sam has protected me since the day I entered this world and found out I was about to live in a suburban zoo. Between Sam and me there are the twins, a boy and a girl who together were like a tornado and a hurricane. There is a video from when I was only three months old and the twins were fighting over who would get to play with Raggedy Anne. At one point they began throwing stuffed



animals. Disney Characters and Beanie Babies were flying everywhere until one ambushed me in the face. At that moment, Sam climbed in the crib with me and held me tightly and sang to me until I stopped crying. That is when he became my Superman. Now today I have to share my Superman because in only a few months my brother will be a paratrooper for the Israeli army. My older brother will be flying out of planes to protect thousands of innocent people.

This obsession I have with Superman is much more than a pillow case or some awesome movie I saw. It started with a little sister wanting to be just like her older brother. I wanted to dress like him, talk like him, be as cool as this ten-year-old super star, which meant a lot of copying and following around. Now that I am eighteen years old and in college, I no longer copy him or follow him around. I have found my own special meaning in this super hero pillow case, and Superman has traveled with me everywhere, to every locker in high school, my desktop, my dresser, even to my college dorm.

This pillow case has seen many beds through the years; every place from my back-breaking cot at Camp Lou Henry Hoover to my Tempurpedic queen bed in LA. Now we have found a new home in room 339 on the third floor of Bouton Hall in New Paltz, New York. My Superman pillow case hangs right between my dream catcher and rope of memories. He is the first thing I look at when I enter my room and my favorite thing to see when I leave.

It is funny what children get attached to, whether it is an old teddy missing an eye who feels more like a rug than a fluffy bear or a blanket that looks like it has gone through war. These inexpensive, dirty things have gotten us through our toughest moments, have heard our loudest cries and muffled sobs. These childhood sentiments have watched us become mature adults and allow us to run back to childhood once in a while. They will never fail to bring us back to those simpler days when playing in the driveway with your brother was all you needed in life.

The Wonders of the Box by Sharon Rios



As I watch the record spin in a continuous motion, I become dizzy. *In Rainbows*. The name of the vinyl exactly signifies the musical colors that float in the air after the needle, embedded within the arm of the record player, carefully touches the disc. A vinyl disc player may seem like an old tool to use to play music, but I think it is ideal. How the needle gently dissects each track allows one to be teleported into the song. Most people my age do not own a record player and would rather use new technology such as iPhones or Macbooks to listen to

their songs, but on top of my dresser is a brown Crosley music chest that spins 12" wide cds and resurrects forgotten vinyls from their graves with the touch of its needled fingers.

Crosley is not just a record player but also a listener as well as a speaker. He listens and understands each vinyl while translating the record's message out loud for everyone else to hear. He distributes good vibes around the perimeter of the room that act like therapy. Crosley can easily alter my feelings from sad to happy or from excited to calm. The magical box of music is the only thing other than my bed that I look forward to when entering my room.

Every time a record is finished playing, my soul is left behind in the last notes of the song. My music player kidnaps all emotions, quickly condensing them into a little ball stashed inside the music box. "How to Disappear Completely" is a song that Crosley plays for me that eliminates the existence of gravity. My body feels afloat and my mind is delivered to a place where I no longer exist. I immediately envision a black hole in the temple of my brain where I am able to get lost in the vortex of all emotions, allowing me to disappear completely.

Crosley's effect on my life may sound unbelievable, but not only does he play music, he also brings people together. I usually have weekend gatherings where my friends and I eat, mingle, and embrace the sounds that Crosley tunes. Finding other people who own record players is surprisingly not hard. I have met a good amount of friends by walking into vinyl shops and speaking about Crosley out loud. I unexpectedly find similarities in people who own the same possessions as me, especially if they listen to the same genres of music as I do.

There are several record shops in the New York City area. These antique or vinyl shops usually have bargain prices for their records from as low as one dollar to five whereas newer shops tend to sell their records for the consumer price. Looking for new records is part of the journey of owning a record player. You seem to develop an addiction for saving a vinyl album from not being listened to. Each vinyl is like a child, so fragile and large spirited. Walking into an antique record store, I begin to think about all the music that is not being

played and put to waste. I do not see an old record but rather an object asking for life again. Walking inside a vinyl shop and seeing Bob Dylan smile at me with his right hand on his top hat and his left hand on his guitar on the album cover *Bob Dylan Nashville Skyline*, lets me know that Bobby D is smiling with me because his music will have a purpose again.

I believe vinyl players like Crosley are special because they still listen to the dusty records trashed in cluttered old basements as well as play new records from upcoming artists. As I blow away the cloud of dust from a forgotten record, I feel a sense of relief as I watch the particles float in the air. The black record spins with my mind and when it is done, the silence weeps with me as I place another record onto the idler wheel. Crosley is not just a record player, but also a machine used to go back in time or teleport to the future. He brings back memories and creates new ones.

Where Is Your Childhood? by Alexa Tolentino

I sat a foot away from the television, and my mother yelled, “Alexsa, move away from the screen! You are goin’ to get blind!” I did not care; all I cared about was the movie that kept drawing me in. To be honest, I do not remember which movie I was watching. It could have been *Nightmare on Elm Street* or *Spiderman*. All I know is that I was a seven year-old girl watching a movie that had come from my uncle’s movie collection.

My uncle, a young man in his 20s, was the type of man who would frequently go to the movie theater or Blockbuster. He did not believe in buying \$5 bootleg films from a street vender because they lacked quality and you would usually have to sit through thirty minutes of random people getting up from their seats. My uncle did not have children or a wife, so he regarded my sister and me as his own children. In fact, we were his sons in his eyes and we frequently found ourselves watching horror and action films; instead of Disney.

Throughout elementary school, I felt ahead of everyone; not academically but cinematically. Once, I sat at lunch with a bunch of girls who picked at their food more than they chewed on it.

“Yo’, they kept giving the *Little Mermaid* last night on Disney,” said one.

“I love that movie, I cry every time,” said another.

“Well I haven’t seen it,” I said while playing with my food. I could not look at them straight in the face because I already sensed their stares. It is the same reaction I get all the time. That day, I felt my cheeks fire up as I felt their judgments blazing through me. The fact that I had not seen the *Little Mermaid* made me an outcast.

I asked, “Have you guys seen *Friday the 13th*?” I received nothing but blank stares. “Have you seen *Blade*? No? How about *Edward Scissorhands*?” Their faces screamed nothing but confusion while some just shook their heads. That is when I realized that nothing was wrong with me, but something was wrong with them. They lacked knowledge in films. I discovered that I could not have a conversation about film with anyone in my school or anyone my age.

The only people I could carry on conversations with were my uncle and sister. We spent hours talking about upcoming movies or famous directors. We began watching classics such as *Psycho* by Alfred Hitchcock and *Rosemary’s Baby* by Roman Polanski. Every movie we watched, we began to analyze, and I would always act as if I were a famous movie critic saying, “The lighting was so off in this movie” or “Oh my God, great song choice for this scene but the dialogue was so unrealistic.” Of course, sooner or later this movie addiction was bound to bite me in the arse. Now I cannot sit comfortably in a movie theater without criticizing every movie.

For example, a friend might say, “*House at the End of the Street* was



such a good movie.”

To which I might answer, “What are you talking about? Did you not see how shaky that camera was. Awful cinematographer. My grandma could do better.” To this day, whenever I come across a movie that passes my inspection and harsh criticism, I consider it a great movie.

Growing up with films has motivated me to want to involve myself in anything and everything that has to do with movies, from screenwriting to acting. I grew up watching classic films and I’m not ashamed to say so; I am not ashamed to say that I have not seen *Toy Story* or *Lion King*. People constantly ask, “Where was your childhood?” and I tell them “It has been here all along. It is in the movie theater. It lay in the hands of Freddy Kruger and Dumbledore.” As the years have passed, I have met plenty of people who have been in my situation and we can literally talk for hours about every movie we have seen. That is the positive side of being a film buff; however, the downside of being a film buff (and trust me, most of them would agree with me) is this—Not finding a movie to watch because you have seen them all.

Memories on my Canon Power Shot by Elizabeth Agneta



I woke up early, got dressed, walked downstairs and saw colorfully wrapped boxes with big bows piled on top of each other on the table. It was May 7, my birthday! Excitement shot through my body as I took one box at a time and slowly unwrapped them. When I opened the second box, I saw a Canon power shot SX260 digital camera. I took it out of the box and held the matte black camera. I turned it over in my hands and saw the big screen and noticed the amazing quality zoom. I clicked the power button and heard the ring signaling the

camera was on. The lens expanded and the flash popped up. The biggest smile spread across my face as I thought of all the pictures I would soon be able to capture.

Throughout the years I have become interested in taking pictures. I got my first digital camera when I was in middle school, and I took so many pictures of nature and animals, especially my own pets. Over the years I started taking more pictures of my friends and family. It's so great to be able to look at an old photo album and be able to remember the past vividly. My camera allows me to take countless pictures, that mean so much to me.

The first big occasion at which I used my digital camera was at my senior ball. I woke up early and started getting ready. I did my makeup and hair and then lastly put my black dress on. Once I slid on my shoes, my parents and I ran out the door and headed to my friend's house to take pictures. Parents were clicking their cameras constantly and every second I would see flashes going off. Numerous adults told us to stand with our dates, stand with our friends, or stand with our parents. I smiled and looked into the cameras and listened to commands about where to look and how to stand. Although it was annoying to have to hold a smile for so long, I did get a few nice pictures out of standing there for so long. A few of my favorite pictures included one of my two friends and me, and one of me and my date standing by the pool. Finally, the picture taking was done and we headed to the dance. More pictures were taken there, but less formal and more fun ones, which is definitely more my style. After the senior ball, every group of friends went to different cabins for the weekend. This was where some of my favorite photos were taken. My camera was passed from one person to the next, everyone snapping multiple pictures. I remember one picture of ten of my friends all huddled around each other. Most of us were sitting on a couch while one was standing over us with his arms spread out. This one makes me so happy to look at now.

A few days before leaving for college, I started printing and packing my favorite shots. I could not imagine not bringing them to college with me. When I began to settle into my dorm room, I started hanging them up. I have so many

pictures hanging up on my walls by my bed. I also spent a good amount of time, arranging them and taping a ton up on the wall next to my desk. Each picture reminds me of a specific memory. They all tell a different story. I have some from when I was younger, which reminds me of all the great times I had, not worrying about anything and just enjoying my childhood. I have some from New Year's Eve. Remembering walking to a party in the cold, dry air, while struggling to walk in my gold glittery heels, brings back great feelings. I have a ton of pictures from my cousin's lake house too. I get nostalgic looking at those because they remind me of the house, and the wooden bridge leading to the big dock. It reminds me of jumping into the cold, green water, and swimming through the frigid water to the floating buoy. I love the feeling of jumping into the water and hearing the muffled laughs coming from above the water. Looking at them and seeing all my friends and family smiling and laughing makes me so happy and grateful to have such great people in my life.

In college, I keep my camera in my top drawer of my desk. I bring my camera wherever I go so I do not miss anything. My camera means so much to me because of all the memories I am able to capture with it. Whenever I am homesick I just turn my camera on, listen to the ring, watch the lens expand and click through countless photos. Looking at them immediately puts a smile on my face and makes me feel instantly happier.

The Pink Car by Jessica Gomez

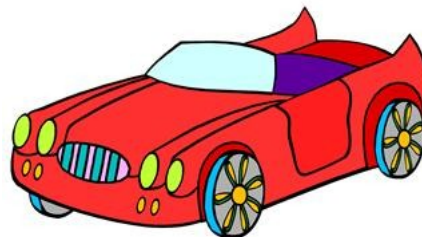
To my nephew Jacob, a toy car was not simply just any ordinary plaything. The thought of just having one nearby allowed him to feel comfortable anywhere he went. At the age of two, when my sister went back to work, Jacob's obsession had grown. He went from playing with typical two-year-old toys to playing with cars and nothing else. This fascination caused him to seclude himself from everyone. He slowly stopped speaking to the point where all that would be heard were grunts. Jacob was taken to the doctor, who told us he was having drastic changes due to his mother's return to work. Not knowing how to adapt to no longer seeing her throughout the day, he looked to his cars for comfort.

Jacob's behavior ultimately led to the diagnosis of PDD-NOS, which stands for Pervasive Developmental Disorder-Not Otherwise Specified. This diagnosis is applied to adults and children who are on the Autism range but who do not entirely meet the criteria for autistic disorder. After this evaluation, my family and I learned a lot about the disorder, which causes Jacob to have difficulty with speech and with being over-sensitive. The therapists began helping him with his speech and with his sensory issues. The cars were slowly taken away until Jacob was down to fifty cars. The less cars he owned, the more quickly he would get tired of playing with them, which would cause him to seek other forms of play as well as socialize with others.

From the remaining cars, he had a pack that was left unopened from his birthday, which contained the hot pink one that is now mine. The vivid orange box contained five three-inch metal cars. Jacob slowly took all of the cars out one by one. He lined them up front-to-back and rested his head in front of the chain of bright cars, comparing them to his other ones. He then separated one car and held it up to his big brown eyes. "This one is pink," he whispered. He looked bothered but quickly changed his expression as if he had just solved a tricky problem. Right then, he stood up from the floor, turned around and held the car behind his back. With a delighted smile on his face, he approached me and yelled, "Surprise!" Holding up the car to me he said, "Here you go, pink is for girls, and I'm a boy."

An unexpected rush of joy overcame me. I smiled, and he smiled back with his eyes as if wanting to tell me, "You're welcome," but could not get the words out. As Jacob walked away, I realized how quickly he had given me the car. He has trouble sharing his belongings, especially toy cars, and getting him to share a toy car is like a woman sharing her diamonds—it does not happen! The fact that Jacob was able to give me his car was astonishing. His difficult year of therapy was showing results.

The pink car was the first item in my bag when I packed for my freshman year at SUNY New Paltz.



Jacob's ability to deal with this challenging disorder gives me the motivation to successfully adapt to college despite the difficulties. I placed the car on my desk because I knew that was where I would be every day. I polish it whenever I can so the paint stays shiny, like the first day Jacob removed the car from its box.

I often catch myself starrng at the hot-pink metal toy car, admiring its stenciled black lines along its sides and top just as my nephew does when he receives a new car. The wheels feel smooth on my hand so I glide it across my desk exactly how he would back home. The motion relaxes me and takes my mind off a long day of classes just as Jacob's cars distracted him from longing for his mother when she was at work. This hot-pink car reminds me of how much I miss coming home to his open embrace every day, but I am also reassured knowing that I will be seeing him soon. Every time I feel homesick, stressed or upset, I look over and I am reminded that everything will be fine. The little vehicle will always be parked near me so I can carry priceless memories of my nephew forever.

Others' Expectations by Nadia Ouedraogo



Life without expectations is like yellowish rounded bread topped by seasonal seeds with no meat and fresh vegetables in it. We live our lives minding what people think about us most of the time. People we mind the most are those who we care more about. We somehow are afraid to act or do things that will not make them proud. But then we lose track of our individuality, forgetting who we are or knowing what is right for us. One of Hughes's quotes from "Theme for English B" that can be connected to expectation and me is, "It's not

easy to know what is true for you or me" (Hughes 70). This sentence has different meanings for different people. To me, I focus more on the expectations of my family. Some still expect me to follow a career path that I wanted when I was little and others just want me to go in a field that will provide me a good income.

In his poem, Hughes, did not know what was true for him, neither do I. I grew up in a big family where my grandparents raised me along with their children. I learned how to be a grown up even though I was not ready. I was given many responsibilities without the chance to say no. Yet, I do not regret any of it. I recognized that my grandparents and uncles and aunts wanted me to be strong and they loved me.

When I was a little girl, I ate something I was allergic to. That night, my grandparents and mother were scared. In the cold and lonely night, my mother drove me to the hospital. The breezy wind was caressed my face, and the hummm of her motorcycle dominated the other sounds around us. The smell of drugs, vaccine and serum welcomed us when we arrived at the hospital. I was also scared as well as my mother because such things never happened to me, and I was terrified of needles. After an hour of waiting, the doctor came in with my biggest fear in his hands. Gently, I felt a pitch like a hungry mosquito sucking my blood. I was so mad at the doctor, I promised him one day I would become a doctor to get my revenge on his children. The doctor and my mother giggled. Since then, becoming a doctor was my only option and my grandfather and mother supported me. I was three years old when I made this decision. I was immature and was angry. But their desire for me to become a doctor was the only thing that kept this decision alive. They wanted "me" to be the best doctor; they lived their dreams through me.

On the other hand, my uncles had a different view of my future and dreams. For them, being a doctor was not worth it. It was going to take too long and I would not be able to make money very fast. I needed to choose another career in order to satisfy them. This did not happen only years ago; it is still happening. Every time that I think of what I want to be, I feel lost. I know that I have my dreams out there but I am scared of finding them and scared of how

finding something will impact my family. In a journal article by Kristine Zarlengo, she says, “[the] narrator is a witness to how his dream must affect other colored people...” (Zarlengo 2: 1). This shows that what we want always affects others, either in a negative way or positive way. Therefore, my dream is going to disappoint one part of my family or everyone in my family. Whom am I going to satisfy? I cannot make a choice because these expectations may not fit with my dreams. None of these makes me feel like I will accomplish and love what I am going to do for my entire life.

What did Hughes mean by “it’s not easy to know what is true for you or me”? (Hughes 70). I know it is not easy to figure how who we are or what we want for ourselves. What my uncles want me to be and what my mother and grandfather want me to be does not allow me to chose what I want. But what about what I want to do for myself? One thing is for sure, I do not want to disappoint anyone that I like. Sometimes I want to be something big but, can I? Am I the person who is supposed to be like that? Expectations will always let me live under the shadow of my family.

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Learning By Fear by Djiby Ousmane (Essay Excerpt)

I first started learning how to read and write in a language that is far away from being similar to mine. I sat in a classroom full of students, and we all were new to learning how to read and write. I saw the teacher walk in the classroom rushing. He wore a long dress and had a chalk board in his hands. In that room I could see sticks around me, and I knew what they were used for. I was nervous.

The first things that we learned were numbers. This was weird because he taught us these numbers in the Arabic language. I was not even good enough in counting in my own language, how would I be able to count in a new language? [. . .]

When I first walked to the classroom it was big and there were too many children. I was nine at that time. We did not have chairs in the classroom, so we sat on the floor, and some people brought their own chairs if they had one.



We all were just talking and excited about school, but as soon as the teacher walked in everything went silent. The teacher was an Arab and did not know how to speak my native language, which was Fulah, so that made it hard for me to understand him. I had to pretend that I understood him even though I did not. He taught us all the numbers from one to one thousand without translating them into Fulani; however, we were able to learn the by heart because almost every day we had to go to the blackboard one by one and read all the numbers from the board in Arabic and the whole class repeated whatever was read to them. I was so proud of ourselves because most of the time we all knew the numbers that he put on the board by heart.

Things got harder and harder, and the teacher went from numbers to teaching us letters in Arabic. This was a hard part. I can still remember when my friends and I used to wear heavy clothes so that we could survive the beatings from the stick he would hit us with. Some days he would just laugh and let us go but some days he got so mean and just hit us anyway. I was so panicked day after day, and I used to walk and say letters to myself to check how I was doing. I was so focused in his class that the teacher let me get away for some common mistakes, but even that did not give me comfort in my heart. [. . .]

We started studying so hard every night from seven until ten at night, and by studying we improved a lot and just kept raising our hands before he even picked on us to come read. I felt so good knowing that I knew how to read and write the numbers and the letters in Arabic because I would not get hit for that any more.

I learned that education is not cheap. Today I am really proud of that hard work I used to do in my childhood because it make me work hard. However I am even happier today as I reflect on the past. I learn new things every day in the US with comfort. I had that opportunity in Mauritania too, but it did not start until I got higher in learning. My foundation as a learner was not easy to build at all.

Dear Ha Jin,

Through reading the your collection of short stories, *A Good Fall*, I have learned to appreciate the peaceful and powerful words you have created. There are a lot interesting stories that drove me into text and inspired me to pull out every single detail and analyze them.

I read the entire book thoroughly within three consecutive days, which is the least amount of time I have ever taken to read a book. Some of the stories directly paralleled my culture and my experiences, so I was eager to finish reading entire book to find the theme of the short stories.

One of my favorite stories is “Children as Enemies.” This story clearly illustrates the importance of names as a way to tie together members of the Chinese family. You portray immigrant Chinese boys and girls and show your readers how the displacement of Chinese names to English names creates a conflict between their own families when they change their names. In addition, the story shows that a name change violates the traditional family rules and breaks the hearts of the grandparents in the story. As a result, the grandparents move from the son’s house and live in an apartment provided by the American’s government for older people, which is ironic. This story suggests that traditional names should not be changed because names indicate a person’s nationality, culture, race, gender, religion, language, and background. Furthermore, changing someone’s name can break a family apart and make it difficult for family members to reunite.

I have learned from my professor you are coming in late September, 2012 to discuss some concepts of *A Good Fall*. I am very enthusiastic to meet with you and discuss some questions regarding the stunning short stories that you have written.

Therefore, I am looking forward to meet with you and hope you will answer my questions.

Sincerely,

Aminul Haque

Hidden Truth by Akeem Samuels and Ediliana Estrella

Eduardo

Hey Bridgette! (Waving) Do you want to join me for dinner at Hasbrouck?

Bridgette

(Turns and notices Eduardo) Hey Eduardo! (Flips hair) How are you? (Beat) I'm like so sorry, but I had dinner like a few minutes ago.

Eduardo

(Feeling sad) Oh okay (Beat) it is alright, maybe another time. But how have you been? I haven't seen or spoken to you in a long time.

Bridgette

I know right? It has been like forever, but I am doing fabulous (Flips hair).

Eduardo

(Chuckles) I was just remembering all the great memories we shared. Do you remember the time your glasses fell and toppled our science project? (Laughs) That was hilarious.

Bridgette

(Impatiently) Oh yeah! I like have to go, my friends and I have places to be, ok!

Eduardo

Oh okay, BYE! (Walks into Hasbrouck and greets cashier) Hello sir, thank you. (Minutes later, finds a table and begins eating)

Bridgette

OMG! (Talks to friends) You guys are so cool!

Eduardo

(Notices Bridgette and calls her) Hey! Hey Bridgette!

Bridgette

(Pretends not to notice Eduardo and then suddenly turns around) Hey you!

Eduardo

I thought you ate already. Why did you lie?

Bridgette

Oh I forgot. Sorry (Flips hair).

Eduardo

Never mind, I feel that you are not who you used to be and with your new beauty and friends, you never acknowledge me. It is okay, I'll have dinner myself. (Walks away) Bye, Bridgette.

Bridgette

(Feeling sad) Wait Eduardo, I'm sorry.

The End

Ha Jin Collection by Stephanie Fernandez

Dear Yuchin,

I do not know you personally, but I have heard a lot about you. I am your sister's best friend and she tells me everything. She tells me that when she first received your emails she was excited to hear from because you guys no longer were writing letters at the time. But now she misses those. The emails you send her on a regular basis are overwhelming. I am trying to understand why she cannot say no to you or why you act in such a manner. But I truthfully, cannot understand. If this is a way of you coping the hardships you went through with your ex-husband, I am sorry you had to go through that but this is not your sister's fault. So please cope another way and stop trying to take it out on her. It is appalling to see you act this way. There is no reason why you have to ask for more than what you can get. Your sister works hard for her money. You are an educated, 26 year old woman. The same way she can continuously work hard you can too.

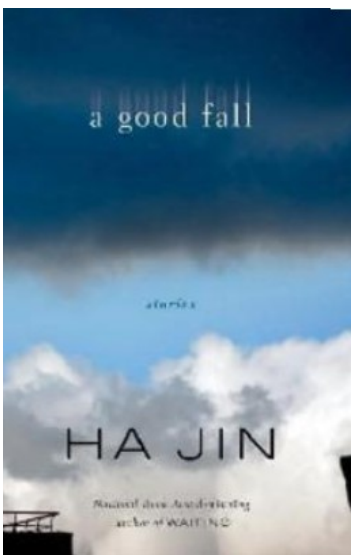
You bought an apartment and your sister even sent you a down payment for that. That I understand. If your sister can offer you a helping hand, good for her, but you are abusing her and taking her whole body. That is unfair; you are living in a bubble. There are people who have nothing at all, yet again you want more and more. For what? Is it going to make you any happier?

The problem here is not your ambition. It is the fact that you are manipulating people to obtain what you want. At this point you are not living for you your living for society. You bribed an officer to pass your driver's license test. That is not okay! Then you harass your sister through emails. You give her sob stories about you not wanting to live anymore because you do not have a brand new car. Instead of wasting your energy trying to put down your sister to get what you want, maybe you should go out and seek professional help.

Your sister does not grow money on trees; she works at a sushi house, ten hours a day, seven days a week. She has goals and aspirations. However, she may never be able to get the apartment she wants or the business she dreams of owning if you are planning on holding back for the rest of your life. You went as far as posting yourself on the internet to sell your organs to get the money you wanted! Now that is beyond inconsiderate. You most likely were never going to go through with it, so the fact that you did that to manipulate your sister into lending you 10,000 dollars is sick. Your manipulating her got you what you wanted, but in the long run be careful because you could get yourself into serious trouble. Appreciate your sister and life itself, not for the material things that one day will all be thrown away.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Fernandez



The Remarkable Photograph by Yeiri Cruz



I sit; I look; I reflect, and so many memories fill my mind. I realize how much I have grown, and my grandparent's venerable picture, which is next to my wooden desk in my new home, makes my room feel like a new beginning, one tied to my unforgettable past. The crack that runs down the middle of the picture symbolizes the imperfection of their marriage. The photograph, black-and-white as a chess board, was taken the day of their new beginning. On their marriage day the "King and the Queen" got ready to play "Ready, Set, and Go." My grandmother's brilliant smile, glistening like a diamond against the sun, reveals the joy in her light-coffee eyes. Next to her, my grandfather stands like a soldier so proud of marrying the love of his life, yet looking on guard for whoever might try to interfere.

My grandparents mean the world to me, especially my grandfather. I grew up with him, and to me he was more than a grandfather; he was my father. He always protected me like a *Delphinus Capensis* (long-beaked dolphin), a species in which the male protects the young. He would always be prepared to protect me from anyone who would try to hurt me or mess with me. I always had that father figure in him, and that is why on the day that he died I felt so devastated and vulnerable. It was such a horrible feeling, I feeling that I will never forget. I was only fifteen years old and I had so much drama going on at that point of my life. His death made a special impact on me and my life completely changed from that moment on. This extraordinary cloud came over my head, and fogged my thoughts. I felt as if I was also slowly dying.


My favorite memory of him was when I saw him for the last time, I realized it was more like our goodbye. I felt it in my heart like a mother's instincts before I had to return to New York. I remember one day the proud look in his face as we were sitting in his living room in Dominican Republic when he told me, "You are beautiful don't ever forget that don't let no one tell you otherwise. You are going to make it far in life as I did because you are a very intelligent and humble young lady and this is what brings you out and stands you out. Always remember that your beauty doesn't come out from the outside it comes from your inside and the way that you speak, treat and act towards others is what really matters." I felt the tears dropping from my eyes like a drop of rain in a dry surface. The last kiss and last words to me will forever remain with me. They are a permanent tattoo in my heart.

My grandmother has always been the angel from above who has taken care of me since the day I was born. We share the same jet-black hair, curvy body, and light-brown eyes like honey. Every time people who knew her see me they always say, "It's amazing! Yeiri is just like Blanca." My grandmother was named Blanca because of her pale white skin color. She was as white as milk. I

was named after her; and my middle name Esperanza comes also from her as it was her middle name too. I wish I could have met her, but she died a year before my mother gave birth to me. Even though I didn't meet her, I know that she was such a strong woman, just like a soldier. My mother always reminds me of how responsible and respectable she was. She took good care of her family and always stood up for them. This is why my mother tells me that I need to follow in her steps to resemble my grandmother like she was. I wish I could have met her, so I could have more memories of her but even though I don't have lots of memories, I have the best one... her appearance.

My room would not be complete without the photograph of my grandparents. I feel some sort of comfort and warmth like a baby in his/her mother's arms. Even though my family is away from me, my grandparents are still there. Waking up from my day dream, this dorm room feels so much like home; their photograph enables a cloud of love spreading throughout my room. All I can do is smile remembering all those good memories. It seems like I hear their voices telling me that everything is going to be all right. Our hearts will always remain connected, my veins flowing with love that will never break.

The Things I Carry With Me by Audrey Lavilette



Keeping valuable objects brings me comfort; I like to keep important belongings around, especially items that mean a lot to me because of the memories attached to these items. After planning to leave my home and family to live on a college campus, I knew there would be limited space in my room, and I wondered, “What I should bring with me? What should I leave behind?” Among all of the articles that I knew would be necessary for my comfort on campus, I decided to bring two special objects with me: a pen and a rosary. These two special objects make me reminisce about my past, home, family, and friends. Since these objects are very helpful in hard times, I carry them with me. The magical pen and my special rosary are always in my purse. I am always scared to lose my bag because, if I did, I would lose these precious objects too. If my purse were stolen, the robber would find my wallet, pens, make-up, and lotion. He might throw out the pen and probably be too scared to steal the rosary, a sacred object. The robber would likely take my money, thinking that it is the most valuable thing to me, but it is not.

On May 9, 2009 I received my First Holy Communion. I was nine years old, and coming from a Roman Catholic family, this event was very important, because it was a sign that I was growing up in the right path. To celebrate, there was a party with family and friends, my uncles, aunts, cousins, grand-parents. I still remember the good aroma coming from the food of the exquisite menu my mother had prepared. I received a lot of gifts, but the only gift from my First Communion party that I still have is a scented rosary. I cherish and carry the rosary because it was given to me by my great-grandmother. The rosary is of a burgundy red color and has fifty-nine small beads. The rosary also has a special incense scent, and there is a crucifix at the end. The crucifix has designs consisting of grapes and leaves, and in the middle of the necklace a medal of the Virgin Mary is attached. This rosary has a sentimental value because I have owned it for many years now; it was given to me by great-grandmother who passed away at 101, and her life greatly impacted my family. She was around for so long that she passed knowledge to my grandmother, my mother, and even me, and I was very grateful to have known her. I grew up with this rosary, because my mother always wanted me to put in my backpack so it could protect me; one time I almost got into a car accident, but I was okay, and I believe that the rosary had saved me. Since college is a new place, a new home, having the rosary makes me feel safe. My rosary brings me comfort; it reassures me that everything will be okay, so if my classes get hard, I can always pray to be strong and have hope that I will be successful in my college career.

Purple has been my favorite color as long as I can remember. I have a purple watch, purple shirts, and purple sheets, and my bedroom walls are even

purple. Of all my purple belongings, the most beloved is a simple purple pen. I acquired this pen when I was thirteen, in the eighth grade. My friend Sally allowed me to borrow her purple pen to take notes in class. Because purple is my favorite color, I fell in love with the pen the moment I started writing with it; therefore, I kept the pen and made the decision to make it mine. Sally asked me numerous times to give back the pen, but I did not want to, so I kept saying, "I'll return it tomorrow." Sally kept asking, "Audrey where is my pen? You better give it back to me because I know how much you love everything that is purple." After a couple of weeks, she finally gave up saying, "I am going to be a good friend and let you have it since you are not going to give it back anyway." The pen is a ballpoint pen, with a body made of purple plastic. It is a mini-pen, so it is easy to carry around. The cap has a hole where you can put a chain. The first time I used the pen to take a test, I got a hundred. I was so happy and told to myself, "I am going to use you again," and I did. Not only does the pen help me score well on numerous exams, it also reminds me of my friendship with Sally. It is also magical because, ever since I have owned it, the pen has never run out of ink. For five years, I have been using that same pen.

Starting college is a new beginning, and these items will help me go through tough times. I will always need my special pen for important tests and to take notes. I will always need my rosary to pray and keep me safe while I am away from home. Without these items, I would probably be nothing; they helped during the past and they will help me in the future. Being so attached to these items, I would be devastated if my purse was stolen, and I would be relieved only if the thief spared my purple pen and my rosary.

Slip the Gloves On by Jonathan Cabassa (Essay Excerpt)



When I was seven, my father took me to see the biographical movie, *Ali*. I was enamored by the way he upheld himself and never let anyone talk him down. His abilities in the ring were phenomenal; to me, he is the greatest fighter who has ever lived. I would mimic some of Ali's lines from the movie such as, "Float like a Butterfly, Sting like a Bee, his Hands can't Hit, what his Eyes can't see." As time passed I eventually was introduced to Muhammad Ali's inspirational quotes; some of those quotes are on my wall in my dorm right

now. If it was not for this one man and his words, I would have never slipped my boxing gloves on and started my passion of boxing.

As I grew older, I was often in some sort of altercation with people and ended up fighting them. I also watched many action movies and was athletic, which only strengthened my will to fight. I always wanted to try something new whether it be sports, video games or a certain fighting style. I was a sponge as a kid, trying to absorb everything thing that I saw, and when I saw a move that I did not know how to do, I would try and find a way to mimic it. I often pretended to do some of the moves the WWE wrestlers made; however, once I found out the fights were faked, I wandered around looking for other fighting styles. I became aware of karate, Jiu-jitsu, Brazilian Jiu-jitsu, Muay Thai, wrestling, kick boxing, etc. I took steps to find what style would fit me. [. . .]

When I started high school, I was an active member of the fitness club and played many sports and talked with different people. Eventually I stumbled upon a few people who were interested in fighting as much as I was. We researched the numerous boxing gyms around the area. The first gym I had my eyes on was Gleason's Gym in Brooklyn. This gym had a reputation of fostering great fighters who had gone on to be Golden Glove champions and professional boxers. Sadly Gleason's was far away and both the traveling plus boxing expenses would cost a small fortune. My next choice was Morris Park Boxing Club, but my mother was too nervous about me commuting at night. This gym was also costly. For a while I gave up trying to find a gym that could help me become a champion. As if by some miracle, my friend Robert Bonet approached me and said, "I found a gym a couple blocks away from the school and they are not too expensive. Even if the price is high they will work out a payment plan with you." I paid fifty dollars a month for the use of the gym and twenty dollars a week for my trainer.

I thought my hardships were over until my training actually began. My trainer was hard on me from the start. He pushed me way beyond my threshold and stamina. When I was tired, he pushed me to continue. On some days, I would be so exhausted that my little sister would have to help me to the car

because my legs would give out on me. All the workouts were serious, and not to be taken lightly. If I messed up while I was doing an exercise, I would have to do the routine all over again. My trainer would say, “Your mind is what gets you through this. Nothing else; if you think it, you can do it, no questions asked.” One day, while training, he told me something that will always be in my mind. “Mayweather and Ali did not get to where they are by sitting on their ass” and “You are not WEAK.” When I heard these words, they made me push myself harder.

Sadly the time came where I could no longer ignore my shoulder injury. I had a torn labrum from playing football with my friends, and while I was boxing, I tore the damaged ligament some more. At that point, I had to stop and get surgery on my shoulder. My boxing career ended. When the doctor gave me the news that boxing was prohibited I had a look of dismay on my face; I did not know what to do. I felt as though my life was taken from me, and my art would soon disappear, without a trace. No one would have any recollection of the mark I had made on the boxing world.

After my injury, I slowly became out of shape. I was a couch potato not wanting to do anything. Eventually I had to go to physical therapy to rehabilitate my shoulder. When I was told I was progressing quickly and that I could become active again really soon, I found myself at a fork in the road. What should I do? Should I honestly bother? Or should I go ahead and try to make my mark in the boxing world again? [. . .]

I was happy when I found out there was a boxing club at SUNY New Paltz. I would be able to start there all over again; I would have my name floating around campus relatively soon. I could picture people saying, “Jon is a great fighter. He can go to the Gloves or become a pro.” I could not do it by myself though, and I often recalled the words that were said by Ali, my trainer, and Sylvester Stallone. Everything I do is guided by one dream, and I will not stop until my dream is a reality.

With this dream of mine, I plan to be a force to be reckoned with. No matter how hard life throws a punch I will get back up and deliver a devastating KO back at life! I will listen to the roar of the crowd, and then raise my arms up in the air triumphantly; the announcer will then say, “Jonathan Cabassa is the champion by Technical Knock Out,” and I will accept the belt with open arms and show that I have overcome all of life’s obstacles.

My Release by QiQi Huang

We were friends for ten years, and he was special to me because we used to stick together all day. However, when I immigrated to America, I started receiving an American education while he was receiving a Chinese education. We started to lose what we had in common.

“You’d better put on some make up because you are not a kid anymore.” That was what he said to me after we had not seen each other for three years. Inside of my heart, I knew he had changed. He thought I was pretty, and if I put make up on, guys would be more interested in me, so I could find a boyfriend. Most girls had a boyfriend in my hometown because they believed it was important to find someone to marry when they were still beautiful and young. Unlike other girls in my hometown, I chose to get an education before getting married. “It’s [still] not easy to know what is true for me” (Hughes 1, 16) now that I am nineteen. Hughes’s line moves me and brings up these memories.

I never forgot that he used to say he loved me. But I didn’t have the courage to accept his love. I was worried that if we broke up, our ten-year friendship would be gone. I wanted to have this friendship forever, and if the feeling between us was love, it would turn out as it was supposed to. But, I knew he never thought the way that I did.

Eventually, he met a girl, and she was skinny (most Asians prefer to stay skinny and they think that’s beauty), tall, and had charming eyes. The night when I saw his “in relationship” status, my heart was completely broken. I missed him. I kept thinking about whether or not it was my mistake, and if my struggle was a punishment for rejecting his love. Whenever I saw him posting photos of himself with that girl, I felt millions of needles penetrate my heart, and I did not have the control to stay away from the ache. He chose to study at a university where people aim to be singers or actors. He said his social life was more important than his dreams. I was depressed when he told me about his new life style. I was sad because he no longer had goals while I was still motivated to succeed. I could do nothing about it because we lived in two different countries. The only thing I hoped was for him to be happy and motivated.

His sudden change in personal values and his relationship made me think that maybe I should live like him. Another part of me said I should just be myself and live in my own way. It was not easy to distinguish which life attitude was right, his or mine.

I did not tell anybody about my sadness, and I pretended nothing had happened. I still went to school every day because I thought the only way to make my heart strong was to keep learning. In my senior year of high school, I got a chance to take a media class with college students at NYU. Having a preview of the college life and meeting with college students who were working on what they were passionate about made me feel curious about my future college life, and I realized figuring out my life goal is what I should do. Figuring that out is what would make me feel fulfilled. Henry David Thoreau once wrote, “There is no remedy for love but to love more” (Thoreau 2). I believe if I keep searching for my passion and gain more knowledge, I won’t have to struggle anymore.



Works Cited

Henry David Thoreau Quotes. *Brainy Quote*. Brainy Quote. n.d. Web. 26 Sep.2012.

Worst School Year Ever by Jose Rivera (Essay Excerpt)

Every time I am writing an essay or am asked to spell a word, a mixture of fear, disappointment, and other emotions runs through my body, putting me in a state of paranoia that has my heart beating fast and my palms sweating. It started in the fourth grade, the worst school year of my life. My classmates and I always did excellent on homework, projects, tests, and even state exams. I was the best at it all and more advanced than my classmates—that is until spelling came into our lives.

When the new school year began, I was an over-confident fourth grader. The best part was exchanging papers to see who had scored the highest. I had all the bragging rights in that class because nobody did as well as me. Everyone used to ask me how I got “A’s” on tests, and I would respond, “Study, read the book, do homework, and believe in yourself.” I was proud of myself. That went on for about five months, but my confidence soon ended.

The teacher simply said, “Okay kids, things are going to be harder from now on.” [. . .] She surprised us like a street magician performing tricks. “Oh. . . I forgot to mention we are doing spelling words from now on. Every week on Monday you will be getting a set of twenty words and five bonus words to study for a quiz every Friday.”

The next Monday the teacher gave back the test and placed our papers face down on the desks. One by one, everyone flipped over his/her paper and each classmate had a different reaction, varying from excited, disappointed, to shocked. My paper was returned, and I turned it over slowly, so no one could see my grade. To my surprise I saw an “F” on the upper right hand side of my test. That crushed my spirit inside, but I could not show it. I wanted to cry because the tables had been turned. I no longer had the highest grade in the class, but the lowest. Test after test I kept getting “F’s” and I could not understand why. [. . .]

I never fell behind in my other subjects, but in Spelling I received an “F” and saw my GPA fall. I decided to spend all my time studying spelling words, and the teacher hosted spelling bees to help students. I even believed that she had created the spelling bees just for me. The teacher gave me the easy words. Although the teacher did this regularly, all the spelling bees did was to make me want to fail because I had lost my confidence. Some of my friends noticed what I was doing, and when I was eliminated early in a round, they would purposely misspell a word in order to sit and help me study the words.

This would happen every day, and slowly but surely, I began to last longer in the spelling bees. My grade began to improve on each test from five, to twenty, to thirty five, to sixty, seventy-five, and even eighty. Each time my grade rose, I would be reminded of the day I had received a five, and it sparked a fire in me to do better.

Today, with every written assignment, I still freeze and go into a state of paranoia. The same feelings still occur when I attempt to take a test. This essay may not be a story about learning something new, but I am in the process of overcoming a fear I have had since the fourth grade. This is my story, and the conflict still continues on.

The Photograph on My Desk by Natalie Reynoso (Essay Excerpt)

On my desk is a beautiful photograph in a silver and gold frame. I see this picture every time I wake up in the morning, when I come back from classes, and before I go to bed. There are two important people that mean a lot in my life besides my mother and father, which are my grandparents. When I came home from the hospital after being born, I went to my grandparents' home where I was raised. Even today, I still sleep over for a few days out of the week. As a child, I would sleep in the middle of them, literally like a baby. My grandparents worry about me because I am like their child. That is why I love them. I have this picture of them that reminds me of how much they mean to me and how much I mean to them.



My grandparents took care of me all the time when I was younger. I would stay with them Monday through Friday and then go to my mother's house on the weekends. They took me everywhere with them. When I was only three months old, they took me to the Dominican Republic where we stayed for a month or two. After that vacation, I travelled every year with them until I started school.

After I started attending St. Athanasius, my grandmother took me to school and picked me up, from kindergarten through sixth grade. When my grandmother picked me up, she would always take me to the bodega on the corner across from my school to buy chips or cookies. On the days my grandmother could not make it, my grandfather walked me home. Every time I saw my grandfather by the gate waving at me, my stomach would fill with butterflies and excitement. My grandfather treated me like his princess; he would take me to McDonalds where I would eat fries with a burger while he drank his coffee, which he loved. My grandparents loved me like I was their own and would always spoil me with what I wanted.

This picture was taken when they got married. Both have a cup in their hands and are having a drink that looks like champagne. They are doing that thing when you and your partner cross each other's arms to drink. Both of my grandparents looked so different when they were younger, that I used to wonder whether that was actually them in the picture. However, I can tell the photograph is of my grandparents because of certain features that they kept into old age. In the picture, my grandfather is wearing his red stone ring that he loved to wear on his thick fingers. My grandmother has a pointy nose and chin; her face is very thin and still is today. In the picture she looks beautiful. I can also see where I get my fashion style as she is dressed in a classy sequined blouse and skirt with white gloves and a matching hat. My grandfather is wearing a nifty black suit with a gold tie and a white flower. Neither my grandfather nor my grandmother is looking directly at the camera, but I can see that they both have smiles on their faces. You can tell that they were happy.

Selfish Sister by Pedro Jimenez



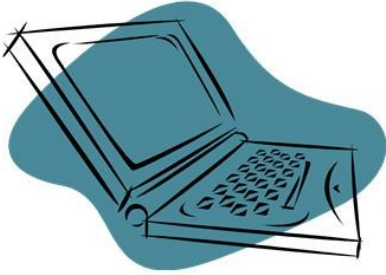
The expectations that the protagonist of the Ha Jin’s short story “The Bane Of The Internet” brings with her to United States is that she came to the country to better herself and live the America dream. Unfortunately, these expectations were crushed due to the demands of her sister who lives back home and who also wants these luxuries.

One reason that the protagonist’s expectations become frustrated is because her sister takes advantage of her. The protagonist’s sister wants to get a loan to buy a new car. But when the protagonist of the story says no, the sister goes beyond her ways to get the money for this new car. The sister publishes a notice on a popular site which announces: “healthy

young woman ready to offer you organs in order to buy a new car.” When the protagonist of the story sees this announcement, she thinks that her sister is bluffing at first. But she knows that her sister is such a hot head that she might actually sell a kidney. The protagonist knows that she has to do something about this, knowing that her only sibling is at risk of being taken advantage of. So what the protagonist does is to offer to lend the money to her idiot sister in exchange for her removing the advisement that she posted.

I think that this incident really destroys the expectations that the protagonist had when she came to this country. What the protagonist wanted to do with the money that she had saved up was to put a down payment on a small apartment in Queens. She had worked really hard to earn this money by being a waitress for ten hours a day, seven days a week. But her family assumes that she is able to pick up money from right and left just because she is in the United States. Of course, things weren’t like that at all. She had to work hard to finally save up to open her own business and get her own apartment. Though she tries to save every penny, she is unable to do so because of the selfishness of her sister.

A Picture Worth a Thousand and One Words by Ymani Vega



Sitting on my bed in this dorm room that I now consider my home away from home, I stare at the wall to the left of me. Stuck to that wall, with this weird sticky grey gum like substance is my poster of New York City. I look at this poster in amazement, and I think about my life and all that I learned in the City. Now I am here, in college at New Paltz. A completely new and different world for me. I never thought I would really see this day where I am living about two hours away from my father, whom I have lived with my whole life.

After a minute of just staring blankly at the poster, I quickly snap back into reality and open up my laptop. As I lie down on my bright pink and black comforter and put my pillow beneath my chest, I type in my password to log into my laptop. Across the screen is a photo of my boyfriend and me at the 23rd Street subway station. I begin to think about that night, and I can remember every second of it clearly. My mind starts wandering off and I start thinking about that night and how we felt on the piers. We stared up at that one star that was visible in the sky; the rest seemed to be covered by the dark sky.

The laptop's backlight begins to dim, and before I know it, the screen goes black. I shake my head and tell myself, "Ymani you will be fine. Everyone misses home within the first week or two, just don't look at anymore photos." My head tells me that, but my heart tells me to keep looking. Tapping the clicker on the laptop, I try to get it bright again, and with success, I open up the folder titled "Libraries." I click on the pictures folder. Hundreds of different photos pop up, and a thousand different memories flash before my eyes and inside my head. I click on the oldest photo I have and that day begins play like a movie in my head. I begin to remember.

The air was filled with the scent of coffee and chicken soup. The room was warm and everyone was laughing and talking. Giving all my focus and attention to my beautiful bright orange pumpkin, I was unable to comprehend and understand what everyone around me was saying. My pumpkin sat on that old white table that grandma had in her living room. This time it was not by the window though. It was against the television by the doorway of the living room. I sat there, right beside it, and I looked at it as if it were the greatest pumpkin in the world. I put my arm around it, turned around, and with my favorite pink pacifier inside my mouth. I gave a great big smile to my mother. Click! went the camera. Jumping off the table quickly, I tip toed to reach for my pumpkin. It was too heavy for me to pull down. As I continued trying to pull it, I heard my grandmother yelling at me from the dining room, "Ay dios mio! Nena, cuidado!"

I looked at her and laughed because I always found it funny when I got yelled at in Spanish. I turned back around and continued to pull my pumpkin and slowly my pumpkin came to me. Finally, I got it off the table and began to slowly walk into the dining room with it. Struggling to walk what seemed to my little mind and body a hundred miles, I got to the dining room and put the pumpkin on the open chair. I climbed up onto the next chair and up onto the table. Then I started reaching down for the pumpkin, and I tried to pull it up, but I was unsuccessful and it ended up falling out of my small

hands and onto the floor. “No!” I thought to myself. “I broke my pumpkin! Mommy is going to be mad at me!” When I looked up, though, she smiled at me and laughed. My fear at being yelled at began to fade as she picked up my pumpkin and put it on the table. When I looked at the pumpkin I realized it was not broken. It had just gotten a “boo boo” on its nose. Jumping down onto the chair and climbing down to the floor, I ran past my grandmother and past Missy, the big black cat my grandmother has had since before I was born. I quickly ruffled through Grandma’s drawer with all the sewing supplies and knitting needles. Sprinting back to my pumpkin while opening up a pink Barbie band aid like a doctor in the emergency room, I put that pink Barbie band aid right on my pumpkin’s nose, and I gave it a kiss and said to it, “There you go pumpy, now you will feel better really soon.”

Snap back to reality once again and I click back and begin to search for another photo in this library of hundreds of photos. [. . .]

It is crazy how time flies by and how many memories we can create and save within our lives. As I think back to that day I put a band aid on my pumpkin, to the day my baby cousin comforted me, my first time on a roller coaster on my 9th birthday and then to my 18th birthday when I got my first tattoo, to right now when I am typing this paper, I realize that life goes on and no matter how badly you wish you could stay in a moment. Sometimes all it takes is a simple picture to bring back a hundred memories. Ever hear the saying “A picture is worth a thousand words” or how about “Take a picture, it’ll last longer.” The truth is, a picture is worth so much more than a thousand words and pictures last for a life time. Many people have picture frames and photo albums , but I like to keep my life all compressed into a more modern day album. My laptop contains a few self-written stories, over 500 photos and over 1000 memories to last a lifetime. This is why my laptop is worth not one and not a thousand, but a thousand and one words.