

writing our hope

a 'zine of creative nonfiction by teenagers
on themes of hope, tolerance and equality



Supplement One
Point Loma High School

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visit www.writingourhope.org
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For more information, contact:
Foster Dickson
Booker T. Washington Magnet High School
632. S Union Street, Montgomery, AL 36104
334-269-3617
foster.dickson@mps.k12.al.us

The Staff

Faculty Adviser and Supplements Editor: Foster Dickson

Student Staff for 2007-2008 (Issues #1 and #2):

Editor: Madison Clark

Assistant Editors: Rhiannon Johns and Rachel Lewis

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Foster Dickson

Introduction: On Diversity, Mission Statements, and Publishing

Some opportunities should not be passed up. During the time when we were accepting submissions for the second issue of *Writing Our Hope* and entries to the first annual poetry contest, I got a message from our school secretary to call a teacher named Tchaiko Kwayana at Point Loma High School in San Diego, California. Messages like these don't come every day but are not uncommon, since we are conducting a project that reaches out nationally. I called Mrs. Kwayana that same day, and she offered us these works.

When we began the *Writing Our Hope* project, the goal was (and is) to allow students from anywhere in North America to write about their hopeful reflections on the topics of tolerance and equality – and consequently, diversity, acceptance, and social justice – and we would do our best to publish all of them that we can. By the end of March 2008, we had published issue one and were closing the submission period for issue two. We had received a small number of submissions, but most were healthy observations on an aspect of how our culture handles sensitive issues. The few submissions we passed up have been either too plaintive, lacking the element of hope, or did not fit our themes by any stretch. The result is two small issues of our fledgling magazine.

But what Mrs. Kwayana has been doing is different. Her Identity Paper and Ego Tripping assignments reach into the students' worlds and have them pull out a self-image to be expressed through words on a page. (For more information, you can access Tchaiko Kwayana's 1996 article from *English Journal*, "The Identity

Paper,” on the JSTOR database.) While their work is relevant to a discussion of tolerance and equality (through exploring the issues of how we view ourselves and how others may see us), and there is the element of hope there, we as editors believed it stretched our mission too much to include these works in issue two of *Writing Our Hope*. But some opportunities should not be passed up. The works these students have produced are remarkable in their vibrant expression of what it means to be “me.”

This first supplement to *Writing Our Hope* encapsulates our desire as editors to practice what we preach. Intolerance and inequality center on the fact that narrow definitions do exist, and often valuable cultural expressions are excluded when they don't fit the narrow definitions. People can see this illustrated by which writers appear in literature textbooks, which subjects appear on television shows, and which candidates appear on voting ballots. *Writing Our Hope* was designed to publish works of creative non-fiction that are between 500 and 1000 words, and which express hope about an issue related to tolerance or equality— that's our narrow definition. But the work of Mrs. Kwayana's students is precisely the type of writing we are trying to share with the world. And I won't allow our narrow definition to prevent us from doing that. The magazine, the two annual issues, will continue to publish works that fit our guidelines, and these supplements will publish the works that should not be denied the attention they deserve.

The writings in this supplement draw on an array of American experiences. Some students have written about their immigrant families' racial and ethnic legacies in America. Others chose topics closer to home, like shopping on Black Friday, playing tricks on the school bus, or a love of Edgar Allen Poe's poetry. This small sampling of disparate writings from one high school in southern California, accomplishes two things: to negate further the idea that stereotyping is even possible, and to show the results of teaching that provides not only academic instruction, but also a little help finding one's self in the maze of American culture.

Farah Martinez

Where I'm From

Things always happen for a reason, or at least that's the way I learned to live. Not everyone is the same, and every situation is different. People seem to act blind and not wanting to face reality.

Where I'm from people learn to live from what they have. There are no fancy places, big luxurious restaurants, shopping malls, or big beautiful parks. What you can see are taco shops and liquor stores at every corner you look at.

Where I'm from, you can see children running around with the neighbors' kids. You see boys riding their bikes or playing soccer in the streets. Then you see little girls playing with their favorite little dolls, or they are helping their moms in the kitchen or cleaning around the house.

Where I'm from, teenagers grow up too fast. They stay out late, keeping their parents up late, wondering where they could be. You see teenage girls walking down the street, pushing a life-changing stroller that holds their future in the one that they care for.

Where I'm from, women go through the violence and pain every day. Women get beat and yelled at. Where I'm from, women cook delicious tasteful Mexican food, clean their homes from inside out, take care of their children, and work to keep their husbands happy. Where I'm from, women tolerate the domestic violence they are put through because they can't survive on their own.

Where I'm from, the cops never give us a rest. They are always circulating through the area. They always search for something wrong in every movement that we make. As if we are some kind of criminals, like we have no right to be ourselves, to express

who we are. Because we get judged for how we speak and the way we dress. Everyone is entitled to their own way of life. It's a free country after all, or is that what we are made to believe? We have the freedom of speech, or is it just another myth, and lie?

Where I'm from, you hear houses with tremendously loud music. You see cars passing by, the ones that you can hear from almost two blocks away because of the intensity of the music in their car. Music is our way of expression; it's our way of poetry; it's our ghetto ballet.

Where I'm from, if you throw a party, not one song is wasted. In other areas, the neighbors call the police because of the loud music. But where I'm from, the neighbors enjoy the music, having their own *carne asada* or attending the party.

Where I'm from, the beautiful view of the sunset slowly lets night fall, that's when it starts to get fresh, and you see people walking around, watering their grass or plants. It's when we go outside to feel the air running past our bodies, and through our hair, feeling something so relaxing, and soothing and yet not being able to see to make sure it's there. These are feelings just like many other things in life, such as friendship, love, pain, and fear. And when the sun goes down and the moon comes up we fall asleep to the blowing horns of the passing train. The train reminds me of life, because like the train and my life, I have no idea where it's going and if it will make it, but I know that there are infinite possibilities.

Where I'm from, there is a park, that is never vacant, whether it may be full of children, teenagers, adults, or possibly low riders. Where I'm from everyone loves this park so much we even have a holiday for it. "Chicano Park Day."

I'm happy to be where I'm from. It has its good and bad, beautiful and sad, and mysteriousness that shape it as it is. Where I'm from, people speak truth, and value what they have. That's why I am who I am, and I love where I'm from: Logan, San Diego.

Kyle Darcey

Ego Tripping

I was born on the coast of Ireland
From the Atlantic Ocean to the Irish Sea
I have climbed the tallest peak of the Irish mountains
I have walked to lowest plain
I was divided into five kingdoms and two religions
I am the Ulster, the Connacht, the Leinster, the Meath, and
the Munster
I am a Catholic and a Protestant
I am a Catholic wanting to oust all Protestants
I am a Protestant resisting the Catholic clergy
I am a Catholic favored by the royal authority
I remained neutral in World War Two
I am the Republicans and the Unionists
I am now a part of the European Economic Community
I am from the harsh winters and the mild summers
The Gulf Stream keeps me warm
I am from the castles and cottages
I am from the light skin and red hair
I am from the green, the white, and the orange

Carlos Juarez

Ego Tripping

I was born in the true waters of the Pacific Ocean. Those waters gave birth to my extensive mango fields in which the hard workers work exhaustingly until the days are finished. For more than 418 years, our race has extended to the limits of our Astronomy through our perfect thinking and knowledge of space and time. In the year of 1589, we meet with a group of outsiders that are as white as our cotton but as dark inside as our chocolate. During all those years of suffering, training to fight for freedom, we have developed a sense of rhythm that has filled our hearts with notes and glorious music. Our ancestors have left behind a race of strong, positive, and mentally and physically fit human race. We will fight until the end. We will fight until the skies are black as our nights in the Sonora desert or as bright as our sunrise in Palenque. We will still stand up until the true waters of the Pacific Ocean don't exist any more. We, the Mexicans, have gathered a style of housing that has changed architecture and the structures. We have invented a color TV and thousands of other things that did not exist. We have gathered the space and time to bring you what we call "Tenochtitlan" with all of its mighty gods from Huitzilopochtli that means "Blue Hummingbird" on the left to tlaloc which means "god of rain". We, the Mexican race, we are not afraid of death; we even celebrate it.

Jose de la Luz

Mexico: Prologue to my Identity Paper

Many people know who I am. I am known almost all around the world. I have many historic things on my face. There are temples, pyramids, and many historical things man made and natural. Many of the people of my land go to my friend in the north in search for wealth and a life. If you're wondering where I'm located, I am in Central America under North America. They call me Mexico and I have been around for a while and there is history in me.

The first people that I welcomed in were the Olmecs. Many people think that the Aztecs and Mayans arrived first but that's not true. When the Mayans came some hundred years later, they were the most civilized in these times to live on me. The Aztecs and Mayans always fought with each other to see who owned me and I didn't enjoy that. Later on they found my riches and I was all right with it.

Then around this time, some people from across the seas called "The Conquistadors" came to my land. I welcomed these new people with open arms, but soon I would find out that I was a fool. They took my merchandise, my resources; they tortured my beloved people and made a mockery of me. For years I wasn't known as Mexico; I was New Spain. Everything about me had changed and I was someone else. After some crucial years for the Spanish, my people rose up and we became a nation again.

Today many of my people live calmly but, like every nation, we all have problems to handle. Right now I am freezing; temperatures are really low and I am close to the Equator. Usually I am very warm and my place is real nice to be in. There are many

religions that inhabit me, from Christianity, Catholics, and many other beliefs.

So my name is Mexico and I have been around. These are just some interesting facts about me. Many people know me now, especially the Europeans and Americans because of the conflicts we've been in throughout the years, especially the Europeans because they've tried to take control of me lots of times, but only succeeded once. The French, English, and Spanish all tried but failed.

Alejandra Rivera

Epilogue: My Future

I am now in my senior year and often think about what life has in store for me. Will all this studying and trouble to keep my grades up pay off? Doing this identity paper made me think deep inside myself to find the true feelings. I realized that I have struggled so much to get here and am very proud that I have. From having what I thought was going to be a perfect family, I learned to be really strong. I really care about my family and hope the best for each and every one of them. My mother Ana taught me to be polite and not be a greedy person.

When I was a little girl, my family was really close to each other. Now that I am older, I still wonder why our family has so much hate. I learned to be strong for myself. I'm really silly and love to make people laugh and smile, because throughout my teenage years, sadness was the only thing I always felt. I think to myself, what happened to those good happy times we all spent together?

From all that, it made me more determined that I *am* going to succeed in life. I tried to get my grades up and do really good in school. I'm doing this for me and to prove to my family that I can go into the real world without their help. I will be strong in life, and never let myself down. That is my goal in life.

When I step into the real world, I plan to go to college and be an elementary teacher. I want to show our future generation that they will have someone who loves and cares for them. I really want to be a teacher and have a classroom of my own. I also plan one day to get married to someone that I love, and he will love me back. But not until I have a job so I can take care of myself. When I get a job and I am able to take care of myself, I do plan to have children one day also. I would love to have a boy and a girl. Maybe

I will even have three children. I still have a long time to think about it until I'm ready.

I have to finish high school first. All the memories and laughs I shared with my friends, I'm going to miss a lot. Also the teachers that helped me through high school, I will miss you all so much. Until the last day of school, until the day I walk out of Point Loma High School with my diploma, I know that I made it into the real world. I am ready to start my life. This is only the beginning of my life.

Joshua Pandza

Ego Tripping

Zdravo

My people speak the language of *Hrvatska*

We have the mountain ranges to make even the most
extreme climbers scared

My islands are the most beautiful

We have the most scenic ocean views anywhere in the world

Our cliffs are so high it scares the bravest of jumpers

Our coat of arms resembles a red and white chess board

The Iris is the most beautiful flower around

The Plitvice lakes are very big and have beautiful waterfalls

My soccer team got 3rd place in the 1998 World Cup

I claimed my independence in 1991

I am over one-third forest

My capital is Zagreb

Most people can't spot me on a map

I am located on the Adriatic Sea

I am the most beautiful country in Europe

I am not the biggest, but I am also not the smallest

My people can live up to 74.9 years old

My land area is 56,414 square kilometers

My total area is 56,542 square kilometers

My population is 4,493,312 with a birth rate of 0.0%

My largest city is Zagreb, with a population size of 685,500

88% of my people are Roman Catholic

Their literacy rate is 99%

Anthony Maglica is a citizen of my country and he invented
the Mag-Lite flashlight

Dalmatia, Istria, old Croatia, Dubrovnik, and Slavonia are
the symbols on my Coat of Arms

From one, to three, then, through wars, back to one.
Zbogom

Ashley Moreno

An Autobiographical Incident

You know I hate you, right?" I said coolly. "I really hate you, Dad."

It is seven thirty in the morning. Outside, it is brisk and cool, but inside, this car is stuffy. I'm writing obscenities against the fogged up window. I feel like I can't breathe; I hope I'm suffocating.

"It's only a month, Ashley," my dad replies in a stern voice, his eyes strictly focused on the asphalt that lay ahead of him. His knuckles are almost white. He's gripping the steering wheel too tight. He does that when he's upset or stressed.

"Good." I think to myself. "I hope he feels awful, the inconsiderate jerk! Oh, I will never forgive him for this! I ha—"

"Honestly, Ashley," my father interrupts my thoughts. "Just one month! Can't you handle that? You've disappeared and not stayed home for months at a time anyways! Besides, it is a highly acclaimed treatment program. You'll be fine..." His voice trails off.

I can't listen to my dad right now: my hypocritical dad. He just wants to get rid of me. He's putting me there for, for—

"Dad! I'm going to be in there for Thanksgiving! What's wrong with you?! I don't even do drugs! I told you I don't know why I popped positive for methamphetamines! You probably framed me! Same with the cocaine in my room! God, how could y—"

"Enough!" My dad bellows. "After all you've put me through; your family through! Dammit, Ashley! You . . . you need help! I need help..."

Oh, here we go again. Why is he such a drama queen? Dear God, why did you give me a crybaby for a father? Oh no, he's getting off the freeway. Maybe he's turning around. No, we're pulling

into the parking lot. Oh, shoot! Here we are— Chapman Hospital in the city of Orange. Well, at least I can get out of this nasty car. It smells like surf in here, like moldy towels and wet wetsuits. Yuck!

I step out of the car, inhale deeply. My dad gets out, shuts his door.

“Hey Daddy, could I bum a cigarette off of you?” I ask in a phony sweet little girl voice. I know he doesn’t smoke, and he hates that I do. Ha, I think to myself. I bet that’ll get to him. He ignores my facetious question. He moves towards me like he’s going to hug me.

“Don’t touch me,” I spit out.

He takes two wounded steps back and looks at me like he doesn’t know who I am. I stare at him straight in the eye and give him the most hateful look I can. All my anger I’ve ever felt is pouring out of me through this gaze. My dad stares straight back with a hurt expression on his face.

“C’mon, Ashley, that’s enough. Let’s go.”

We begin walking through the hospital’s entrance. “There it is, the second floor.” My dad points to an ugly blue sign. “The Positive Action Center.”

Begrudgingly, I walk with my dad to the elevator.

Little did I know that this thirty-day inpatient rehabilitation center would change my life. I would be forever grateful.

Juan Carlos Lopez

Ego Tripping

Cuando se oye México es como oír los rugidos Fuertes de la Bufadora. (When you hear Mexico is like hearing the roars of the Bufadora.) When we hear those days like the 5th of May (*Cinco de Mayo*), those are the days when our race made history and not just that we had made a lot of history just like how we sweat and work for low money. We do it because we know we can and those who know they can, do it. *Nosotros fuimos y seremos siempre una raza poderosa por que para mexicanos no hay límites.* For a lot of decades we had made good and talented people and we all do it from nothing, we start from down and then we go up cause just like the statues and the cathedrals we always stand up no matter how much time passes or how strong it is we will do it and not stop till we succeed in it. *Nosotros desafiamos a todos we defy anything, nosotros sobre pasamos todo,* we overachieve everything. When we seek something we find it, we are as warm as the oceans of Rosarito but we can be as fierce as the Hurricanes from Veracruz. We play our sport; it's all about endurance and that's what Mexico is made of. We only play soccer, our mission is to make it to the Mexican national team, but we also have other talented minds. Just like animals work hard to feed their family and will not stop until they do, that's Mexico, *cuando buscamos algo lo encontramos a fuersas y todo para lo mayor.* Mexico, a place were a lot of families from all races can go, just go to our warm places or visit the rivers of Ensenada, you will be amazed.

Winnie Riley

Ego Tripping

To the mysterious, unseen, creature infested, forest
I look to the hills and observe the beaming sunlight,
brush the horizon.
I think to myself, "It's nice to get away from contests!"
Banyan trees and oil paints stick to my mind,
While delectable waves fill my dreams, day and evening.
The fruit so sweet, from the nectar of life,
The native love and powerful, tradition-infested nights.
To see the talented shadow puppet shows
For being alive is what these people cherish and know.
To have a laugh, eat fish, and explore the premises,
These people have very little nemesis.
Speak their native tongue and respect their gods
You will have lots of people who love your prestige and
your living cause.
Bali, Bali, I just want to go
I want it so badly you don't even know.

Daisy Luchega

Taken Away but Found

O h! My God! What am I going to do?" my mom was asking my grandma.

Then my grandma asked, "Have you looked everywhere?"

"Yes, I have, and I can't find him."

My grandma advised, "Well, there's nothing else we can do but to call the police station and report it."

"Yeah! Sure, let's do that."

My mom and grandma were very worried, exclaiming and crying simultaneously. My brother had been kidnapped from us. His father had kidnapped him, and they could be anywhere. So both my grandma and my mom rushed to the phone to call 911 and get in contact with the police.

The police started to ask as many questions as they could to be able to get information out of my mom, but it seemed there was really nothing they could do. The police simply said, "Keep calm and we're going to look for him."

They started to look for my brother, Ricardo. They looked and searched everywhere around the county. Days passed by and they couldn't find my little brother. He was only 2 years old at the time. Well, it got to the day that the police called my mom and told her that his father and he had gone out of town. They asked, "Do you know where his father might have taken him?"

My mom, right away, said, "To Mexico."

The policeman told my mom, "So now the police can start looking."

Well, it turned out to be that police from the San Diego station went to Mexico and got together with some of Mexico's police officers to look for him. The first place the police went to was his father's family and asked them, "Do you know anything

about the father and the child?"

Their response was, "No, we don't know anything about them."

All they did was deny it. Police told his family, "If he doesn't turn in the child within 48 hours, one of his family members is going to get arrested until he returns the child in a safe condition."

The next day came and the father heard about what was happening and what was going to occur if he didn't return my brother. The father still refused to give my brother back. Within a couple of hours, the police found the father and my little brother. They found them in a small apartment in a little town in Mexico, far from Mexico City. It's almost going towards Guanajuato, a place far from where my family in Mexico lives. The police arrested him and pressed charges against him. He would not be allowed in the U.S. for 6 years. He wasn't allowed to make contact with either my family or brother.

He stayed in Mexico and lived another life. We know the new family he has, but what's sad about it is that he physically abuses them. It's not good that the family is not in a good relationship, but it's their thing. The new family won't leave the father.

He harassed and annoyed us for many years. By phone he would call at least 4 to 5 times a month, asking to speak to my brother, Ricardo. Years have passed by, already 15 years, and they have gone by quickly. My brother's father has now stopped bothering us; it's already been 8 years since he stopped. We haven't heard anything about him. If he decides to come to the U.S., he will need to reimburse the cost of care of my brother over the years. That man has caused a lot of pain and has worried my family.

Now we're all happy and are not worrying about anything. My mom and grandma are still happy for getting my brother back. We'll never focus on this incident ever again, because it caused pain. We are all now a happy family.

Jessica Massey

Ego Tripping: England

Driving on the country roads
with the steering wheel on the opposite side.
The tears of deceased Englishmen
fall down on their children.
Trying to find shelter in
the historical chapel.
Today is the day when
England lost their so-called slaves.
Today is the changing of the guards
with the band playing
their melodies filled of pride,
but not forgetting what this day brought.
Britain vs. America,
who are the real English majors?
With the character in a voice
and the slang in a knot.
Who flies first class?

This setting was the home
of my founding fathers.
Yet I find myself living in
the defeater rather than the defeated.
I see the difference between
America and England.
But still see the similarity.
Does it matter who came in last?
Is it based on
President vs. Queen?
Dollars vs. pounds?

As the independence was won,
I don't have to choose sides.
I see the beauty of both bad and good,
and I am not visiting who is still the enemy.
I'm visiting where my
ancestors once cried,
and where they chose to leave.

Derek Anderson

The Punk Lifestyle

Most people don't understand what punk really is. They just think we are weird and dress funny and hate everything about traditional society.

Punk to me is who I am. Punk is about freedom and not caring about what other people think of you. It is a lifestyle and a lifestyle that will stick with you for the rest of your life if you're not a poser. It's all about unity and equality and individuality and not for the people that are homophobes, sexists, racists, or Nazis. It is a way of life, and it's all about living life to the fullest and doing what you want to do when you want to do it. It's about the music as well and having fun with your friends and supporting your bands.

For me I don't hate everything about society. I'm a nice guy and I like to talk to anyone who wants to talk to me. I love living in the United States as well, but I don't agree with a lot of what is going on in our country. There are many unjust and corrupt people high up in charge of our country that make unethical decisions that affect the people. I wouldn't want to go live in some Third World country or move out of the United States; I do believe we have a good life in America and I don't hate my country. I just believe that we can do more to help the people instead of being greedy and money-hungry about our own country. I think we have enough money and power and we should go help countries who are suffering from oppression and guerilla warfare. It might make a better name for ourselves. For instance, letting acts like the Invisible Children and guerilla warfare using child soldiers go on hardly seems to support "life."

I went to my first punk show when I was about ten years old. I went to a concert with bands such as G.B.H and Bad Brains.

After I went to that show, I knew that this was where I belonged. I love the music and the music is what it's all about. The artists are all smart – well, most of them – and I identify with their political opinions and share their political beliefs with others. They are not afraid about what people think. They do teach others through their lyrics.

About the way I dress, I make all my own clothes myself pretty much. I have leathers that I have painted designs and logos on and leathers that I have studded up. I sew patches of bands on my vests and on some of my pants too, mostly to support the bands, and if anyone sees the patches, they might go and check out the bands. I have also had charged hair and Mohawks. I dyed them colors, too, sometimes.

To sum it all up, now you have a pretty good understanding about punk and my life. Punk started way back in the 1970s and is still going strong; we just play it harder and faster now but keep it real. Punk will never die though some people say that it will, but it will not; it will live on. People who don't even look punk or dress punk can still be punk. It is a lifestyle and that is all that it will ever be.

Dorey Ontiveros

November 8, 2008

The cloudy cold wind was hitting my face as I stood on the Point Loma High School football field on May 16, 2005. I was looking at others speed up and race their feet during my PE class. As I was just standing in a circle of friends while my classmates began to play flag and field (football). Meanwhile my friend, Eddy, who happened to be one of my classmates, put a sight on me.

Then BOOM! A strong lift just raised me up into the sky to the cold wind. A loud scream came out from my impact when, in just two seconds, BLAM! My head had hit the field hard enough to make it bounce.

“Aww, Eddie, what the f***!” As I screamed my anger and fright out from the top of my lungs, my head had blurred out for a couple of seconds as I laid down not trying to move.

Everyone else began to surround me as a dead body from “CSI” episodes.

As I began to recover some consciousness, I stared at Eddy as he was looking at me. “Oh my gosh! I’m so, so sorry, Dorey! I didn’t mean to hit you that hard,” he replied, with such worry in his voice and in his eyes.

“Don’t worry, it’s okay. I know that you didn’t. Damn, why you had to come from the back? I felt like if I was about to get a heart attack!”

As everyone else had asked me how I was, they began to help me back up. My head was spinning around, making my back hurt, and I could even feel the blood inside moving. As I tried to walk, my back began to hurt, and I was no longer able to feel the cold breeze on my face. Instead, I was left with the warm feeling of the blood just running all over my body, not to mention the goose-

bumps crawling from my toes, all the way up into my head. Until today I still have some back pains, and as I touch the back of my head there's a very flat figure on the back of my head.

Jaimee Hoff

April 9, 2008

Author's Note: In my senior English class, Mrs. Kwayana, had us do this identity paper about our lives and a country of our choice. Part of the project was to get letters from our family members about how our ancestors came to America. This is a story that my father told me a while back about his great-grandfather coming over to America from Sicily.

Jaimee is part Italian; her ancestors are originally from the island of Sicily. Her great-great-grandparents were horse breeders, raising thoroughbreds for racing. Money was easily made and lost due to betting on the ponies. It wasn't a very honest business, but it paid the bills. Blackmail, corruption and thievery were common. Her great-great-uncle actually stole a horse from her great-great-grandfather, and he killed her great-great-uncle, his own brother. Jaimee's great-great-grandpa Puma served six months in jail for manslaughter.

The family members moved to the United States in the early 1900s, when arriving at Ellis Island, my great-great-grandpa changed his last name from Puma to La Puma. He was trying to create a new identity for himself and his family. Being a true Italian, he started association with the New York Italian Mafia. He was dealing in every type of organized crime, trying to make enough money to make the final move for his family. By the late 1920s, the family moved to the West Coast, where he set up a business as an accountant: an investor, basically laundering money for the Mafia.

The La Puma family members still reside in southern California, with hundreds of the La Puma clan. Mostly because Great-Grandpa La Puma was married eight times. He would outlive most of his wives, which in return meant many, many offspring.

Jesus Juarez

My Grandma, My Best Friend

My grandma Martha Leadsman was a very special person. She lived to be seventy-eight. All my life, my grandma had been a big part of my existence. When my dad left, she was there for us to move in with her. We stayed with her for about a year. She took care of us whenever she could.

She attended all our school events and always made sure that we were happy and had all the fun things a kid would want. My grandma loved camping, and she would drive this big old motor home and always take my brother and me with her. She would take us fishing and swimming, but more than that, in the last three years of her life, she was someone to come home to.

She moved in with us in 2002. It wasn't that she couldn't get around okay on her own, but she was lonely and we were always at her house. So she and my mom decided it was time for her to move in with us.

At first it was a little weird. We had not lived with her for a long time. We were not little anymore, and I think she felt like she was in the way, but we loved having her at home with us.

It felt right.

She would always have dinner ready for us. She would always sit and watch us do our homework and ask us about our day. She would always tell us stories about how rotten of a kid my mom was, just teasing to make us feel good. One of the best things about my grandma was she loved music, all kinds of music. She would watch the music videos and dance around and tap her toes to the beat. She like to watch rock music videos especially if they were "creepy looking" like the band Slipknot. She would say, "They are so ugly, but I like the music."

One day in July 2005, after my grandma had been sick with

a cold and then the flu, she was just starting to feel good again when she had a heart attack. The next time I saw my grandma it was to say good-bye to her in her hospital bed. I didn't want to, but my mom said, "Jesus, it will probably be the last time you will be able to talk to her."

She died the next morning. I miss her very much. How proud she would have been to know that her last grandchild was now a senior and getting ready to head off into the big world.

Marlene Lira

Beautiful Image

As I was about to go to my preschool I told my mom I saw him. It was yesterday when I had seen him. I don't really remember all the things, but I remember the most important parts. The next day I told my mom, "Mommy, I saw baby Jesus."

"Really, where?" she asked without interest.

I mean, I was just three years old. Why would she even be interested?

"Yesterday," I answered.

"What did he tell you?" my mom asked.

"Nothing, but he didn't have clothes. He only had a white sheet on; his hair was long up to his shoulders; and he didn't touch the floor."

When my mom heard this, her face changed. She told me she got goosebumps all over her body.

I continued, "You could see his heart, Mom, and then he put out his hand and touched me like this on my forehead."

I took her hand and put it on my forehead, and I told her he gave me a little squeeze. Now, I think he cured me. I had been out of the hospital for a year. I was just two when I had an operation because I had this tiny, tiny little hole in my heart. Blood went in and out of it, so I had to have an operation.

My mom then thought that baby Jesus wanted to take me away. She prayed and asked him to please not take me away. She prayed to him, telling him to please let me live, to let me be a kid, a mother, a grandmother, and to have an entire life. Until now he has let me live, all I have to say is, "Thank you, God!"

Erika Solano

Ego Tripping

I'm from the brown, yellow, black, white all mixed together
From the golden state where all
The dreams come through
Here all the races mix together as one

Here we used to be separated from one another
We fought and fought and now we are one

I was the gold rock that made everyone go crazy
Everyone wanted me because I was worth a fortune
I gave many my land and the right to vote

I was the neutral country,
All around the world all you heard was
Voices saying black and white
We were a calm country
Until some greedy people
Came to disturb our quality of life

They put us down in our own country and,
Yes, they won. We were set up to work.
For them and we didn't get anything
In exchange
We fought to get
Our land back, it was useless.
Selfishness is sometimes
Stronger than union

Many years have gone by and
We are still the “alien,” the one that came and disturbed their
Way of life
It’s pretty ironic
But we will get through it.

I have four main regions, the coastal, the valley,
Desert and the mountains.
I am the big wall that lets us be our own and
Doesn’t let the other problems affect us.

I’m one of the four who invested
And connected many points of the nation
I brought people to work for me

I’m the country with rich culture and history
Many people hear of me and they just know
I’m the perfect destination
I was born here
Still I was treated like an “alien” in my own country
I am what used to be Mexico.
I am California!

Gothic Romance

Romance and love will be in the air no matter what happens. It can be the worst day in your life, but for someone else it can be the best because they are falling in love. Or it can just as well be a vice versa thing, someone half way across the deep blue sea could be having a bad day but then you just found love.

Love is defined as:

1. A profoundly tender, passionate affection for another person.
2. A feeling of warm personal attachment or deep affection, as for a parent, child, or friend.
3. Sexual passion or desire.

So on and so on. There are infinitely many definitions for every different person. The real thing is that there are many meanings and love isn't always pretty.

During the 19th century, the Gothic romance era was going on. Many poets wrote about a happy feeling, but yet others wrote horror stories. There were some very compelling writers in the 19th century. Among those very talented writers falls Edgar Allan Poe. He falls more into the short, thrilling and suspense thrills category. Some novels that he wrote were very mysterious and detective-like stories but they were very captivating.

In the poem that he wrote named "The Raven," he talks about a raven going into his house and it brought him memories of his wife that had died. The raven just kept on repeating the word "nevermore."

In the poem "Lenore," he talks about how a lady almost like a queen was lucky that she died. She was lucky to die, because she now didn't have to deal with her husband. By her dying she now left three sons behind to get married on their own.

As you can tell in the second poem, Poe was also referring to the first one, "The Raven" because the names of the woman that had died were the same. The only difference is that in one he talks about her dying and in the other one the pain that her husband suffers because he is haunted by the raven. I think that in a way the raven in the story is supposed to symbolize that after he had tortured his wife, she had come back in re-incarnation and was now here to haunt him.

Another thing is that in both poems they deal with death. In "Lenore" the wife dies, and in "The Raven" the husband is the one that passes away.

All of the writings of Edgar Allan Poe have very little difference, but somewhat. At first he did start with a comedy story. His poetry was kind of on random topics like a horror about teeth, stories about balloon travel, and horrors about a cat. Then later on came a beautiful love story. In many ways, it related Poe's life and his love for his wife.

Then they sometimes got a little weird. Poe would write about how to follow someone's conversations with a hypnotized dying man, being buried alive, a mummy speaks, inside an insane asylum, and then finally with a murderer's guilt. Although these stories may seem kind of awkward things to write about for some people, these are really what others think about.

You really cannot put a limit on your mind and imagination. That is what Poe's poetry says to me.

The 1900s were just like any other century. Things that people just cannot believe happened but at the same time regular things happen, because we are all regular people.

Bryant Hernandez

There is No Fun in the Ghetto

Running for time
Cops close behind
There is no fun in the ghetto
Duck and cover that's your role
If you don't, you will get hit in the skull
There is no fun in the ghetto
Smoking weed, drinking brew
If there's an Undercover they will get screwed
There is no fun in the ghetto
Blue or red 13 or 20s
Why can't they all just be homies?

Consuelo Alcazar

Ego tripping

I was born in Yucatan
I created the pyramids of Tenochtitlan
I gave life to the Mayas
I saw how a man with shiny armor killed my sons and daughters
 saw how he took
Their gold
I destroyed him with my hands
I created the Mestizos
Gave them strength to fight the same people that destroyed my
 family before
I created goods to sell to people in exchange for others
I created the beaches where all the people love to go when I make
 it feel so hot
I send the butterflies to live in my country
Gave birth to all, my Diego Rivera and Frida Kahlo
I created all the Mariachis
I created the mummies in Guanajuato
I created the rivers, the birds, the jungle and the fruits and food
I am the one and only who created El Dia de los Muertos how
 no one forgets about the
Dead
I celebrated Cinco de Mayo and 16 de Septiembre
I cry when I see my people. They are killing the people of my
 tomorrow of my land
I see blood run and go into my seas and rivers
I will create peace and this will be the best country that any one
 has ever seen
I will give my heart for my people. Why, many would ask, why?
Answered back because
I Am MEXICO

Jessica Lopez

Prank Gone Wrong

One day after school my best friend and I were walking to our bus. When we got on the bus we sat on separate seats but normally we sit together. We saw one of our friends, Mary, get in the bus and that's when everything started. I told Mindy, "Let's pretend we are mad at each other."

Mindy said, "Okay."

So we pretend that we were mad at each other, and Mary asked, "Are you guys mad at each other?"

I told Mary, "I don't want to talk about it."

Then she said, "You guys are just playing. I just saw you guys smile at each other."

So Mindy and I couldn't trick her. But our next victim was my sister, Carina. She walked in, saw that we were not sitting together, and asked, "What's going on? Why are you guys not sitting together?"

I told Carina that Mindy didn't wait for me, so I had to walk by myself.

"Does she know why you are mad?" Carina asked further. "Mindy should know."

So my sister sat with Mindy and heard her version of the story. And Mindy told my sister that I was the one who left her.

So I started arguing with Mindy. I said, "Don't blame it on me."

Then my sister told us, "Can you guys forget about it? You guys are best friends to be fighting about stupid things."

I told my sister, "I'm not forgiving her, and I don't want to talk to her anymore."

Then Mindy and I heard something. It was my sister starting to cry.

We told her, “No don’t cry we were just playing.” But she got mad at us and didn’t want to talk to us. Mindy and I told my sister, “Didn’t you see us, that we were trying to laugh?”

But my sister didn’t see us. Then she told us that there’s going to be payback. But she would get over it.

Samantha Camacho

The Early Morning Craze

My sisters and I have a tradition every year: day-after-Thanksgiving shopping. As everyone knows, that is the day of the year to get the best deals. Personally, that's the day I do all my Christmas shopping. It's exciting, hectic, with caffeine-thriving people, including myself that wake up early for the bargains. I wouldn't have it any other way.

All four of us woke up at around 3:30 in the morning to get ready, to get to the mall by four AM. Usually JC Penney is the first store to open, so it's the first store we rush to. Entering the doors is exciting but difficult at times, because so many people are trying to squeeze in the doors at once.

When we finished at JC Penney, if we had time, we would go to Starbuck's. The caffeine would help us out the rest of the day. Once the clock hit five AM, stores like Macy's and Old Navy opened and helped to divide the huge mob of people.

At five in the morning, my younger sister, Marlaena, and I split apart from my other two sisters, Janessa and Daniella, to go to Old Navy. To me, this day isn't just about getting the best deal; it's fun spending the time with my sisters since we all don't get to spend much time together. I have to admit: even though I'm probably the worst morning person alive, I don't mind shopping on this day. My sisters and I have so much fun running around and trying on things we normally wouldn't buy, just because they're on sale.

Leaving Old Navy, with the checkout line that wrapped around the store, it took awhile but it was worth the money I saved. We continued on to Victoria's Secret and were somewhat disappointed, because there wasn't much on sale. Needless to say, I didn't buy anything. Exiting the store, my sister and I were say-

ing how we were “so starving” and needed something to eat! We went to the McDonald’s and ordered from the breakfast menu. Surprisingly, we found that our other two sisters were there so we all ate breakfast together.

After we all finished eating, we decided what else we needed for Christmas presents or birthdays that were coming up. So we all walked out with minds set on what we were going to buy. Store after store were filled with people, sale signs, and cheery Christmas music. Surprisingly, from the start, all of it never got irritating. I got more into the Christmas spirit.

Before I knew it, it was nine AM. It had already been a long morning but I wasn’t quite finished with the things I needed to get before I could leave. At that moment, I realized that this day was much more than bargain shopping. This was a day that brought the four of us sisters to do something together. It’s something that will hopefully continue on for years to come.

Abercrombie & Fitch, Sephora, and Charlotte Russe were my last stops where I completed my birthday and Christmas shopping. It wasn’t long before I and all my sisters had bundles of bags walking to our cars at 10:30 AM. We were finally done. All we needed to do now was go home, drop our bags, and enjoy our afternoon.

Jesse Cuevas

The Feathered Serpent

I am the land that the Aztecs walked on.
I gave birth to the pyramids which mark the stars.
I am the one who secreted the rivers that nourish the farms.
I let my braids hang down to form the mountains and volcanoes.
It is I who trusted Hernan Cortes with my love.
He dismantled my foundation.
I was re-incarnated with new peoples, goods, and animals.
I accepted my gifts as Missions and Cathedrals.
I had a new name.
Mexico

Winnie Riley

Bali and the World

Bali!!! An amazing land filled with joyous adventures and mysterious creatures. What we don't see is the oncoming downfall of its warm, soothing, climate, and how global warming, poverty, and disease harshly affect it.

I have been surfing for over six years, and it is a major concern of mine, how the ocean and our land are cared for. Right now the United States' pollution is not only affecting America but it's taking over world. I don't want to see condoms or bags of trash floating next to my head as I paddle out for a surf session.

These effects have impacted my life for years, and soon it will not just affect fellow surfers and me; it's going to affect the world. Tourists don't see the struggles that people all over the world encounter, but they do face them. Our contributions to their ongoing struggles make their lives that much harder.

My future goals include becoming a nurse or medical assistant and living in Bali. They are extremely deprived of medical aid and resources, and I'm the type of person who likes to make a difference. It's not for anyone else but me.

In conclusion, Bali and the world all mean something, maybe not to you, but to someone and we need to take in considerate the rest of the world, not just the US.

Nickolas O'Neil

Unfair Treatment

The article that I have chosen is a text about my family history. Many wrongs were done to the early Irish. They had their lands taken and were treated as dirt by the governments that forcefully controlled them. The document mentions how some of my ancestors were killed in battle. They died fighting for their land, their family and their pride. They had to fight because of how badly oppressed they were by the English. One thing that it does not mention, however, is how hard it was to obtain this information seeing as how they tried to destroy our heritage. We were not allowed to own land and the only documents we have were kept by the churches.

To read Nickolas O'Neil's family history article, visit:
www.writingourhope.org/oneilhist.pdf

Bryant Hernandez

Is there nothing but gangsters
in the ghetto?

Running from the cops
Ducking from shots
Thugs they think they are
But with those thoughts they will not get far
In the streets packing heat
Praying to God that death they will defeat
In jail they will be one day
And that is where they will stay
Nothing but lowlife in the ghetto
Ruining their lives
Always carrying a knife
They don't go to school
On the streets they think they're cool
Always doing drugs
All the girls are ashamed of giving them hugs
If you enter their game
You will end up full of shame

Ashley Moreno

One Day at a Time

My head is lain upon my pillow
Full of unsettling thoughts
What is in store for me
This new school year?
Will I make it through
The next seven months
Without being eaten alive
By all the materialism,
The shallow beasts
That feed off weaknesses?
Will those that prowl the halls
Drowning the innocent in their filth
Take me down with them
Taking me back
To a place I dare not return on my own?
I fear this event
For I have been there before
I have felt the agony of losing myself
And I cannot do it again
I must remember
How far I have come
And what I have to lose
This time around
If I get sucked back into
What so many ignorant high school students do
I must stay balanced
On my straight beam of light
I must . . .
My eyelids began to weigh down

As I slowly drift to sleep
My last thoughts
Are those of hope
Of faith in myself
That I will make this year great
I will make myself proud
If only
I am to forget what I have to fear
And focus on placing one foot
In front of the other
One day at a time.

Winnie Riley

Pollution

Water! It's crisp, cool, and clean,
But there are many things unseen.
Drains, pipes, and debris contaminate it daily,
But we hear about it vaguely.
The sickness and disease it leads to
Will have you wishing you lived somewhere new.
People are inconsiderate and uncaring to the ocean's needs.
It's like an uncared for garden with lots of trash and weeds.
We need to take the initiative to make things right.
Otherwise we can say bye bye to our ocean delights.

Free Choices

When you surf it's like you're free.
You dance on the wave, in the open sea.
The sea salt seeping into your skin and pores,
Wishing that the ocean could only be yours.
The creatures and the people are so full of life—
Makes me want to fight pollution and makes things right.
Our world and nature are precious forever
So let's cherish and take care of it together.

Jaimie Webb

Inbox: 1 New Message

Ever since I could reach the keyboard I had been typing in that specific name, pressing “search” and hoping for a good result. I’d sit on the old school Gateway (computer) at my mom’s realty office until I’d see the midday blue turn into midnight black. As time started to shrink, it was time to go home.

“All right, boo. We’ll look some more tomorrow,” my mom would tell me.

I would continue this searching routine for days in a row but would temporarily give up and preoccupy myself with something else, leaving the task unfinished.

An urge to continue my long awaited search came up again when I was fourteen. Living in our house on Pescadero Avenue, I hopped on the computer and typed in that name on last time:

S— P— O—

An endless list of this name popped up, like it had all the times before. However, this time I was a little bit older and a lot more determined. I clicked and scrolled until the list was minimized to about ten names. With these names were e-mail addresses.

All right, I said to myself, I’m going to send out e-mails.

“Hi, I’m Jaimie Webb. Are you my father?”

I know, it sounds like a very blunt thing to send to a bunch of strangers. But I had waited way too many years, and had way too little patience to write some long e-mail explaining what I wanted.

As days went by, I checked my e-mail religiously. I got a few replies, but to say nothing more than, “No, sorry.”

I began to lose hope, but to be honest, that wasn’t anything new to me. I stopped checking so frequently. Then one day I de-

cided to check on final time.

Inbox: 1 New Message

I opened the e-mail from the foreign address, and started to become a little anxious. I came to find an e-mail that looked no less than a couple of paragraphs long. I don't remember what the e-mail said, except for a few short words.

"Hi, Jaimie. Yes, this is me, your father."

Author's Note: I chose this piece to represent social justice, merely because I had to search for somebody I should never have had to search for. This autobiographical incident is pretty self-explanatory and fits perfectly into the idea of social justice.

Tchaiko Kwayana

Personal History

Nigger, if you don't get out of here, I'll blow your brains out." Mr. Huffman, of Huffman's Restaurant, Buena Vista, Georgia (for whites only— except at the side window) with his Winchester rifle cocked, as he shouted that threat, aimed that rifle at me, a one-year-old baby in my father's arms. My father, Rev. John James Cook, had come into that restaurant in desperation to get some water for me, his crying baby. A Christian Methodist Episcopal (CME) Church preacher, Dad had just been assigned to the CME church in the small southwest Georgia town, Buena Vista, and was moving our family down from LaGrange, Georgia where I had been born while he pastored there. Years later, my father could not understand why we would go around to the side window of this man's restaurant, no matter how good his fish sandwiches were. He could no better understand our demand to go to the only movie house in town in this pre-television era and sit in the segregated balcony. I led the protest to demand that we be allowed to go to see movies in that theater. My father chose a respected young school teacher, Miss Mathis, to accompany us to those segregated balconies. More protest but in vain.

We would be protected. To date, I am not a swimmer because Dad refused to let us swim in the ponds where every year Black youths drowned, Blacks not being allowed to swim in the pools for which we, nevertheless, paid taxes. Nor am I able to ride a bicycle; we lived on a highway without sidewalks and the danger of being struck by a car was too great. As one who had many stories about the ruthlessness, the terror, the perils of our segregated society, our father was determined to keep his three girls safe. If Dad was determined, so was Mom, Mrs. Dorthula Theresa Coan Cook, the eldest in her siblings, who valued manual labor. She, who had

cut cord wood in her South Carolina share-cropping home and worked as a live-in maid in New York to send her brothers, sisters, and herself to college, argued that, for a healthy work ethic, we should learn to pick some of the cotton and the peaches that Dad would not let us join the white farmers' work gangs to pick for money. Undeterred, Dad's solution was to take us to the homes of his parishioners who lived in "the country" and learn there how to do this work. His children must not be put in harm's way.

I learned a lot from my father's precepts and examples. There were whites who "respected" him too much to call him "John" but who could not find it in their superior hearts to call him Reverend Cook; they called him "preacher"— except for the White Methodist Church pastor, that is. This man and my father talked philosophy. They exchanged books and visits. And what an exception! Just as I almost got us killed in his efforts to get water for me as a baby, I also put him in the path of constant humiliation at the ration office during World War II. I was "hard on shoes" and the man who had to hand out ration tickets during that war time did not like my dad, whose dignified demeanor unsettled him. Dad would come home to tell of this ration-ticket man picking over him in the long, segregated line to call up everybody else to honor their ration tickets then turning out the lights as if he did not exist. Educated African-American men must be put in their place. An interesting, brave, autobiographical book by Stella Suberman, *The Jew Store*, points to how rooted our society is in prejudice. Suberman takes us back to Concordia, Tennessee and Bronson's Dry Goods Store. What struck me most about her C-SPAN discussion was her admission that she was taught that you could be "nice" to Negroes, but you must be sure that you keep them in their place. You do not apologize to a Negro. That would be soft.

My father never had a gun nor believed in children playing with toy guns or pretending to shoot each other. I never got the idea that he was a pacifist, however. Quite the contrary, as one who had not only experienced the indignities recounted above,

but whose father's prime land in McRae, Georgia, had been swindled out of him in the cruelest fashion, he feared a gun would put him into trouble. To my father, education was the answer, or rather, an answer. Not so his father, though. He never tired of telling us of how his father threatened to beat him, at age twenty-four, when he asked to go to Paine High School, now Paine College, my undergraduate alma mater. His clever scheme that took him to Paine College over his father's objection, the real reason for that objection, the result of his home experiences that excited him about going to Paine and the result of life at Paine all make exciting stories. He wanted all his children to become teachers: "Teaching is a noble profession." He wanted a house with a porch so he could, "See the race of men go by." We had to listen to news. He agreed, aloud, over the dinner table, where he insisted we all eat together, with Gov. Ellis Arnold that there would be no respect for the life of Black people until the penalty for the killing of Blacks by Blacks or Blacks by Whites was no different from that of Blacks killing Whites.

After his stroke, which he had while I was still in high school, Dad taught me even more as I, at fifteen, became one of his drivers as we traveled throughout central and south Georgia visiting his churches and the homes of his parishioners. I loved those trips just as I loved walking around and around our Southwest Georgia town's small square on Saturday afternoons selling *The Chicago Defender*. I would later have those same beautiful feelings traveling the coasts of Guyana, my adopted home, with my husband. In my close and personal contact with every possible description of person, I have learned to appreciate the sterling, godly qualities in my personal friend, Langston Hughes' "Luella Bates Washington Joneses" of our world. In those country and city churches, in the farming settlements, and villages, the small towns, and later, in Augusta, Oakland, Lagos, Harlem, New York, Georgetown, Guyana, Atlanta, and San Diego, I have learned and had reinforced the lesson that every teacher needs to know: to look past the physical

environment, the person's appearances, and other external trappings and connect with the soul of the person. It is a lesson very difficult to learn in our society. But Dad was not my only teacher. Mom and Dad complemented and contrasted each other in so many very unique ways.

I used to think that Mom was older than Dad because she was taller than he, a fat and short man. They were very different, even if equally determined. Mom was very pained because I changed my three given names from ones which honored dear friends of this preacher's wife who had to make new friends as she relocated following her husband from town to town. Before marriage, I changed my name to reflect my personality regretting, however, the affront Mom felt from this action. Tchaiko, a Shona name, means "One who seeks the truth." My maiden name, Ruramai, also Shona, means "Take a clear cut path to a given goal." My mom would have found some justice, and pain, had she known that my daughter, her namesake, Iyabo Effua Dorthula, deleted "Dorthula" from her names and added "Shukuru" for her 8th grade diploma. This grand lady, my mom, who in June of 1996 died at 98, has in other ways distinct from Dad's taught me lessons that I use educationally and personally. The most practical one is techniques in how to read. Thanks to my mother, I was a reader at the age of four. The multi-sensory method she used with the students in her one-room rural Georgia schoolhouse where I tagged along more than a half century ago are slowly coming back into practice but as new thinking on how to read. Because of her, and a quirk of fate, I was allowed to enroll in first grade at four, to graduate from high school at sixteen, and, then, from college just before my twentieth birthday. I became a teacher at an excellently staffed and administered junior high school in Augusta, Georgia, the best of its type I've seen to date.

That experience as the youngest teacher on staff, and the only teacher allowed to teach in that school without a Master's degree, gave me a chance to learn and to practice what both par-

ents and other experiences had taught me to value in people and in life. When our local churches kicked girls out of church when they became pregnant, Mom took them under her wings. Mom always wanted to live near a Black college. She loved the founder's day and commencement exercises. She laid a very heavy challenge on my children some months after they arrived, young, in the USA in 1983. It was the first time my family had seen our children and that after the tragic death of one of our twins just before his third birthday. Mom's challenge to them was heartfelt: After taking them to a commencement exercise at either State or Claflin University, she called these youngsters together and said, "I want to live long enough to hear each of your names called 'magna cum laude' as you are called for your degree." The emphasis on excellence like the respect for education did not originate with her or with Dad. It has always been strong in the African family of the South. A good education was our survival. However, there is a marvelous story of how my maternal grandfather with his brothers, passing on a train to their sharecropping farm in Spartenburg County, South Carolina, spotted South Carolina State College and Claflin University as the train rolled through Orangeburg. My grandfather very shortly afterwards pulled up stakes and moved to Orangeburg so that his children could get college educations. All but two did; those two married early. The only surviving sibling after Mom's death at ninety-eight and her sister's the following November at ninety-five, is my ninety-nine year old uncle, Josephus Coan, who has degrees from Howard, Yale Divinity, and a Ph.D. from Hartford Seminary Foundation. My family has always felt that any obstacle could be overcome through unity, work, preparation, and determination.

Traveling was early in my blood. I lived near a railroad track which had two passenger trains pass through per day. I was early introduced to the wide world and knew that the proverbial moss would not grow under my feet. As early as I could remember, Uncle Joe was in South Africa; Aunt Ozelle, a WAC (Women's

Army Corps), traveled through the military all over the USA and throughout Europe and Asia. She sent my sisters and me stethoscope pictures and a view finder introducing us to all these far away places and distant peoples. Uncle Joe and Aunt Ozelle had successfully planted the traveling seeds.

Every summer, beginning with my sophomore college year, at seventeen, I traveled. One year it was to a Methodist Work Camp for Mexican American migrant farmers in Pharr, Texas; the next year I was off to still another new area, Sherbourne, New York, to work in a child care center for African American migrant farmers. My clientele would change economically at an outdoor education workshop in Trinity County through Fresno State College as it was then called. These youngsters were from some of this country's wealthiest white families. I learned by working with all these groups of children the commonality that children have, even when economically and ethnically they differ. A boys' high school in Lagos, Nigeria, reconfirmed that fact, especially after I, the only female on the staff, won the 100 yard dash (with a 10 yard "advantage") over my males colleagues at a sports day. I learned that day how very much the rooting of a crowd for you can propel you to victory (and how unsporting your male colleagues can be afterwards in the face of the relentless tease from students). That lesson has lots of application for our work with children as well as with each other. Encouragement can give almost magical boosts to a person's efforts. I would not have won that day had it not been for the extraordinary encouragement of that crowd that ran on the sidelines with me yelling, "Run! Run! Run!"

I could not write this autobiography without beginning with my own generated family, my prime educators. I have not done justice to traveling as another of my teachers. Yet I have received a profound education as the wife of Eusi Kwayana, himself a legend in his own time. An exceptionally creative teacher, writer, and organizer, he and his students at the Republic Cooperative High School (formerly "County" High School) took education, (or

rather have taken education as he continues to create), teaching, and learning to a level one usually only reads about in scant theoretical texts such as Friere and Piaget. County was a school that never closed, a place where students taught students as a matter of course; books, personal belongings, late-night and all-night students read there without bother; there was an active community academic and theater component with adults of all ages taking “lessons” and with a core of us traveling to distant villages to give these lessons, for my part, even during the full term of my pregnancy. There, the youths themselves learned to write, direct, and produce plays and travel with this drama all over the country’s West Coast. Their beekeepers association was the foundation of apiary culture in Guyana. Reflecting with Eusi about this portion of the narrative, he asked me if, apart from creating a library, I discussed what to him was a most powerful aspect of my teaching: having students fan out throughout the villages from which they came and beyond, finding elders and recording their stories. Oral history more than three decades later has a place of respect in the academy. There are still memories of the stories of some of our informants such one of whom led us to the amazing enslaved cook, African Janet, who not until she was on her deathbed confessed to her role in the liberation of African people by using various methods to poison the overseers. I wrote about her in the *Guyana Chronicle*. The stories told to our students by an octogenarian born in slavery, Father Daniel Ezekiel David, were equally compelling from slavery to his porkknocking (gold and diamond mining) days. His granddaughter, now a scholar in a British University, is in touch with us.

Self-confidence is perhaps the most striking value that “County” students possess. I never met a student from that school who ever thought that there was any subject he or she wanted to “read” – in American jargon, study – that the student would not be able to master, given a book to use. I often tell my students in the USA of a youngster, Kamau, who told me how he had read

all of Shakespeare's plays because a man who liked to argue in his village square – and there is one such person in every village – always quoted from Shakespeare. This youngster's social situation was extremely poor. Yet he found that the library had a volume of the works of Shakespeare and he set to read them. I not only tested him on that reading but I gave him Toni Cade Bambara's short story "Raymond's Run" to read to see whether his skills allowed the subtlety of urban Black speech. No problem. Impressed, I had him tape a message of inspiration to my students in California few of whom have ventured on their own into reading. We have to get students into the reading while the youngsters such as that Shakespeare reader, Kamau, my husband and many others of Guyana's pre-dictatorship era were never threatened by a book. If you want to read it, you find a way to master it! We, here, must discover how to build that motivation in our students. I constantly design projects with that motivation in mind. Guyana, a victim of a dictatorship, has, regrettably, lost a quantity of this magic.

Alas, with the murderous dictatorship in Guyana, which brought our Kwayana children and me here while my husband remained, not only was my husband's school shut down as a means of controlling the population and the employment possibilities for the country's militant, competent intelligentsia, but the entire educational system of a country that once boasted of 90% literacy was virtually destroyed. Eusi has completed and had published a grammar book, *Groovy Grammar*, which teaches the grooves of Standard English using as texts multidisciplinary examples and cultural proverbs and jokes. One of his students, a professor at an eastern university, has ordered this text for his classes.

My husband's former students literally span the globe. They organized a gathering in the spring of 1997 in New York to honor him, timing it for Father's Day but also to arrange his air passage to witness our daughter's high school graduation. Another, a former World Bank employee now a professor at UWI, recently nominated him for an honorary doctorate. In November 1999, at

the first annual County Reunion, a stormy weekend in Maryland was no deterrent for several hundred former scholars to come by charter bus from Canada and by land and air from all over the USA to honor "Teach", as Eusi, like all teachers, is affectionately called. They were honoring one who guided his students to become independent, totally confident, lifelong learners. All ages have been similarly encouraged. Over the past decade, in response to the needs, he has helped mothers to create a "Grammans Bank"-type seed money institution, an Old People's Foundation, a village library and reading center, a children's club, a young farmers group to continue the cane farming tradition, an AIDS awareness youth group, and, recently a very studied response to David Horowitz.

From Eusi, not only have I seen the extraordinary depth of love and compassion one can have for people and justice but also what I call the *Animal Farm* character Boxer's spirit of sacrifice that dedicated ones have to bring a country and people to a desired state. The assassinated historian, Dr. Walter Rodney, dedicated his final book, *The History of The Guyanese Working People*, to Eusi, "For Example." His work as "field janitor" for an Afro-Guyanese cultural organization, ASCRIA, set the example of doing the unglamorous, thankless, necessary tasks in the same way that his example of erasing female gender functions and challenging other males in a chauvinistic society to serve as waiters at party social events, wash baby diapers and do what women do in the home and publicly. Genuinely repelled by flattery and fawning, Eusi teaches by example that aggrandizement whether by self or others should not only not be necessary or desired in order to have a strong sense of self and purpose but keeps alive unhealthy ego inflation.

The intellectual and spiritual environment that surrounded my life with the "Buxton Sage" has been awe-inspiring. I am still learning to add humor to my life and to be able to adapt to new trends and technologies with the balance he has.

My children have given me immeasurable insights and patience for dealing with teenagers, especially males. I still have much

to learn about females. Yet, my daughter, though my relationships with her often confirms the stereotype of mother/daughter discord, I learn much from her and publicly acknowledge it – as with the China experiences we separately had – and she, I am told by others, does the same of me. Iyabo and I are slated to co-author a piece on China for Fred Ho's book. Our children became my laboratory for learning theories that I hold. I have no doubt that very young children can be literate and very communicative. The daily simple routines I used with our infants and toddlers I passed on to other mothers. Only time has prevented me from recording those very successful activities. Our eldest offspring, Kofi, who vigorously resisted my requirement that he read the Op-Ed page of the *New York Times* and listen to public radio grabbed the paper, perhaps as security, one morning when I was leaving town and leaving him and his siblings in the care of a friend. Though the paper reading was transitory, now, years later, as a teacher of English himself, he monitors public radio as well as C-SPAN. And in a reciprocal mentoring relationship I had to explain at the Langston Hughes Centenary in Lawrence, Kansas, in February 2002, I have mentored Kofi on some teaching content while he has mentored me on a crucial other: hip-hop poets. I am encouraging Kofi to co-author with me an *English Journal* article on our combined mentoring and the results for both our instruction.

Not only in successes but also in sorrow have I been taught. Our loss of a twin son just before his third birthday certainly helped my husband and me empathize with the growing number of parents worldwide who lose their children for whatever reasons, often avoidable ones. Even though biologically identical, our twins, Kwame Baako Sando and Kwame Manu Yero were so different in personality, as were their siblings, that I had reinforced the fact that each child, like his or her fingerprint, is a distinct individual. In a society that quickly stereotypes and generalizes by color, class, and other categories, it is important to be reminded of that fact as often as possible, especially when we must work as teachers and guides.

A Glimpse Into Tchaiko Kwayana's Half-Century Journey

It did not begin at Paine College where I came as Annie Florence Elizabeth Cook from one of the smallest counties in the state, Marion County, Buena Vista, GA, #137, in a setting where we Paineites grasped at whatever we could use for bragging rights. I had always asked "Why?" even down at the spring in Bluey, a section of Buena Vista, as mom washed clothes and I watched the sky, the trees, the earth asking, "Why?"

But Paine ignited what Buena Vista and my family experiences had embedded: My wanderlust which through Uncle Joe in South Africa and Aunt Ozelle traveling all over the USA, Europe and parts of Asia, and sending back Viewmaster pictures, along with that proverbial railroad track had firmly set me up with traveling shoes. At Paine, very young, I would travel alone to the Rio Grande Valley one summer and the next one to work in a Migrant Child Care Center in Upstate New York. Destined to be penniless, I have nevertheless now traveled to all the continents except the Arctic and Antarctic Circles. More on that later.

Had not I, along with my roommate, the late Loretta Young, found ourselves on restriction constantly, not for serious infractions but for staying too long after dinner at Bennett Hall, and had my sense of injustice not been kindled, perhaps I would not have spent my entire life fighting injustice; without that infusion, I may not have met my spouse in Guyana as I traveled through Central and South America looking for African retention answers. I would, before marriage, change my name legally to Tchaiko (One who seeks the truth) Ruramai (Take a clear cut path to a given goal). Eusi Kwayana's work as educator, as selfless social reformer on national as well as international levels, as

poet, and later as spouse and father has not only had a profound effect on society but also on his spouse. Eusi, before ASCRIA's Cultural Revolution in 1968, was Sidney King. Yet other encounters before meeting him in 1968 would be important teachers. The Afro American Association that we founded in Berkeley in 1960, would spawn both The Black Panther Party and Karenga's US. The experience of teaching, under Mr. L. K. Reese, at Augusta's A.R. Johnson Junior High School, an excellently run school, would set a high standard for a twenty-year old beginning teacher. Only Republic Cooperative High School, Buxton, ECD, Guyana, founded by Eusi in 1956, with its academic, social, cultural seemingly boundless student-driven offerings, would exceed the standards of my first teaching experience.

This is not to say that teaching in Nigeria and later at CCNY as the academic director of SEEK (The "Search for Education, Elevation and Knowledge" program) left no mark. Life in Lagos would bring me life-long friendships including with my neighbors there and later in Manhattan, Jacob and Gwen Lawrence. All my holidays were spent in Ghana where a large African American community had settled along with my friends from Oakland, Jim and Nanette Lacy who lived for a while in the Y in Accra where Maya and her son also lived. In Nigeria, Wole Soyinka's 1960 Masks group would heighten my interest in Pidgin and Creole English, an interest that I would follow on the streets of Harlem and, after meeting Dr. Beryl Lofton Bailey, who became my mentor, thanks to Dr. Virginia French Allen Shoemaker, my Teachers College advisor, those interests would take me on the 1968 tour. With coaching from our daughter, Iyabo, after a semester of study in China, and with remembrance of Dr. Bailey's coaching about an African presence in China, a presence that James Garrett and Runoko Rashidi and others would confirm, I would travel to China continuing that 1968 quest. CCNY with a whole set of literary artists would lead to my first writings in my colleague Toni Cade Bambara's first publication *Black Female Voices* edited by Random

House's Toni Morrison. My second publication, held up in Guyana for political reasons, would be co-written with Eusi, *Scars of Bondage; a First History of Africans in Guyana*. Travels in 2004 first to South Africa to represent Uncle Joe in a ground-breaking and later that summer to New Zealand and Australia would leave no doubt in my mind of the still tragic plight of Black people the world over. Hurricane Katrina would make that fact emphatic.

Teaching in the USA has brought forth all my creativity and many awards of competency and appreciation, but has also leveled on me, after my return to this country, a much more insidious "restriction" than Paine College would ever dreamed of. It is the story of my life as an educator and social activist that my doctoral committee, of far too many years, has insisted that I write rather than the monograph series that was well on the way. That committee feels that the story of public education from by experiences needs to be told. I will, when it is completed, need to swear an affidavit that none of what I report is fiction. PALS (Parents And Literate Students), The Sankofa Bird Project, HUG (Guyana Support in Atlanta), and a number of professional presentations as well as a personal tribute to my friend, Langston Hughes, at his Lawrence (KS) Centenary – so ably organized by Paineite Dr. Maryemma Graham – and two journal articles, may let the reader wonder why this National Board Certified Teacher (1995), mother, and grandmother will never die of boredom.



Kwayana at the Univ. of Louisville



and at Langston Hughes Centenary

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