

ESL Newsletter

Published by
English as a Second Language Program Students



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ESL NEWSLETTER

A publication from Fall Semester 2008 English as a Second Language Students



Parking: A Big Problem at BHC

By Matomlagou (Kodjo) Baguissogo

When I interviewed students at BHC on September 26, 2008 about the parking problems at BHC, 15 out of 20 students said parking was still a big problem. "This semester, I decided to take the bus rather than drive my car to school to avoid being late because of the parking problems," said Liassidi Komla, an ESL student at BHC. Students can park their cars in the Parking Lot 4, which is free; however, most of them do not want to park there because they do not want to walk. Anne Bollati, the ESL Program Coordinator said, "The problem is that students do not want to walk five minutes to their class; they want to park their car next to the building where they have class."

Students complain that they pay for the pass in order to park their cars near their classes and avoid walking, especially in winter when it is very cold.



Kokou Agbodo, another ESL student said, "If I paid for the pass, it is because I don't want to park my car in Parking Lot 4." He added, "Our parking should be expanded," because he thinks that expanding the parking will help students coming to class on time. Another student who didn't want to mention his name said, "To avoid being late, I park my car in the wrong lot; unfortunately, I got tickets 3 times for this." Another student suggested reducing the price of the pass; he thinks that \$15 is expensive.

Although some students find this price expensive, the staff and some instructors do not think so. Karen Hindhede, an instructor at BHC said, "If you divide \$15 into 8 months of school, the cost of parking is \$1.875 per month. That seems fair." Captain Fiems, Chief of Campus Police, said "Fifteen dollars is fair. Most colleges charge much more. Many high schools charge more than that too. The amount is set by the College Board of Trustees, not by the college administration."

In addition to the price of the pass, students talk about one more problem—the safety of the lots. Many students believe that a 24-hour video surveillance should be installed to avoid theft and vandalism. They said that there is rare vandalism and theft in the parking; however, "Prevention is better than cure," they said. Calleb Waller an American student at BHC said he never heard about car theft, but he heard some students



complaining about the theft of their parking passes. "Your pass can be stolen if you forget to close your car windows," he explained. "Theft does occur in the parking lots from time to time, but it is rare considering the number of cars we have here," says Captain Fiems; however, the staff noticed two thefts this fall. In his report of September 25th 2008, Chief Fiems said, "Today we noticed two reports come in of burglary to cars parked in Lot #3 and the other was parked in Lot # 4. The car parked in Lot # 4 had its window broken by the thieves while the one in the Lot # 3 had its windows partially rolled down. In both cases, items set on the car seat were stolen."

Taking into account all these points of view, it is clear that the best solution to satisfy students' parking problems is to expand the lots and install 24-hours video surveillance; however, Captain Fiems, says, "There is no need to expand parking here." He explains, "We have more spaces than cars 99% of the time."

Fiems says it is hard to find parking sometimes, but this problem is a scheduling problem not a parking problem. Many students also think that the amount they paid for the parking pass can help install 24-hour video surveillance. Fiems says that cameras in parking lots are very expensive to purchase and maintain; however, the



campus police is looking for ways to expand its current surveillance program. For the police officers are patrolling the lots

much more frequently than in the past."



A New Scholarship

By Youma Nyiada

B.H.C has a new scholarship called the **Cristina Green** scholarship. This special



scholarship is given to students who are completing the ESL program and moving toward their major.

Cristina Green was a very special person to many of us at B.H.C. Unfortunately, she passed away suddenly last year. My father considered her a close friend because she was

always there whenever he needed her. In fact, she had a very interesting life. Cristina Green was a counselor for many years, but before that she was an ESL teacher. Because Cristina Green was from Argentina, she felt lots of compassion for immigrant students. That is one the reason why she decided to become a counselor.

This is a special scholarship that is called "endowed." That means families give money to the college and the college invests that money to give more scholarships. The scholarship is given to students who are completing the ESL program and moving toward their major. Omar Badam Gul and Marco Garcia-Ibarra are the two people who completed the ESL program and won the

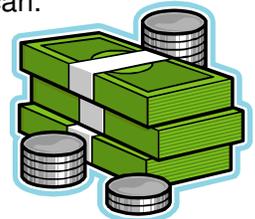
scholarship for this fall. They each received two hundred and fifty dollars.

Anyone who is interested in applying for this scholarship should apply around March when the Black Hawk College Foundation Scholarship forms becomes available for the fall semester.

We should continue this scholarship because Cristina Green did a lot for this school; she motivated and inspired lots of students. Through this scholarship, her memory will live on and she will help students like the ones she so loved. I also believe we should keep this scholarship going because it is a reminder for those of us who loved her and cared about her. Doing this will help us feel closer to her and also keep her alive in our heart.

We can keep the scholarship alive by donating whatever amount we can.

Anyone who would like to donate money to the Cristina Green Scholarship should make a check payable to B.H.C., and address it to Shelly Cain at the Foundation.



Be sure to note the money is for the Cristina Green Fund. We would appreciate any donations.

Thank you to Christina's children who really put time and effort to help this scholarship be so strong. Christine's family and others at BHC did great job creating this scholarship, and I know it will help many students.



ESL: The Same Way of Teaching?

By Salvador A. Mojica

When we see the abbreviation ESL (English as Second Language) the idea pops in our mind that this person is learning English. Before I started the ESL program at BHC, six weeks ago, I used to think that all ESL programs were the same, but this is not always true. As an ESL student who has taken classes in California and in Illinois, I can explain some differences between the programs in two unrelated colleges.



The ESL program in RCC (Riverside Community College, CA) and BHC (Black Hawk College, IL) differ in the way in which the instructors teach the class. For instance, in RCC in writing classes, the instructors are focused on the

development of paragraphs and essays only. For example when I enrolled for intermediate writing, my instructor's goal for the class was to write five paragraphs and one essay during the semester. This sounds easy, but the tricky point is that every time that I would write the paragraphs or essay, I only had a set time and the worst thing is that I did



not know my topic until one minute before I started writing about it.

Another example is that instructors require a minimum of two textbooks per class and by the end

of the semester students have to finish both books. The instructors base the organization of the classes around these books. In contrast, BHC instructors develop research papers and a newsletter in addition to the paragraphs and essays. For instance, in Writing II students are expected to write five essays, a research paper, and a newsletter article along with several paragraphs. In addition students are required to buy only one book, but they can study handouts that the professor gives to the students in class.

At RCC only full-time teachers have office hours, which is problematic for students to clarify any doubts that they may have. The instructors in BHC have office hours, even if they are part-time teachers, so they can assist the individual necessities of each student.



Different from RCC, BHC has many tutors for the ESL students and a well-organized lab. The tutors in BHC are friendly and they always give to the students ideas how to improve their skills; also they are there for the students when they have a problem or they just want to talk. Furthermore, the ESL lab is well-equipped with computers and dictionaries for students who need do homework or want to talk with the tutors in a



peaceful environment. In contrast, RCC has only two tutors for the ESL program, so they are busy all the time, and the students have a maximum of ten minutes to talk to the tutors.

And they do not have an independent lab just for ESL students; instead, they share the reading and writing lab with all the other students, so everyone is waiting impatiently for the next available tutor.

Another difference between RCC and BHC is WebCT. RCC does not have hybrid courses for the ESL program because the ESL coordinator

believes that "face to face" teaching style is more convenient for students who are learning a new language. On the other hand, BHC's coordinator believes that it is better that students get used to all the academic options through the ESL program. WebCT allows students to communicate between themselves and with the



instructor; they can take quizzes online and see answers to their assignments.

To sum up, although I think that the ESL program in BHC has more opportunities for the students to develop their English skills, I can not say that one is better than the other because each system is constantly changing to give the most beneficial learning experience for the students who come to the US. After all, the goal is the same, to teach foreign students English, so RCC and BHC have different methods to achieve such the same goal.

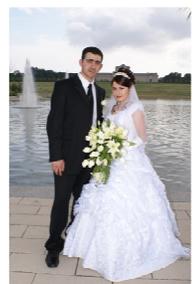


Wedding Customs and Traditions

By Raziya Gasanova

"If you want to test your memory, try to recall what you were worrying about one year ago today," stated Joseph Cossmain, the successful entrepreneur. Apparently I do have a strong memory, for I dearly recall a year ago when I married.

My biggest worry was when I entered the wedding reception room with my husband, Vagif. I was full of worries and fears that I would do something wrong; I walked in leisurely and regally, so people could observe my wedding dress and my hair. The most important person in the wedding is the bride, so she has to be beautiful. Also, my wedding dress was from Russia, and it looked different from other people's dresses. It was a beautiful two-piece satin embroidery, portrait neck gown. The corset was filled with the floral, satin lace appliques and satin embroidery. The bottom of the dress was a satin



bubble pick-up skirt with small, sparkles and floral brooches.



As I walked in, I used a special gesture where I put my hand to my head in order to indicate thanks, offer a greeting and show respect to people. I wanted to see everyone in the room, but I couldn't because I had to be calm and graceful. However, I could hear

beautiful traditional music which was about a groom and bride. Then, we were stopped at the middle of the room, and our relatives and friends danced around us.



In the middle of the room, I sat down on a chair. Suddenly, the music stopped and people sat down in their places. Everybody was looking at me and waiting for the next part in our traditional Turkish ceremony. A clean, white, folded scarf was placed on my head. My husband's god-father pulled out his decorated Turkish sword and started dancing around me. After he danced one round, he stopped and said to people, "Ladies and gentlemen, what should we cut? Head or tongue? If we will cut her tongue then she will be without it, and if will cut her head, then she will be without her head."

When people said their opinion, the godfather came to me and lifted the scarf off my head with his sword. He repeated his dance and his speech three times.

This tradition comes from our grandparents a long time ago. It means that if the godfather cuts the bride's tongue, she will be quiet and calm in her husband's house.



People always answer the tongue.

Then, I had to stand up and use the same gesture of thanks as earlier with my hands three times.

While I was thanking people and the godfather, my aunt came to me with red belt, which she tied on my belly. Then, she brought Turkish bread and rice. She put the bread between the red belt and my belly, and she gave me rice to hold. At the same time, children started dancing around me. Beautiful girls in their magnificent dresses tried to dance as if they were brides. Then my aunt called Vagif to dance our traditional dance with me. While we were

dancing, Vagif's uncles and father threw money to us, and my aunt took the rice from peoples' hands and started to throw it around.

When people throw money to bride and groom it means that they will have rich life. In Turkish culture, rice represents good fortune and money; that is why the more that is thrown, the better it is for the couple. In addition, the meaning of putting bread between the belt and the belly represents success in the family. Also, dancing kids around groom and bride means a lot of children in their family.



The traditional dance ended with slow music. Vagif held my hand, so we could go and sit on our chairs decorated with the ribbons. With beautiful flute music, we stepped on to the stage where we had to stay until our parents gave us permission to sit. I stood on the stage and tried to see every person who came to enjoy our wedding. Then, for one minute I thought about the first part of my wedding in my parents' house. The day before this wedding I had another big ceremony.

First, my younger brother, Naim, had to sell a beautiful, silk pillow to Vagif. My brother started the bargain. "How much will you pay for this unique pillow?" Vagif held out two hundred dollars, but Naim thought that wasn't enough, so he said, "Vagif, my sister is charming and smart, so do you know what I am talking about?"

Then Vagif said, "I know your sister, Naim," and held out five hundred dollars. Everybody started to laugh about Naim's way of selling the pillow. This tradition means that brother of the bride



gave the message to the groom about their marriage like a surprise. When I was leaving my house, my mother couldn't follow me. She had to sit on my seat and

cry. Now, I was standing on the stage and hearing all the beautiful wishes from all our relatives, except my parents, who couldn't come to my second wedding. The parents of the bride can't participate on the groom's side because it's believed they can bring bad luck to their daughter.

Every person in the room tried to have ideal speech to give us; after the speech he or she had to dance with family. Then my father-in law took a

microphone and said, "Let your eyes be light of happiness, let your smile to be bright and joyful, your heart to be kind and full of responsiveness, and the voice of love to be like singing fiddle." His words were so touching and kind that I had a tear in my eye. After a few dances everyone took their seats, and Vagif and I had to dance our first waltz. I was nervous, but happy because I knew that I would have a happy life with my husband



A Foreigner's View of Raising Children in America

By SongKum Prock

If someone were to ask me, "Where would you prefer to raise your children, your country (I am from South Korea) or in America?" My choice definitely would be the U.S. Raising children in the U.S. is one of the biggest blessings that I could have for my children because my Korean background was unable to



provide the same environmental conditions as my children have now.

One strength I have found is that the American education system provides an academic, sports and social environment for children. The blending of the American academic and social learning experiences provides children a much better opportunity to be successful in life, whereas the Korean education system emphasizes an academic environment. The Korean education system is not as well-balanced as the American schools in areas such as academic, extracurricular and social activities. I have noticed American schools emphasize students' participation, discussion, presentation, observation and creative skills. Since my educational background is different from Americans, I remember giving presentations to others less than three times in my entire academic life. The Korean education system places an emphasis on the students memorizing ability; therefore, many students are uncomfortable giving presentations in front of their classmates.



Another benefit of schooling in America is that students can enhance their physical health by participating in school sports. For example, my 17

year old son, Dennis, hadn't had opportunities to participate in sports activities when he was in a Korean school. After my family moved to America, Dennis started to play school soccer. Involvement in school sports teaches students how to interact with others, and it gives them a chance to build a relationship based on their team work.

The last benefit that children have at school is a variety of social activity programs. I had never known what prom homecoming or school dances were until I came to the U.S. In my opinion, they are great social outlets where children can express themselves out of classroom. Eventually, students learn the skills to present themselves properly to others in different situations including the ability to carry on conversations with others.

Having a well-prepared health and social service system is another distinct benefit of raising children in America. The medical availability is a great one. My 10-year-old daughter, Julie, had a few cavities that had to be treated, so she had to see the dentist regularly. I was concerned that she might be frightened while she was in treatment. When we entered the dental office, her fear was gone as all medical staff was so kind to her. Now,

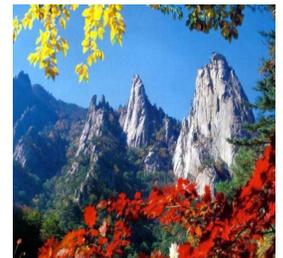


she loves visiting the dentist because she can choose her favorite flavor mouth wash, and she gets a little gift, too. She thinks visiting the dentist is fun. In fact, she has aspirations of becoming a dentist some day. I am very impressed the way

medical staff treat their patients in America.

Another social benefit which impresses me is shopping availability. Shopping is great here because I don't have to worry about parking the car, bumping into people or someone picking my pocket. There are large selections, and prices are very reasonable compared to my country. My children can get their basic needs satisfied such as clothing, shoes, school supplies and electronics within our budget.

The emphasis that is placed on the natural beauty of the country and the preservation of wildlife amazed my family. We have seen so many different wild animals such as blue herons, swans, squirrels, geese, bears, fox and deer that we couldn't see easily around our apartment in Korea. I enjoy breathing clean air, watching the stars so clearly, enjoying a walk in the beauty of



nature. I have never known how grateful I would be to have nature in our lives.

Finally, I consider family relationships as the best benefit of living in the U.S. America is a society where almost everything is based on family events. Doing something with my family enhances strong family bonds among the family members. The more people spend time with their family, the stronger the family relationship will become. My family tries to get together whenever we have special occasions. I have four grown stepchildren; two are living in Chicago and two are living in Wisconsin. When holidays come, they always try to come to our house to spend time with us. We have a house full of family members, especially, at Christmas and Thanksgiving. The makeup of my extended family is diverse in cultural richness as I am Korean, my husband and stepchildren are American and one of my stepdaughters is Japanese.

Since we have diverse family members, we fix our traditional dishes and share different food and cultural activities together. Our family also does many family activities together such as swimming, playing sports, watching movies, playing games, boat riding, fishing, going to church and participating in school events. I am so happy my stepchildren ask for our help whenever they face obstacles.

I have seen many different social interactions in America that I had not seen while I was growing up in Korea. I remember shortly after arriving in America, when my daughter was three years old, we went shopping at a mall. I saw another mother and daughter shopping for clothes. Since I didn't know about the American culture, I was interested in observing the way they shopped. The mother asked for her daughter's opinions in choosing outfits, and I saw how she respected her daughter's opinions.

This one little incident gave me a chance to reorganize my relationships with my children and awaked me to admit to some mistakes that I had made with my children. Children are able to be themselves without being controlled by their parents and teachers so naturally here in the U.S.



Since that first shopping experience, I have learned the American culture, academic experience and social environment have made a great impression on me and has changed the way I think and act with my children. I did not have these experiences while I was growing up and can see now as an adult how great these opportunities will be in the future of my children. These academic, environmental and social experiences will make my children self sufficient and confident when speaking with or to other people of the world, an experience they may not have had if I had not moved to America.



A WINNING TANK

By Gil Shafir

10/6/1973-Yom Kippur, the holiest day in the Jewish religion. People were spending this special day fasting and praying. Then Egyptian and Syrian soldiers attacked Israel at 1:35 PM. The attack was an absolute surprise for Israel who wasn't ready for war; however, the people had no choice but to fight back and defend their land. The secretary of defense, Mr. Moshe Dayan, gave a message to the people of Israel on this first day of war, "I hope that they [Egypt & Syria] will be defeated in such a way that they will think in terms of peace and not war." I'm about to tell the story of my father who stayed for two days in a tank during the war. I learned of his experiences through stories he told me as I was growing up, and recently he added more details as I talked to him on the phone. My name is Gil and I'm proud to be the son of a man who fought and risked his life so that others and I could live in a world of peace. Israeli soldiers on the way to the Suez Canal.

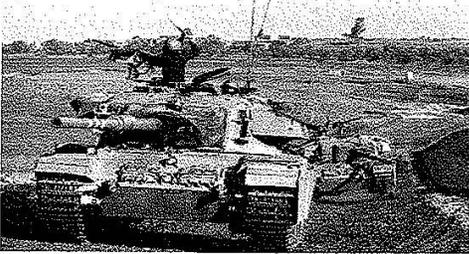
Day one, 10/16/1973 Tuesday: My dad is



Israeli soldiers on the way to the Suez Canal.

sent to the south of Israel along with his tank unit. At midnight, the moon was like a giant light bulb up in the sky that lit the entire field of Israeli artillery. My dad and his friends were sitting on their tank looking west. His friends included the driver, the gunner (himself), the loader, and the commander. They were supposed to head west, but for some reason the actual command was delayed. Meanwhile, my dad and his friends kept telling their tank driver what to do in case they got hit. My dad told me once that when a tank gets hit,

the driver is most likely to survive, so it's very important that he stays calm and manages to get the tank and crew back to safety. I've heard stories from my father about tank drivers who got hit, lost their mind, and went into shock leaving them and their crew as a steady target to the enemy. Morning came, and my dad said that before him was a sight he'd never seen. A huge amount of artillery and soldiers were spread out from one horizon to



Israeli tanks making their way to Suez Canal.

another, about half a mile. But something was not right; everything seemed stuck; something went wrong; maybe the attack had failed.

My father said that nobody knew what was happening, and if they were going to attack the enemy or not. Later on at the same morning my father, with his crew, received a message through the tank radio that their original mission was canceled for the moment. My dad couldn't explain to me in words the feeling which he and his crew felt after they'd heard that delightful message. My dad said that he felt such a relief, for it was like he got his life back and that he was saved.

Unfortunately, the good news didn't last for long, and two hours later they received new mission orders. "It was time," my dad said to me. The new orders which came from way up in the Israeli government were to start approaching toward the Suez Canal looking for enemy tanks. Just before sundown my dad and his crew spotted a few unrecognized tanks. No one knew if they were Israelis or Egyptian, and the tension and fear inside the tank reached a new high. Egypt and Syria border Israel and very much resent Israel's existence. The cause for this war was the Arab-Israeli conflict. This conflict has created several wars and battles since 1948.

"We were in war," my dad told me, and for that you can't allow your fear to mess with your mind and actions although everyone was shaking and their stomachs turned like a carousel. My dad's tank and five more tanks from his unit kept approaching the unknown tanks. My dad once told me, "A winning tank is one that stays down and hides behind the hill while the enemy shoots at him, and then comes up, shoots, and goes to hide

again." My dad and his crew were exposed halfway down to the unrecognized tanks, and there were many of them - at least 10. Shaking and praying, they kept moving forward not knowing if the tanks in front of them were friendly or not. All of a sudden one of my dad's friends shouted, "They're Israeli; they're Israeli," and with four seconds left before opening fire, most of the crew confirmed that the tanks were indeed Israeli. Everyone was happy to see each other. They joined forces and continued the mission, to find and destroy enemy tanks and vehicles.

Day two, 10/17/1973 Wednesday: My father recalls that the general of the armed forces came in a helicopter that day to talk with their unit commander about the attack. The second they left the place, in which they had met, a missile hit the tent. The Egyptian artillery was at its best! "The feeling was that everyone was trying to kill us," my father said. The Egyptian tanks were shooting non-stop all night while the Israeli airplanes were bombing targets on the ground, and we were in the middle of everything that happened." Suddenly my father realized that the Egyptian soldiers whom he was fighting against were young and scared people just like he and his friends. Both fighters from both sides were in the same boat, but the ones who won the war got to live, and the ones who lost - die.

On 10/17/1973 Wednesday: My father and his crew were hit by an Egyptian tank. Two of my father's crew were dead at the moment of the explosion, and my father and his friend were injured and rescued. My father was injured badly and had to stay in the hospital for more than a year. Unfortunately, many of my father's good friends didn't

Four Israeli soldiers sitting on their tank on the way to Suez Canal.

make it to the hospital. The Egyptians fought with great force and so did



the Israelis. More can be read about this conflict at www.historylearningsite.co.uk/yom-kippur-war-of-1973. My father means a lot to me, and I admire his great courage. If not for him and his friends, neither I nor many others would be here today.



Immigrants' Lives

By Kokou Agbodo

In life everyone looks for a better place to live. Many people from all over the world believe that America is a dream country where life is easy. They come to the USA to have a better life. I came from Togo to the USA for the same purpose. I left my family and all I had in my country to come to USA. We believe, back home, that America is a paradise on the earth; however, things were not as we thought. The life in the USA is difficult, especially, for immigrants.



Many immigrants are not used to the American lifestyle. They have a hard time synchronizing their lifestyle with the American one. As an immigrant, I have difficulties figuring out which customs and practices to use, especially because I don't want to offend anyone. For example, in my culture,



I should not look in the face of an older or important person while he is talking to me. Conversely, here in the America, I have to look directly at people to be respectful. Most immigrants are from communal countries where

people are used to doing things together, so the individualism here in the USA is seen by most of us as being arrogant and selfish. This situation predisposes people to solitude and makes immigrants feel very homesick. For instance, a former ESL student, Fatimata Barikire, said, "I felt homesick for a year, for I did not know anybody and nobody seemed to take care of me, so I felt like going back home to see my family".

In addition, immigrants can't communicate easily in first years of living in the USA. This leads to many problems. In my own experience, I have to say that in the first year, I could hardly speak or understand a word of American English even though I had learned British English for seven years in my country. Every time that I had something to



say, I had to write it down and asked my interlocutory to write down what he was willing to say. I could only find jobs that needed less communication; as result, the only kind of job I could find was working in warehouses; consequently, I was employed at Tyson. It was a very hard job, but I did not have any choice. The problem of communication is very crucial in the lives of the immigrants. Nhan Nguyen, a classmate from Vietnam said, "The most important problem that my parents told me they have here in America, was working with English instructions, for they can't read or speak English." Even if the immigrant is somebody who had graduated from college in his country, if he can't speak American English well, he cannot find a job according to his education. He has to work at warehouse. I know people who had their master's degree and were working before they came to America, but they are not considered educated in America. For example a friend of mine and former ESL student, Yao Kotoku, earned a masters degree in accounting and was working back home. Even though he came to USA in 2005, he is still working at Tyson.



In everyday life immigrants face huge challenges from the cost of life in the USA. For them, life in America is hard as stone. They have to work hard to pay the debt of their journey to US. They have to support their family here in America and the rest of the family in their home country. If they choose to continue their education, they have to pay for it. All these expenses come from the same modest check they earn from hard jobs. They often do not have any free time because some have children to raise. It is difficult for them to do such physically demanding jobs, take care of children and go to school. I do not have children to raise, but just working in a hard job and going to school are very difficult to fulfill; imagine those who have children. Nevertheless, they strongly hope for the best future, but it takes an average of 7 to 10 years for immigrants to be settling down to something like what they had in their own country and to have a better job depending on the background education the person has.



Another problem immigrants have is discrimination. It is an everyday reality for them at their job, at school and when shopping. American people seem to create a distance from people who speak different languages, or have a different accent in speaking English. Not only that, but also it often seems that they do not like strangers. For example an ESL student, Salvador Mojica from Mexico said, "The principal problem we have is discrimination; that is why immigrants try to live in a community where they can feel they are without prejudices." The good news is that not all Americans have that behavior. I know some of them that are really nice and helpful to strangers. For instance, Norma, an old woman in our church, is known for her assistance to strangers because she takes care of new immigrants in our church until they become used to the life in America. She gives them rides and helps them to find a job. In my case, for example, she took me to the hospital and stayed with me all the time when I was sick.



In conclusion, even if we are still struggling in the everyday life in America, we should consider the freedom and opportunities we have here. Life is just like building a house. As every material is necessary for the achievement of the building, so is every difficulty we overcome in our life. Let's keep going, let's keep hoping for a better future; we will achieve it for sure.



By Mariajose (MJ) Gonzalez

The time came. The streets were getting new color and energy from national, international, and local guests coming to the city, painting the streets with happy smiles. The fresh smell of coffee and the sweet smell of freshly-baked cookies came from the bars opening at 6 am. Every painting and mural posted on the old colonial 'plazas' and streets could make everybody's dream



about returning to the 16th century of the Mexican history.

Friday, the day is here! – "Can you hear? They are here!!" – And the voices shouted, "Guanajuataaaaaatoooo, Guannajuatoooo, we are here!" In the middle of this, I turned my face to my



friend and smiled. "Here we go!!!" And we both laughed jumping into the crowd, dancing, and singing. "Where are you from?" is a question many people asked, but there is just one correct answer: "The World"; so, let's celebrate the "International Cervantes Culture

Festival."

The International Cervantes Cultural Festival has taken place in Guanajuato, Mexico each October since 1972. It began when university students went out to the streets posting poems and phrases from Miguel de Cervantes Sabedra, who was a great writer of classical literature. Such was the impact of this event that it had an increasing following. It kept happening each year until it caught the governor's attention. As a result, Guanajuato has become one of the principal tourist places of Mexico. It is the place of the artistic diversity of many cultures.



Right now, Cervantino is a huge party that lasts a whole month without stopping. Each year one honored country visits us and one honored state of Mexico represents Mexican culture. So we, Mexicans, can appreciate the architecture, cinema, theater, opera, sculpture, dance, music, etc, from another part of the world through planned and spontaneous events. The unplanned events, such as the dancing and cinema on the streets are awesome. The streets are full of people dancing to the sound of the drums played by the hippies and Rasta people. Others do tricks with fire sticks and 'golos'. Moreover, people like to go to the long steps of the main university where a big screen is located. They watch films of the history of Mexico or original Mexican films.

There are attractions and events for everybody, but what my friends and I enjoy most are the concerts, night clubs and the great spectacle of "lights and fire." We attend every rock and classical concert in the plaza of "La Alondiga de Granaditas." There is a large alignment of steps

where the audience sits and watches the events while other people dance below enjoying the music.



The most spectacular event is “lights and fire” that takes place in the big “frog plaza” (called like this because Guanajuato in Purepecha dialect means ‘place of frogs’). This event is a kind of theater mixed with opera. The actors fill the entire plaza

with fireworks and an amazing background that transports the audience to an indescribable rare world where there are colorful lights, beautiful music and a huge story that becomes part of us, and we cannot forget it. For example, “What is the watermelon laughing about when it is being murdered?” is a great strange reflection that I like so much from this event, and I will never forget it.

When the end comes, the streets empty to be filled with the music of the silence. All the beautiful colonial streets and history become the attraction. The students return to their arduous studies, and everybody is already waiting for the next year to celebrate Cervantino. “See you next year,” some foreign people say with huge smiles of satisfaction on their faces as they make the trip to their respective countries.



Young President

By Onder Badur

The day was April 23rd 1997; I was very

excited, but I didn’t know why. When I went to school, students were in the school’s theater. I



wasn’t sitting; I was standing behind a very big red curtain. As the curtain opened, everybody was looking at me. I started reading a poem that I memorized two weeks before. After the poem, everybody clapped for me; I was so happy. I was in first grade, and I was barely reading. My teacher taught us that April 23rd is a very big day. He said there were two reasons: the first one was our parliament was opened by our famous leader, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. The second reason was that April 23rd was Children’s Day, given to Turkey by the same person, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. April

23rd was not only a big day for Turkey, but also for me.

On March 19th 1920, after three days of occupation of Istanbul, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk, who



was the general of the Ottoman Empire, sent a telegraph to delegates in the country, which said to come to Ankara, the capital city of Turkey, to make a new parliament. On April 23rd 1920, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk and delegates

opened the new parliament. After that, the day was celebrated as the Sovereignty of the Nation until May 27th 1935 when Mustafa Kemal Ataturk changed the name of the celebration to Sovereignty of Nation and Children’s Day. In 1979 UNICEF decided to make the celebration international, so foreign children started to come to my country and celebrate with us together in peace. This event is unique.

During the day, on April 23rd students don’t go to school to learn; they go to school to celebrate Children’s Day. In the mornings students read poems, sing songs, and dance. They talk with kids from other countries and tell them why we celebrate this day.



During the day, the students in elementary or middle schools who have succeeded in their classes are chosen by their school’s principle to be president or to be a parliamentarian or to work at some place in government. The young president gives a speech about his or her topic of choice even though this child doesn’t really have any power. In addition, the government makes big fairs for the kids. For example, when I was ten years old, I went to a fair after the school’s show with my friend. In the fair we participated in a lot of activities, such as, soccer, basketball, some team games. We didn’t have to pay.

In the night we celebrated the Sovereignty of Nation. In Istanbul, people get together in Bagdat



Avenue (Turkish: Bağdat Caddesi) which is 5.5 mile long avenue. We walk from the beginning of the street until the end. We wear red and white which is our flag’s color, and we carry flags.

During the journey we sing our nation anthem or some national songs. Actually Bagdat Avenue is very busy street; there are lots of cars on it, but the government closes the street so people can walk on it. The government puts fireworks on Bosphorus Bridge, which is world's fourth longest suspension bridge span. Also the government puts the fireworks on the sea.

Mustafa Kemal Ataturk said, "My only hope is our children." This quote explains why he created a celebration for children. He loved kids; every time he went somewhere he always talked with a child. I am so lucky



First celebration the children's day

that I have day like that in my country. Ataturk decided to make children feel important by giving them their special day. I thank him for making me feel special.



TOGO AFTER THE DEATH OF EYADEMA

By Mikemna Koussowa

The world is filled with problems.

Contemporary society is going through a morality crisis and a generalized dissolution of morals. There are wars, cheating and violence all over the place. Negotiations, peace agreements and cease-fires have failed. Nowadays, numerous are those who think that problems can find their solution in wars and vengeance; this is what destroys our world. Many countries are affected by this animosity; therefore, the lifestyle of every country is marked with a disastrous historical event. In this way Togo (West Africa) is a typical case. In addition to positive political events, Togo has lived through a tragic historical event which is indelibly printed on the memory of the Togolese. This article will show that from beginning to end, the death of Eyadema and the presidential election afterward have scarred Togo.

Everything began on February 5, 2005 when Eyadema Gnassingbe (President of Togo 1967-2005) died suddenly. According to the Togolese Constitution, after the president's death, the president of the National Assembly should become acting president. At the time of Eyadema's death, National Assembly president Fambare



Natchaba was out of the country, and Faure Gnassingbe, the son of the late president was sworn in as acting President to "ensure



Eyadema Gnassingbe

stability". The army wanted Natchaba to resign his position and allow Gnassingbe to take over legally; however, the African Union denounced Gnassingbe's assumption of power as a military coup. A day after his father's death, the National Assembly received clear instructions to dismiss Natchaba and elect Gnassingbe in his place, which would legalize his succession; Gnassingbe's election was unanimously approved by the deputies who were in the National Assembly at the time.

The opposition was not represented due to its boycott of the 2002 parliamentary election. The parliament eliminated a constitutional requirement that elections be held within 60 days of the president's death, enabling the younger Gnassingbe, hungry for the



presidential power, to rule until the expiration of his father's term in 2008; however, under pressure from others in the region, and particularly Nigeria, Gnassingbe announced that he would step down as president during the interim period. He also announced that new elections would be held within 60 days.

On April 24, 2005

Gnassingbe was nominated by delegates of the ruling party, the Rally for the Togolese People (RPT) as the party's presidential candidate competing with the main opposition candidate, Emmanuel Bob-Akitani, who was at the twilight of his life, and the second most important person in the opposition coalition after Gilchrist Olympio, who could not take part in the election since the Constitution requires that any candidate must have lived for at least 12 months in Togo, and Olympian had been in self-imposed exile. In the election, Gnassingbe took slightly more than 60% of the votes according to official results. The RPT, the ruling party from 1967 until nowadays, refused to allow oversight during the counting of the ballots. The European Union (EU) and the Carter Center deemed the elections to be fraudulent. Mass



protests by the coalition of opposition parties led to the killing of over 500 citizens by security forces.

Some 40,000 refugees fled to neighboring Benin and Ghana, most of whom have since been repatriated despite concerns. Extrajudicial executions, arbitrary arrests, indiscriminate repressions of the residents of a neighborhood where alleged opposition sympathizers live, threats of rape, repeated threats against and intimidation of private media have all been common. Those events have changed the political and social aspect of Togo.



Nowadays Togolese are behind their neighboring countries. Togolese are trying to sort themselves out. A lot of effort is being made in order to remedy some problems, but it is important to note that nothing seems to be happening.

The Togolese Human Rights League (LTDH) in a memorandum on the human rights violations committed on 5 February 2005, concluded that "in reviewing the facts gathered by various sources against the testimony of witnesses and survivors, it was in a position to officially ascribe the events to premeditated, politically motivated military operations, carefully planned and executed with the intent to kill and injure".



The scars left on Togolese people are evidence that around all the world, contemporary society is getting worse. Wars multiply, refugees multiply too, and the poverty expands like the jet streams. Nobody knows where all these atrocities will lead. Numerous are people who think nowadays that we are going to the Third World War. Human beings had better find the best way to resolve the political, social and economic crisis without creating some more. The events after Eyadema's death in Togo are still troubling many Togolese because a lot of them are crying for their relatives who were killed; others are crying for their material possessions burnt or stolen during the disturbances.



New Move / New View

By Kodzo Degni

It's practically impossible to get to know the difference between two or more things if you are only used to one. I knew and learned about the other continents within the world at school, but the idea to visit or become a resident of another one of them wasn't my goal. I was focusing only on my dreams, which were getting educated, finding a good job, and living a normal life like anybody else when I heard about a certain type of lottery, called "The Visa Lottery," which can enable someone to visit and live in the United States permanently.



I started applying then for "The Visa Lottery" to see how far this new and exciting opportunity would lead me.



Fortunately for me, I won on the first try, and then my vision of things began to change. I began planning to change my life in every way, making sure that I fulfilled every single requirement listed on "The Visa Lottery" forms. After I successfully satisfied the terms and conditions as a potential winner, it was then possible for me to take off for a trip to the United States of America. Now after living in the United States for four years, I can look back and notice the change in my life style.

First, I used to have a busy life in my home country, Togo, because I was a graduating student trying to get some experiences at the same time. I was a full-time student living with my parents, so the greatest responsibility that I had was to pay my school fees. The rest of my earnings were then kept for my own usage which included some saving. In fact, beside my studies, I was teaching classes called Fundamental Accounting Principles, Financial Mathematics Principles, and part-time at two different private technical high schools in the city. The first technical high school was called "The Technocrat" and the second technical high school "The Columba." These activities enabled me to earn some money. I supplied myself with whatever I wanted to have including clothing, transportation, gas, savings, a couple of public phone stations, and many other personal needs. I didn't have to pay the rent, the



electricity, and the gas for cooking, a phone bill, medical bills, car insurance, groceries, and many more. My life was very busy, but I still had time to accomplish my favorite hobbies such as playing soccer, racing, jogging, playing volley ball, and sometimes playing basketball, swimming, and many more. I didn't know about stress because I knew that once I was done with my studies, I would be able to get that job of my dream using on my major. These were some of the aspects of my life in Togo when suddenly, good news changed everything.

In 2002, I was sent a winning notification for a permanent residency in the United States, a year after I applied for the visa lottery. I prepared all I needed as proof of my eligibility for entering the US and submitted the documents which were approved.



Everything changed the day I landed in New York City at the JFK airport where my sister's friends, a married couple, came to welcome me and took me home. It was in winter time with iced snow on the ground. It was freezing that day.

When my social security card was sent to me after two weeks, I went to look for a job and found one at Kiddies Towne as a sales person. I realized then that America wasn't a small paradise, like I thought. After three months, I decided to leave my sister's friends and be by my own, which I did after I thanked them. That way, I'd be able to face reality and would grow better with experiences. I started getting telephone bills, paying rent, paying for the bus and the train tickets, shopping for groceries, paying back the money that I owed in



Togo, sending some money to my brothers and sisters, who were still ignoring what was really going on. I started being stressed, having a lack of time for my own relaxation, being uncertain about what would happen next for me and about the future. I wasn't able to keep any money in my account because of my expenses. I was nervous about it. I used to spend two hours in the train before arriving to my job in the Bronx where I worked ten-hour shifts, six days a week for as little as three hundred fifty dollars before taxes.

Eventually, I decided to take an eight-hour security training course certificate, and then a sixteen-hour security training course certificate, in Harlem, Manhattan, and a Fire Guard certificate to help me find a security guard job to enable me to learn English at Bronx Community College. All these changes didn't give me the right schedule I needed for college. I heard about Tyson and Black Hawk College in Illinois, where a close friend of mine lived and decided to move. Once in Moline, I registered at Black Hawk College and got hired at Tyson Foods, where I worked for a while.

In conclusion, my life in Togo was busy, but at the same time, I enjoyed it because I was used to that type of life

compared to the life in the United States which I'm not used to at all. It's not easy to leave a comfortable life and suddenly move into another one which is totally



Soccer Investor

different. One way to explain this discomfort is very simple. Since habit is second nature, adapting to a totally new life beside the one I had my entire life couldn't be a piece of cake for me. That doesn't mean life is impossible in America. Life in America is very stressful, sure, but I think at the same time that there are many sources of opportunities in America more than I thought I had in my home country, Togo. My new perspective is to take care of my education, which is for me because this is the only way I can overcome difficulties and become a winner in the US. I'm willing then to pursue my studies in the health field and become a health care provider. When that happens, this change will have been worthwhile.



The Educational Systems in Egypt

By Mohamed Hosameidin

About four or five years ago, my Egyptian friend got sad when he knew our gym class was canceled. The reason was that our science teacher decided to take that period of class and explain some lessons, but my friend didn't like that. He talked to the teacher about that and begged him not to do that because he wanted to play soccer, but of course, the teacher did not accept that and started explaining the lessons. My friend started talking to his friends quietly and cursing the teacher. He also

didn't show his notebook to the teacher, which made the teacher angry, so on that day, they both had a big quarrel and the student's parents came to



school the next day. It was a really big problem. Education in Egypt is not the same as it is in the United States. The educational differences are more than the educational similarities between both countries. Generally, students here in the United States are

luckier to be educated and learn here for many reasons such as the lack of strong economy in my country which is the most important reason.

In Egypt, the educational systems are unfair because many students there study so hard, but unfortunately, they aren't accepted to join the college which will allow them to take the classes they need to take. For example,

when I was in my country, my major was engineering, and my grade was 93.2%, but I had to get 94% to join the engineering college, so I couldn't join that college. That was one of the most important reasons why I immigrated to



the United States. Colleges are different there because students don't have the choice to choose their classes or majors. Unlike the American educational systems where students focus on many and different classes, almost every Egyptian student thinks that engineering and science are the best two subjects because they help for getting a better job in the future. The number of the students who prefer taking those classes is about 70 % or 80%. Some the students prefer literature classes, but science and engineering classes have better opportunities than any other classes because it's a fact in Egypt that when engineering and science classes are taken, there will be a better jobs after graduating from college.

When a lot of students have the desire of joining the same college, it's so hard for the college to fit for all the students. As a result, they join some



other colleges to take other classes which they don't prefer. Consequently, students get depressed and hate the educational systems of their country. If students get just a little less grade than required, they have to join the same college but in a different city. For example,

my friend who used to be my classmate in high school got just 1% or 0.5% less than what he had to get to join the engineering college, so he couldn't join that college, and he had to travel to a city which was so far away from our city. He was really sad because he had to choose to leave his family for one year in order to join another college. It's a very hard choice, and that's why students think it's really complicated over there. Students also wish to immigrate to a different country which has a better system of education especially the United States. They know that students take whichever classes they want to take, and that they can get more financial help.

One of the serious problems of the Egyptian secondary educational systems is the number of the students inside the class. In contrast to the United States, Egyptian students might not get as much information as they



have to get because the number of the classmates is often big. Often, in private schools, there are from 25-30 students whereas in public schools, there are often from 40-50 students which are a result of not having enough funds. Approximately, 70% of the people send their sons and daughters to public schools while the rest send them to private schools. As a result of the large number of students in the classroom, students sometimes fight during the class time. Large numbers of students inside the classroom also makes it so hard for the teacher to explain the lessons fairly for all the students. For example, when the teacher explains the lesson, he or she won't be able to answer all the questions of the students who raise their hands because there are too many. Students also find it hard to understand the subject from the teacher especially because there might be some of the students not concentrating during class and annoying the others by talking or making noise.

Another problem in the Egyptian



educational systems is focusing on just studying and memorizing subjects but nothing else. Unlike the United States, most of the requirements in the Egyptian systems of education are on tests and studying materials from the textbooks which the

students are given the first day at schools. For example, projects or interviews don't count as

scores or credits especially at the last two years of high school. All students just concentrate on is how they will study and how they will have to pass their final exam of the year.

Punishing students is common in Egypt, too. In the United States, teachers don't have the right to punish their students physically, but it happens in Egypt. For example, the most common way of punishment is to hit the student with a stick on the hand. The teachers do that when they see students being lazy, not doing their homework, or annoying others in class and causing troubles and problems. In my opinion, teachers shouldn't do that because this method is not really useful to students at all, but absolutely, it makes students hate education. I can mention a very specific example of a guy who used to be my classmate in high school. That student was talking a lot during the class time when the teacher warned him many times. But when the teacher couldn't take it anymore, he ordered that student to stand up and come to him, and he started beating him up so badly as if he was fighting him. Somehow he punched him in his face and slapped him. The student, of course, cried a lot, and the teacher really felt so bad because of what he did. In the end, he apologized to that student several times and told him the reason why he did that, which was because the student made him mad!!

Whereas Americans care about all the subjects at school, especially sports, the Egyptian educational systems don't care about sports that much. For example, when it's time for a sport class (any sport), some

students just go to have fun; they walk and talk. Sometimes they go home if it's the last class period, but many of them play sports and play soccer which is the most popular game there. Sometimes other teachers take the gym class for themselves to teach their subject to the class, and they force the students to attend that particular class. Students really hate that, and they feel it's unfair and that they need to practice more and more on playing sports for their physical benefits. Even though there are a lot of disadvantages in the educational systems in Egypt, a lot of students just try to forget that and work so hard for their educational future to graduate and get their successful job which they need .

Most of the problems go back to the number of population. Somehow it seems that the



educational systems in my country don't help students to satisfy their educational needs. I hope that after a few years people will start to use more technology and build more schools in order to make the education easier there in my country, and also to make schools fit for students so that they are able to learn very well. Also, the Egyptian government should spend more money on the systems of education because it's really important.



America: *Dislikes and Likes*

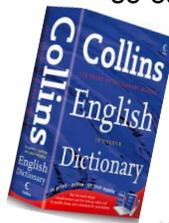
Submitted Anonymously

I moved to here six years ago. Life wasn't so easy because I had to leave everything I knew. I didn't know anyone except my family. I didn't know a word of English nor did I have any friends that could speak my language. I just had a dictionary that helped me get around. In school, I was the only African, so it was hard to get along with the

Americans. Some of the students would come to me and ask me rude questions about Africa. For example, they would ask me if I had a car, lived in house, and if we wore any clothes. One year later, I started speaking the language, and I met some new friends. Life became more fun. Now I can say that I have a more reasonable view of this country. I dislike some aspects and like others.

One of the things that I dislike about America is the fast food restaurants. These places serve fattening food, and it causes obesity and diabetes. Since I have been here, I have seen lots of overweight kids everywhere I turn. I understand parents have to work, so they don't have time to cook for their family, so they feed them quick and convenient fast food. Parents, also feed their kids lots of frozen and take out food. That's one of the reasons why kids are not as healthy as they should be. I believe adults should stop eating fast food in front of the kids so that the kids would learn healthier eating habits.

Another aspect that I dislike about America is how some families believe that it is necessary for eighteen-year-olds to move out of their houses. I don't believe they are mature enough to take care of themselves. In my opinion, kids should stay with



their parents until they are ready to move out. If the children are in college, the parents should wait to have them leave until the children graduates. If the children are not in college, the parents should let the children stay until they find a job with which they can support themselves. In my country, girls are not allowed to move out until they get married. The men have to bring their wives in the house that they grew up in so that the women can help the man's parents with the housework.



The high cost of living is difficult to accept. Hospitals are really expensive in the United States, especially if you don't have an insurance card. When I find my mailbox full of bills every month, I think that life here is really expensive for those of us who have to go school and to work part-time. When my mom got sick, the doctors took good care of her, but when the bills kept coming, she was frustrated. It took her *years* to finish paying them.



On the other hand, I really like education in U.S. which is important to most international students because we have moved here to have a better education. All people can get a good education even if they cannot afford it. We can always get loans or have financial aid, so we are able to continue our education. A good education is like money in the bank. We also have wonderful teachers who care enough to help us with our difficulties in the classroom. In my country, when I went to college, the teachers didn't teach, they just played tapes. The students had to figure out the rest. Also every three months, we had an important exam to go to the next level, but even if a student passed the test, the authorities could sell it to someone else. We had to retake the class until we passed. There was no investigation for it because the government didn't care. Here it doesn't happen because everything is well-organized.

Americans have open communication in their families. I believe that what Americans are doing is great because they always talk about things that are important for their children to know. Americans are not afraid to teach their kids about life. They ask them about school, work and friends. They ask them if they need help with anything. They are



always there for their children. From where I grew up, it is very hard for females to ask their parents about things that we females go through in our life. For example, parents think it is inappropriate to ask them about men. Americans believe that it is important to answer children's questions. When a child asks a mom or dad how babies are made, the parents answer that happily, but in my culture a child can never ask that question of the parents.

I also like American politics. In the United States, when someone is running for president, they must participate in debates and town meetings. In my culture we don't have that. The rule that limits a president to two a four-year terms is also great. In my country, a president can be in office for a long time and sometimes that president can try to have his child replace him. In the U.S. the government is well-organized.

In conclusion, despite some things that I dislike about America, I have learned lots from being here. I have learned that education in U.S. is important to have because I can find better job after, and I will be able to afford the cost of living in United States.

The United States is a great, well-organized country. Even though there are some things that really frustrate me, I believe in the future, we can make changes together.



Experiences of Immigrants

By Yawa Afanvi

For a long time people from different countries have come to America to look for peace and to look for jobs. Some come to have a better life; however, it wasn't or isn't what or how they thought it's going to be for them. Before they leave their country, they thought they would be in paradise, but it hasn't turned out like they thought. Instead they have had many difficulties.

My dad's experience is typical of immigrants. When he came, the first thing he did is to look for a job. But, where to find it? There are lots of places where immigrants work. For example, Tyson, Ex Pac, Excell, Farmland and so forth. Most of the immigrants work at Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc. Tyson.



Tyson Fresh Meats, Inc.

If they don't know any English at all, Tyson hires a translator who explains information to the immigrants. My dad found a job there. He works at second shift, where he will go to work at 3 in the afternoon, and come home at 4 o'clock in the morning. We will wake him up at 7 o'clock to give us ride to school. He will get up out of bed with heavy red eyes because he didn't get enough sleep. He will walk tiredly to the car. "I am very tired. Hurry, I will take you to school, and come back to go back to bed," he used to say. I felt very bad and at the same time, proud of him because he only got 4 hours of sleep before taking us to school, which shows what a loving father he is.

Next, immigrants come across discrimination at work because of their skin color, their language or where they are from. For example, Song, one of my classmates who worked at Rock island Arsenal for 18 months as an accounting technician, stated that people with whom she worked didn't talk to her. "I felt like a stranger in the office for few months; my co-workers wouldn't talk to me for six months. Even though I greeted and smiled at them, some of them never responded to my greetings," she said. But,



because of her honesty, some of them ended it up talking to her.

Another thing is that some families have difficulties because of their job. The work affects their children. In some families in the morning, their kids will go to school and when they got home they won't see their parents because they went to work. When the parents get home the kids are in bed. So they

don't have any family time together, which later affects the kids because they don't have any family supervisor. For example, when I was in high school, I only got to see my father for 30 minutes on every school day, which is not enough, because of his schedule.

Back in their country, some of the immigrants had a Bachelor's degree. Some were university or elementary teachers, or some worked at a better company, but when they came here, their job is to butcher meat which is embarrassing to them.

Often, when they go to work, their boss treats them like they are nobody, and the boss doesn't talk to them nicely even though they have a higher education than their boss. Some of



immigrants have said, "This wasn't what I thought I would be doing or how it was going to be. If somebody told me that that's how it was going to be, I would have called that person a liar."

In conclusion, immigrants have a difficult time in the U.S. finding good work. They are living a stressful life and are struggling so much. My father always said to me, "Go to school, go to school,



study and study, in order not to do the work that I'm doing. Even though some immigrants had hard work experience in their countries before they came, they said that the work that they are doing here is harder than the one they did in their country.

From their experience, if I don't go to school to get a better job, it will be more difficult for me than the ones working now because I didn't have any hard work experiences in my country before I came to the U.S.



The Tet of a Vietnamese

By Nhan Nguyen

What day do you think is the most special day of the year? What significance does that day have for you? And, how are you going to celebrate or enjoy that day? Well, if you ask any Vietnamese those questions, his or her answer – just like mine – would be "Tet." Tet refers to the Lunar New Year, which usually takes place a couple weeks before the first of January. And, for all Vietnamese, Tet marks a new start of the year for everyone to expect many good things to come: happiness, health,



fortune, and success. Every year, I could not wait for the day Tet would begin; but when it did, I never wanted it to end. Now that I am in the U.S, I still wait for the fresh air that marks this day.

A couple of days before Tet, people start staying home from work and school. In fact, it is the only event of the year when everyone can obtain a long break. House by house, new colors are painted as if to dust away the ash of the old year. Everyone is busy with chores; they clean the house, wash the curtains, trim the garden, and decorate everything with ribbons . . . all must be done before New Year's Eve. From everywhere, there is talking and laughing; more than that, songs of Tet are played.

Some traditional families carry out the formal activities; all the members gather up to prepare food and wrap the Tet cakes. My family used to be one of them. Two types of cakes which represent the Earth and the Sky will be offered to ancestors in commemoration. Children are all happy waiting to have new clothes which make them feel more mature. At home, my mom made a lot of foods since we would not cook during the days of Tet. Working hard at the end of the year signaled the start of New Year as a year of fortune and success.

Before New Year's Eve, people from



youngsters to seniors just cannot wait for the counting down of the last few seconds until the beginning of another year. As it reaches twelve, from everywhere, the

sound of fireworks, screaming, and singing break out. What an exciting moment! No one can sleep through out that night; foods and drinks make cheer last until morning. People also go to churches and temples to make and reveal their dreams. And, on streets, it is crowded like no other day. It does not matter if everyone is neighbors or strangers, they hand each other a branch of cherry blossoms as a sign of "best wishes in the new year."

Every year, I enjoyed the firework and musical show at the city center with my friends. There, we were also pleased with the impressive Dragon Dance which is going to bring luck, health and protection to everyone in the New Year since dragons represent power and delight. When it starts turning red and the new day is about to come, people go back home; they gather with family and relatives to spend the happiest and most memorable moment of Tet.

My family carries out the celebration of Tet in this traditional way. In the early morning, every member puts on his or her best looking suit; then, we head down to the living room



where my mother had set up the table with foods from the last night. Although it tends to be chilly outside, the warming air from candles and working kitchen keeps everyone in an excited mood.

We begin the traditional activity with my parents sitting in their chairs; their children line up from elder to younger and start offering wishes to them. The wishes of health, luck, and success seem to be the same as the previous years, but somehow they are important to be spoken out at the moment, and my parents take them happily. In turn, they wish us to have a successful school year and give each of us a red envelop in which we receive lucky money of about \$20. This little red envelop always caught my interest. We then hug each other and enjoy the meal.



A lot of Tet foods at the moment catch my attention after a cheering night. They seem to be more delicious since we can only have them in Tet. My favorite food is always the Tet jam made from coconut meat. Also, the celebration of Tet cannot



finish without watermelon, the fruit that represents happiness since there is thick redness inside of it. After the meal, we go to my grandparents' house where all the relatives gather. Again, we offer wishes to everyone, from seniors to youngsters, to get the red envelopes. For kids, it is the most profitable chance of getting rich while the adults think that "money goes out will come back like water." We take pictures, have foods, and more than that, we play cards and bingo. Tet is really one of the only times that my family can enjoy each other like this.



The following days after the first day of the New Year are still considered Tet days; thus we enjoy every day until the break is over.

We go visiting our relatives, friends, and neighborhoods. In tradition, we believe that the first person who comes to our house at the beginning of the year will affect our family in everything and every aspect throughout that year. So, we are all excited to hear the first knocks. And, every day of Tet brings back happiness for us; every year marks something new and unforgettable. Sometimes, when recalling of these memories, I wonder when I will be able to enjoy the next Tet since my family

now no longer celebrates it in the U.S because of having no days off from work or school.

Tradition is part of everyone's life, and for me, Tet completes myself as a Vietnamese. Living far away from my country, every year when I watch Tet come and go, it makes me miss my country even more. However, in the U.S, I can only live with my memories as the holiday passes. Each year here as I think about Tet, I realize how I should treasure what I had, especially in my youth when I still had a chance to celebrate Tet.



Memorable Experiences of My Life

By Ragya Sharma

How many of you, international students, were excited when you got your visa? Was it the most wonderful day of your life, or was it the saddest moment of your life? Different people have different experiences and views on these questions. These questions may be new for American students, but may be quite familiar for international students. What I am going to describe is all about my feelings and other students' feelings when they got their visa and came to America.

I was the one who had always dreamed to go to the U.S. to study, and I wanted to have a good degree. I was the one who had never left my parents for a single day. My day used to begin when I woke up to my mom's calling my name and used to end after having her home-made dinner. Not only me, I think most the international student were spending their life in the same way as mine in their own country. In this situation, you all can imagine the emotional state of a person getting visa and getting the chance to come to the U.S. Of course the student will be happy as his or her dream is going to be fulfilled. The student is going to get a chance of having a better education, but at the same time, there will be lot of sadness inside his or her heart because the student is going to leave the parents, relatives and country. When I got my visa, I went and told this great news to my parents. They became very happy, and I was also very excited, but my mom's



eyes were filled with tears. Seeing her emotional state, all my joys disappeared as I was thinking how I would live so far from my parents.

I had come to Katmandu, the capital of Nepal, to have an interview in the American Embassy. After I got the visa, I went to my home town where I stayed for a week. There I went to my relative's house, had lots of fun, and went to different places to hang out with my friends. In this way, the time of waiting passed quickly. The flight date came nearer. One of my friends, Nhan



Nguyun, from Vietnam told me in an interview that his parents had come to airport to say goodbye; likewise, my mom and dad and my other relatives also came to airport at the time of my flight. When I went to the airport, there were many students who were coming to the U.S leaving their parents. I was feeling very sad, but when I saw other students then I felt a little secure. I still feel very sad, and my eyes get filled with tears when I think about the very moment when my dad and mom were waving their hands and saying good-bye. When I remember that moment, I wish to be a bird to fly to my country. Not only me but all of us who are far from our parents want to do so.

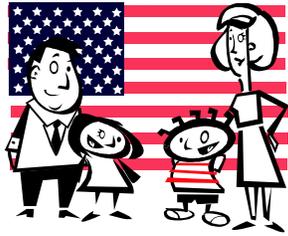
When I went inside the plane, I was not able to think of anything because I was so stressed. When the plane took off then I was thinking, "Oh! God why are you giving me such a hard punishment? What mistake have I done in my life?" I was feeling as if I was suffocating, but after 10 or 20 minutes of flight, I felt a little fresher. When I was flying up and up in the sky of my country, I was thinking whether I would be able to return to my country. Would I be alive when I reach to America? Would my relatives remember me when I came back? How would the college environment and teachers be? Would I be able to adjust in America or not? Most of the time, I was thinking about my family. I was exhausted from the first flight as I had to spend more than 24 hours in the sky to get from Nepal to the U.S. I was very eager to land on the land, see sunlight and green plants.



When I landed in the U. S., I was very excited. I took a long breath and said, "Thank God." When I saw my uncle, I was very happy. I realized I was really in the U.S. I mean, not in

another place. It was the night time. Everything was new for me: language, transportation, people, food, lifestyles, roadways, way of communication etc. I felt as if I were in a different world. I felt the people here were different. Each and every day of my life became a challenge. When I started my school, I met teachers like Ann Bollati, ESL Program Coordinator, and Juanita Zertuche, International Student Advisor, who were so helpful and cooperative toward me. Their behavior gave me a lot of courage and helped me to adjust in school. Slowly, I became more familiar with my other teachers and friends, and my life has become easier nowadays.

All in all, to come to the U.S. was one of my dreams which I fulfilled. When I came here, I was so excited, but at the same time I was so sad as I had to leave my parents and country. The time which I spent in the plane was full of struggles, but many of those struggles vanished when I landed to the O'Hare Airport in Chicago and began enjoying my life here in America. I had to struggle a lot to get adjusted here in the U.S., and it took a long time. During this period, I never gave up. I always hoped for the positive and tried to become optimistic. Happiness after sadness and being together after a long departure is the only truth of life. So I want to give all students the advice that although you are far from your country and family, never give up your hope and try to remember your goal and name of God before starting your day. Then your whole day goes in a good way and definitely you will reach your goal.

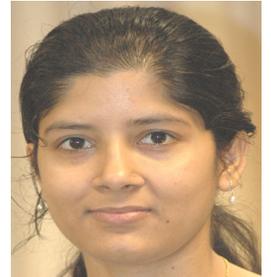


writers

Salvador A. Mojica (Andrey): I am from Mexico, and I am twenty two. I came to the U.S. four years ago, but I have been living in the Quad Cities for three months. Before I moved to the Quad Cities, I was living in California. My goal is to be a police officer. I am a very friendly person. I love to read, dance, and learn about other cultures. Also, I am a green belt in Shito-Ryu Karate-Do Genbu-Kai International, and I know how to use the sword, sai, and bo which are Japanese weapons.



I am **Ragya Sharma** from Nepal. I was born on May 6th. Actually my name Ragya doesn't have a meaning, but my friends and sisters gave my name the meaning, "Remember Always Good, Young, and Awesome." I have completed nursing from Nepal and want to do BSN here in America. My mom, dad, brother, and sister are in Nepal. I live here with my uncle, aunt, and my two younger cousins. I like dancing, singing, and visiting new places. I enjoy going outside when it rains.



My name is **Mohamed Hasameldin**. I am from Egypt. I was born in 1989. I moved to the United States in 2007 for a better education and a job. I have learned many things since I came here, especially learning how to speak better English. I haven't decided my major yet, but I prefer math. I have been taking ESL classes to improve my English. I work a part-time job besides going to school, which makes my life busier than it was in Egypt.



My name is **Yawa M. Afanvi**; I'm from West Africa, Togo. I'm going to school for radiology. I have two sisters and one brother, but I'm only here in the U.S. with my parents and my brother. My favorite classes while in the U.S. have been biology, history, pottery, sewing, and jewelry/metal making. I like hands-on work.



Razizya Gasanova: Almost all my life has been spent in country which even weren't my native country. I'm Turkish. Russia wasn't my native country, but I lived there for fifteen years, and the most interesting part of life for me was there; however, I moved to the U.S., and my life is still going. I am married to a wonderful person, Vagif, who loves me the way I am. My husband is the person who never lets me give up in this world. Vagif and I have an adorable daughter, Amelia, who is three months old. Now I am taking Writing II to improve my English. After graduating from ESL program, I want to study accounting for a two-year degree. Being a mother and wife, it is difficult for me to be a student, but I won't give up on education. As great philosopher, Aristotle said, "Education is an ornament in prosperity and a refuge in adversity."



My name is **Gil Shafir**. I am 24 years old, and I was born and raised in Israel. I moved to the U.S. a year and a half ago after I realized that some changes must take place in my life. I am the son of two lovely parents and a brother of two wonderful sisters. I graduated from the Israeli Air Force Academy in 2003, and later I joined the Israeli Air Force in which I served for 3 years. My hobbies are riding horses, surfing, and flying radio airplanes.



Kodzo Degni is my name. My country of origin is Togo, a small country in the west part of Africa, and I'm from the part called in French "Region des Plateau." I have been in the Quad Cities for almost four years now. My parents reside in Africa today, and I have four brothers (three older than me and one younger), and five sisters (with two twins sisters). One of the twin sisters lives in Paris with her husband (also a twin). I love doing sports and my favorites are the racing and soccer. In Togo my major was Accounting and Business Management (FASEG). I graduated in 2003, but this time, that focus will be my minor since I decided to be part of the health field. My dream is to get an associate degree in science as quickly as I can which will enable me to transfer to a four-year university (medicine, pharmacy or dentistry), whichever will be convenient for me.



My name is **Matomlagou Baguissoga** or **Kodjo**.



Most of my friends call me Alain or Alino. I am from Togo (West Africa). I studied biology and economic science at University of Lome from 2002 to 2007 before coming to the USA (July 2007). My goal is to become a great pharmacist. After the ESL program, I will get my associate degree in science then transfer to a pharmacy college. I like watching soccer games.

I am **Youma Nyiada**. I am Mauritanian, and I moved here six years ago with my family. My favorite colors are pink, blue, black, red and green. I love to read novels, history and love stories. I love playing sports especially, playing volley ball and softball, but I dislike watching sports on TV. I am a person who is really organized, and I have a set plan for my future.



My first name is **Kokou Agbodo**, but I am also known as **Gabriel**. I am twenty-six years old. I came to the U.S.A. in September of 2005. I have two sisters and one uncle here. Before I came, I was studying biology at University of Lome. I hope to study pharmacy after I have finished the ESL Program. I like music, TV and nature.



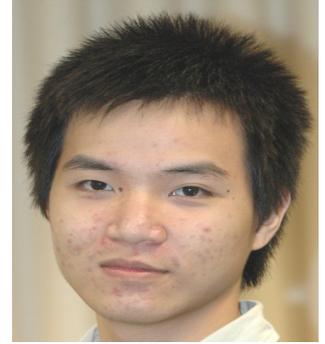
Originally from Togo, I speak French, Spanish, and English. I have lived here for almost a year. My name is **Mikemna Koussowa**, but my friends and relatives used to call me Mikey. I am single and none of my family lives here; they all live in Togo. In my country I attended school for 15 years, and I attended the university after having my high school diploma. Here I am attending school for English as Second Language (ESL) in order to improve my level in English, so I can continue to make my dream of studying international relations a reality.



My name is **Song Prock**. I come from Taegu, South Korea. Taegu is the third largest city in Korea, just like Chicago. I have been living at Fyre Lake with my husband and two children for the last five years. Living in the countryside has changed my life style. For example, I never had my own garden before moving here. Every spring I plant Korean vegetables and share the bounty with my friends. In fact, my neighbors love Korean cuisine, too. I love fishing, jogging, watching movies, being with neighbors and cooking with my daughter. I would like to go back to Korea and want to live there for three years to teach my culture to my children and enjoy my country, but I do consider America my new home.



Nan Nguyen: I like playing video and computer games and reading Chinese literature. I am originally from Vietnam and live with my parents and two sisters.



Onder Badur: I come from Turkey. I live with my parents. I love playing soccer and have been interested in race-car driving for a long time. At one point I even considered being a race-car driver but am now focusing on being a doctor.



Maria Jose Gonzalez (MJ): I am interested in art, movies, reading, music, traveling, animation, and photography. I want to do something with graphic arts in the future. I currently work part-time at HyVee. I'm from Mexico, and now I live with my aunt and uncle.



Thanks and kudos to Anne Bollati, Sheryl Gragg, Mike Winter, and Akiko Edmondson for assisting with the production of the ESL newsletter, which was written by the students in Writing II (ESL 076).
—Karen Hindhede, Assistant Professor

ESL

English as a Second Language Program

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION:

The ESL program is a seven-level program designed for non-native speakers and international students who need English skills to participate in American society, to enroll in vocational or academic programs at the college level, to enter or advance in the workplace, or to earn citizenship. Students will attain and refine language and study skills as well as deepen their knowledge of U.S. culture through a series of specially designed courses that include sentence structure, reading, writing, speaking, listening, pronunciation, and conversation. Students have access to computer, video, and lab equipment through the Independent Learning Center. Individual and group tutoring is available for any student needing help. Students have access to all college services and may participate in college clubs and attend all extra-curricular activities

TESTING:

Before class registration, all first-time students will be given the Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency. This test is composed of three segments:

1. Michigan Test of Aural Comprehension (listening)
2. Michigan Test of English Language Proficiency (grammar, vocabulary, reading)
3. Writing Sample (short composition)

Placement Scores are as follows:

* Below 60	Levels 1—5 (Beginning)
60—69	Level 6 (Intermediate)
70—80	Level 7 (Advanced)

* If students receive a score below 60, they will be given the ESLOA/CELSA test and a short oral interview to refine placement

PROGRAM PROFILE:

New Arrivals – Level 4

Offered at various satellite locations:
Black Hawk College Outreach Center
Florescente Center (Moline)
First Lutheran Church (Moline)
(Other locations as determined)

Level 5

Offered at the Illinois Employment and Training Center, Moline

New Arrivals – Level 5 follow the schedule for Adult Education classes. Students have several opportunities to register. Call the Outreach Center for specific registration dates.

Levels 6 & 7: Offered at Black Hawk College

Levels 6 and 7 follow the academic schedule. Students enroll in classes for 16 weeks. Please refer to the college calendar for specific start dates.

INTERMEDIATE ESL:

Students who enter this level have decided to begin academic or vocational programs. All reading, writing, speaking, listening, and sentence structure activities are taught in the context of a variety of academic disciplines. Students study the simple sentence from a linguistic perspective, write paragraphs using all rhetorical modes, write college essays, give five-to-ten minute oral presentations, use library resources, listen to academic lectures and take notes.

All courses are web-enhanced. Students attend classes two days a week (1 hour 40 minutes per class) and also complete one credit hour of online instruction for each class*.

* All classes labeled "A" are the online component associated with the face-to-face class.

Courses

All of these courses are offered at Black Hawk College Quad-Cities Campus.

ESL 062/ESL 062A	Intermediate Grammar
ESL 064/ESL 064A	Intermediate Reading
ESL 066/ESL 066A	Intermediate Writing
ESL 067*	Listening/Speaking I
ESL 070/ESL 070A	Communication Skills

* This class is not web-enhanced and is offered only in the evening program and during the summer program.

ADVANCED ESL:

Students in this level advance their language skills and knowledge of the academic culture so that they can enter academic classes or vocational programs. They study complex sentence structure, write documented academic essays and research papers, read a variety of texts from many disciplines, read a novel, listen to lectures and take notes, and give ten-to-fifteen minute speeches. Students at the advanced level participate in a number of special projects. They create an ESL newsletter that is distributed campus-wide, listen to lectures given by Black Hawk College professors, and interview professionals in their chosen fields.

All courses are web-enhanced. Students attend classes two days a week (1 hour 40 minutes per class) and also complete one credit hour of online instruction for each class*.

* All classes labeled "A" are the online component associated with the face-to-face class.

Courses

All of these courses are offered at Black Hawk College, Quad-Cities Campus.

ESL 074/074A	Advanced Reading
ESL 076/076A	Advanced Writing
** COMM 105/ESL 072/ESL 072A	Advanced Grammar
** COMM 100/ESL 078/ESL 078A	Advanced Oral Skills

** Students receive 3 transferable credits for each of these courses.