

¡ESCRIBA! ¡WRITE!

A BI-LINGUAL JOURNAL OF STUDENT ART AND WRITING



VOLUME 13, DECEMBER 2015

EUGENIO MARÍA DE HOSTOS COMMUNITY COLLEGE
THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

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THE CITY UNIVERSITY OF NEW YORK

EDITED BY:

Miriam Laskin, Ph.D.

DESIGN AND LAYOUT BY:

Catherine Lewis-Cannon
Zsoreign Sanchez (Design Intern)

FACULTY ADVISORY BOARD:

Madeline Ford
Miriam Laskin, Ph.D.
Elizabeth Tappeiner
Jorge Matos

PUBLISHED BY:

Library Department
Hostos Community College
The City University of New York
475 Grand Concourse
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INTRODUCTION

Greetings and welcome! We proudly present our 13th issue of *¡Escriba! /Write!* This is a publication of the Hostos Community College Library and in it we showcase writing, art and photography by our student body. We also honor four student contributors each year at the Honors Convocation, for the excellence of their writing and artwork. This past May, 2015, our awardees – whose work is in this issue – are Ms. Chee Chee Bourne and Ms. Danielle Stelluto, both of whom offer inspired and inspiring poetry and in Ms. Stelluto’s case, an essay about housing equality in New York City that provides a needed perspective on why it is so difficult to find affordable housing in our great city. We also honored two artists, Ms. Xiomara Estevez and Ms. Karlene Almonte whose paintings and photography are eye-catching and capture many sides of our human nature.

Each year we see the state of the city, the country and even the world, reflected in the writing and art our students submit to *¡Escriba! /Write!* This past year it seems clear that our Hostos family is struggling to understand or describe some of the big issues and problems facing us. For example, Alexandra Herrera de Leon writes about President Obama’s African American identity, his skill at communicating important perspectives on race and the way that the election of an African American has been affecting the ongoing national conversations about race and discrimination in the United States. Ramel Archie takes on the struggle for equal rights of the LGBT community and assesses the triumphs and ongoing challenges in that struggle. Marcelino Bonilla writes about our processed foods and how his service learning opportunity enabled him to explore our health and eating habits and bring his new understanding of the food industry to our choices of what to eat.

We are also lucky to have students like Alma Cayasso who contributes a short story about an unexpected pregnancy, and Ana Deniz Ventura and Sarah Ladino who offer stories in Spanish that will surprise and delight. As in the past, we are happy to present winning essays from the Hostos Women’s History Month and Women’s & Gender Studies essay contests. I know readers will enjoy them. I highly recommend the poetry that our thoughtful poets have submitted. Poetry is especially good for expressing the range of human emotions and for bringing fresh, unique perspectives on the human condi-

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tion. You will read poems that honor and mourn a beloved one who has been lost, explorations of place, love, loss and playful reflections. Finally, I want to draw readers' attention to the three essays, with photographs, created by Hostos CLIP students whose teacher, Laura Kleeman, took them on tours of the Bronx, including landmarks and nature. We could not include the entire class's essays but we proudly bring you three of these essays, on the Bronx Post Office, Bronx graffiti, and of course, Bronx pigeons.

Our artwork is always a true delight for readers of *¡Escriba! /Write!* Hostos students show their creativity and talent in the paintings, scratchboard pieces, charcoal drawings, digital montages, posters and photography each year. The Artwork "Tribal Magick" that graces the cover of this issue is by Xiomara Estevez, who was one of our winners for artwork who we presented at the Honors Convocation last May. You will see another piece by her in the section of color artwork inside. And our other winner in the art category, Karlene Almonte, shows her artist's eye in the two photos in this issue. The photo of a food truck in the cold, snowy evening on a street somewhere in NYC strikes me as a perfect symbol of our resilience and creativity in the art of urban survival. We have so many other wonderful artworks in this volume that must be seen. Interspersed throughout the writing are black & white artworks such as Alexander de la Cruz' superb "Hope's Journey" as well as Moises Quezada' "Liebe" and Sofia Delgado's "Campesino." I mention them because we cannot pass over beautiful art in black & white.

Finally, each issue of *¡Escriba! /Write!* is really a collaboration, a group effort, involving not only students but also faculty throughout Hostos. Without help from faculty who push, prod and cajole their students to submit writing and artwork to the journal, we would not have as great a publication. Many thanks to Prof. Jerilyn Fisher and Prof. Andrea Fabrizio for their work with students who took part in the Women's History Month and Women's & Gender Studies essay contests and for making sure we have the winning essays. Similarly, thanks to Profs. Elyse Zucker, Christine Hutchins, Diana Macri, Michelle Cheikin, Ian Scott and Laura Kleeman for the work their students have submitted and which you will find in this issue. I hope anyone reading this Introduction will find the essays, poetry, art and photography enjoyable, enlightening and inspiring!

BARACK OBAMA AND RACE

Even though in American history there weren't any records of a 'black' person in a big political position, Obama decided to present himself as a candidate for the presidency in 2008. He knew that it would be hard, but he trusted Americans' changes and stood up for what he believed in. "I stand here knowing that... in no other country on earth, is my story even possible" (Obama keynote address to the 2004 Democratic National Convention, 27 July 2004, qtd. in Augoustinos 564). Obama knew that the competition against a white candidate would be hard not just because of his skin color, but due to the population's traditions. Therefore, he created an elaborate way to speak and work in order to convince the population. "... Obama actively crafted an identity that appealed to a broad constituency, sections of which had problematized his identity as either 'too black or not' or 'black enough'" (Augoustinos 575).

He identified himself as an 'ordinary' person who would make those changes that people want. "The politics of 'hope' ('hope you can believe in') and 'change' ('change you can believe in')" (Augoustinos 576). This is one of the strategies that I see he used to change voter's behavior. Obama reached others who identify with his own story by sharing the feeling of not knowing where he belongs. This is the same kind of position that Puerto Rican people sometimes feel between Americans or Latinos. It is an "... in-group identity that was oriented to an increasingly socially diverse America- a diversity that he himself exemplified and embodied as a leader". (Augoustinos 575)

However, this is just a piece of the cake. "... Obama's skills as an orator contributed significantly to his success..." (Augoustinos 575) President Obama's speeches clearly demonstrate he often only implies ideas. For example, he has been blamed for not talking about race after the 'Race Speech,' but that's because people just pay attention to the superficial meaning of his words without noticing that he implied the ideas that he cares about regarding race. I feel that President Obama has acted cleverly by not saying directly his opinions about race. Even though he is not literally saying key words such as "race" or "black people," it doesn't mean he does not care about the issue.

Many people disapprove of President Obama because he is Black. First of all, in a country where racism has existed since the beginning, having a black president is almost a miracle. "The election of the first African-American

president of the United States, Barack Obama, has been widely recognized as an extraordinary milestone on the history of the United States and indeed the world” (Augoustinos 564). People are paying careful attention to what he does and says, especially when it comes to African-American people. An example of this is a single phrase from Obama’s speech about Trayvon Martin’s death: “When I think about this boy, I think about my own kids” (Coates 4). This single expression was a “red” alarm for racist people and the media to start a whole argument about Obama’s race point of view.

Many Americans are scared of having what they feel “belongs” to them taken away. They are afraid of being replaced in the important positions by minority groups. As one politician said, “I think he [Obama] would put too many minorities in positions over the white race” (Coates 16). Furthermore, some doubt whether he is capable of leading a big nation as the U. S.A. “There is a little doubt that Obama’s rise occurred in a socio-political context of incrementing anxieties regarding the global financial crisis and wide-spread disenchantment with the Bush administration” (Augoustinos 576).

President Obama has therefore faced a lot of attacks not just from the media, but from the Congress and other politicians. I think that those attacks make Obama anxious about being stereotyped. This is shown in his 2008 campaign “strategy” when Cornel Belcher, a pollster for Obama, said that “it was not a black man being president, but a capable and extraordinary young man who happens to be black, being president” (Coates 16). Even though this convinced a lot of people, it still put even more pressure on Obama to be as good as those who dislike him are and focus, as Coates says, “...not just on being twice as good, but on being half as black” (Coates 21). Obama is constantly pushed to present himself as both white and black. Therefore, before people even thought about stereotyping him, he created a face for himself, which everyone has ignored. “We demonstrated how Obama positioned himself as the leader best able to advance the collective interests of all Americans, regardless of race, gender, class, or ethnicity...” (Augoustinos 565).

With the election of Obama to the presidency, Ta-Nehisi Coates says that “What we are witnessing is not some new racism—it’s the dying embers of the same old racism that rendered the best pickings the province of ‘unblackness’” (Coates 27), and many people approve this idea. Back in the days when segregation was popular and legal, people openly said whether they were racist or not. In those days, white people also reacted openly, without fear of prosecution, against black Americans. But is racism really dying? It is true that things have changed. African-Americans are going to college. They get jobs and can

share places with white people and others normally. They have the ‘same’ rights that everyone else has.

Nowadays, just one in five people openly admit they are racist, but that doesn’t mean that the other four-fifths don’t feel the same way about black people. However, is racism nearly gone? What I’ve noticed is nothing like it. The old racism is not dying or disappearing, it just has adopted a new way. Now it is hidden and examples of this we find everywhere and in our everyday lives. The Black population isn’t being treated as others want to make people see. They are categorized into two kind of ‘negros’: those who can be celebrities in their professions, magic negros, and those who humbly work day by day supporting their families and giving what they have to give to the country without getting what they really need to have: real freedom and equality.

The ‘Magic Negro’ is a relatively new image in American’s archive of racial stereotypes. It refers to black athletes such as Michael Jordan or entertainers such as Oprah Winfrey who seem to be able to do whatever that want in their chosen field. Wilmore’s point was that white people have so little grasp of what it means to be black in the United States that they have exchanged the old view of African Americans as incompetent, lazy, scary and oversexed for a new one in which a certain type of African American has no flaws and seems omni-competent (though sexuality is still largely excluded). The point is that in neither case are African-Americans judged as what they are: fallible human beings” (King 79).

They are judged based on the social status that African Americans initially had during the colonization process, when they were taken from their countries and real environments and sold as slaves to work for the white families:

“For whiteness historians such as Roediger the very idea of color blindness verges on the absurd. ‘White supremacy is defined not just a matter of racist attitudes and prejudices, but a new social order’” (King 80). the White population had been taught that they had the power to lead minorities based on its supremacy, that they are the ones with more power since before the country was established as a country, and therefore no one else has the right to guide it, even less black folk.

It is true that since the colonization times things have changed a lot for the black population, but it isn’t enough still. I think that using the phrase “dying embers,” as Coates does, is a good adjective to describe the real racism that is happening nowadays. As the embers, this racism stays quiet and under the table until something significant comes and blows it up making it to fuel a fire once more. The attacks on Barack Obama, even the comments about what

he wears, are the biggest proof of the new ways racism is being displayed; as Jamelle Bouie, from *The Daily Beast* says: “Racial bias still exists, individuals still act on it, and it still works to worsen inequality” (Bouie n. pag.).

There are other examples also running around the media that clearly show how people react against black folk. For example, the company that makes Cheerios cereal made a commercial with a family of three, a white mother, black father and interracial daughter, and many people went crazy about it. Everyone can notice that some of the comments about the commercial were too racist. People made comments like “black people don’t want our respect, they want our heads” or, even more absurd, “The wife is not white. She’s Italian, so therefore it’s okay for them to be together with a beautiful daughter because Italians are part black.” Is it just me or does anyone else wonder how someone that probably went to college could make ridiculous comments like these just guided by their racist thoughts? I don’t have an answer for it, and maybe it won’t have a clear right or wrong answer for it. Another example is the Fox News reporter who wrote an entire article about Santa Claus being white, not black or mixed. People let their words go out of their mouths as soon as they get to their heads. As the Bible says “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.” James 1:19.

African-Americans in general are keeping their opinions aside and preparing themselves to overcome any comment or action against them. They are doing as Martin Luther King, Jr. said: “We must accept finite disappointment, but never lose infinite hope.” These people are waiting for the day that this racism really ends and equality becomes real. There are ways that people can start truly changing what is being hidden. A new generation is coming up, and it is the best way to start building equality, by putting consciousness into the youth and making them socialized without prejudices with other groups of people.

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LETTER TO OUR NATION

Letter to our Nation

I'm writing this letter to our nation: to our leaders, Mr. President, Congress, Senators, Governors, Mayors: to all our City Council members. This letter goes out to everyone at home and abroad: loved ones, families, and friends and to our communities and to every society that believes in the word humanity.

In our hearts we all have wants, desires and needs. We are all human. Whether you're rich, poor, disabled or sick.

Our society is changing. Our world is changing. Morality is being given up for money and power. Why gain it all to have no one to benefit from it? Our homes are being broken up and divided. Education is degrading. Young African-Americans are being criminalized. And most of all, the ones that are supposed to be protecting us are killing us and throwing us in jail.

Just because our economy has fallen doesn't mean we, as a human race, should fall too. No matter what race, ethnicity or religion you are or believe in, if we want change we have to change from within. Change ourselves. Avoid the negativity. Stop the violence, especially if it is not in the act of self-defense.

I need change more than anything; The American nation needs change more than anything. Without each other, we are only molecules. But if we come together we are a body of one. And only by coming together will our nation, our beloved United States of America, be the greatest place in the world and other countries will admire us.

Our U.S. Constitution gives us democracy, freedom and the right to due process. We all have the right to live in the pursuit of happiness. Let it not be through any criminal mischief or activity, but by education and hard work. We shall all live by the law and abide by the law whether we're at the very top or at the very bottom.

To our members of society, to the moms and dads, help advise your child. Not by discouraging them but by encouragement. Lead by example. To our youths: Stay in school. Our nation needs us. Without us we will become extinct. Stay educated, Read and write. Make goals and achieve them.

But most of all, to the ones in power: to be honest, you do not know who voted for you, whether black or white or any other race. The thought of young black males being labeled automatically as criminals is wrong. Our police officers are here to protect and serve all members of society. The injustice that is being allowed is morally wrong. Cops should not be feared by the people and should not take the life of any human being unjust. The American nation needs hope. Hope that truly no man is above the law. Too many people have been wrongfully convicted, accused and even murdered by the ones in our criminal justice system.

Too many police officers are killing too many innocent people. This needs to stop.

Being a police officer is a tough job and I believe that our government needs to keep a closer eye on how policing is being carried out. To be honest, the way in which police officers even talk to people is wrong. The term "innocent until proven guilty" means a lot. The use of force as the officer's discretion should be a less harmful risk and only when necessary should force be used. That means an officer should use force only when a weapon is in use against them or someone is in immediate danger. As officers they need proper training, weaponry and should know that they are here to maintain peace and security for the people.

In order to change what's being portrayed today, I believe that cameras on officers should be the rule at all times while on duty. Also in effect there should be a separate job for people who can go into different precincts and observe how officers talk, treat suspected inmates and watch their professionalism. And if they are found in violation they should be penalized or punished.

As a young black man I am crying out for more justice, peace and opportunities for us all. We need change and our voices should be heard.

THE BATTLE FOR EQUALITY: THE LGBT COMMUNITY

I'm from encebollado of albacore [fish stew with onions] with roasted corn and much lemon juice, accompanied by rice, bread and coffee served every Sunday when my daddy arrives at our house after a long, tiring day spent working since dawn; I'm from Manicho chocolate and cocada, and helado de paila which my daddy made to sell and keep the five members of our family. I'm from a cane house over a ground that was sometimes filled with water because it didn't have plumbing, and now that house is a two-story concrete house which my parents built with much effort after many years. I'm from Fertisa, a big neighborhood in the Guasmo in Guayaquil City in Ecuador, where there are children playing in the streets, where there is a fertilizer factory and a pier where international ships arrive. I'm from mangroves where there are many animal species and crustaceans, from Malecon 2000 located on the banks of the Guayas River and where a few times my great-grandmother walked in her wheelchair. I'm from Christmas Day when we went to the Maria Auxiliadora Church to listen to the Midnight Mass and after we went to aunt Fila's house to drink chocolate with Easter bread, and from the end of the year when all my family were in my house to celebrate the new year while burning the paper doll at midnight.

I'm from great-grandparents Petita and Juan who worked in their fields under the stunning sunshine, who raised my mom (I still don't know why), from my Grandpa Manuel and my Grandma Rosa who lived in the field near the beautiful beach of Puerto Lopez. I'm from my mom telling my sister and me when we were in preparatory school that we needed to learn to wash our clothes, and take care of my brother who was a baby while she was working. I'm from going to Dominical School every Sunday when my sister was 9, and I was 10 and we listened to Monsignor Nestor Astudillo preach about Saint John Bosco who was the Founder of the Salesian Society. I'm from Guayas, and Manabi, and Middle of the World because the Equator Line crosses my country, Ecuador, from tripa mishqui, humitas and fritada and fish bollo. I'm from my grandmother who had eleven children, of whom my father was the third, who came from Puerto Lopez to Guayaquil to work in a restaurant when he was 15 because he didn't like going to school, and from my mother who came from Quevedo to Guayaquil when she was 13 to work as a babysitter. I'm

from my family photo album with a paper cover. My mom still has our album in Ecuador. I couldn't bring it with me because my sister didn't allow me to, because it maintains all our memorable moments of when we were children and my daddy worked in fishing ships and my mom took care of my sister and me because my brother had not yet been born, and the albums with photos of my brother when he was born and when he was a child, and the last photos that my sister took of me with my daddy and my mom and all my family when I was in the airport because I was coming to New York and I didn't know when I will be returning to them again.

IS HOUSING EQUALITY REALLY EQUAL IN NYC?

Is housing equality really equal in NYC? Well, if you look at the amount of luxury developments that are currently being built and the number of empty condos or half finished luxury condos that stay empty due to lack of financing, the answer would be no. Housing equality does not exist, unless you make a certain amount of money and can afford to buy a \$600,000 two bedroom in gentrifying neighborhoods like East Harlem, Williamsburg, and especially in the once commercial neighborhood of Long Island City where developers are quickly purchasing land and building high rise buildings that most New Yorkers like myself will never be able to afford. If we take a look at the current housing stock and compare that to other major cities, housing here is very hard to come by, especially if you're at a certain income level.

Additionally, obtaining affordable or subsidized housing is much more difficult to obtain if you're in a shelter, have bad credit, mental illness or physical impairments. Furthermore if you are a minority, it makes it even more difficult to obtain. If you look at statistics the majority of the people are clustered in poor and dangerous neighborhoods. "The poorest borough, the Bronx, has the highest rate of overcrowding. According to the most recent data available from the US Census Bureau, New York has the distinction of being second only to Los Angeles in overcrowding" (Vernon Elliott). Neighborhoods such as Harlem West and East Harlem are quickly gentrifying making affordable housing unattainable for most in neighborhoods that were once deemed dangerous and unworthy of living in. So what is gentrification? Gentrification is a general term for the arrival of wealthier people in an existing urban district, a related increase in rents and property values, and changes in the district's character and culture. The term is often used negatively, suggesting the displacement of poor communities by rich outsiders (PBS.org).

Money is not being spent wisely; it needs to be shifted to the communities where there is permanent affordable housing for everybody. In the past year, the number of luxury apartments listed for sale in Manhattan essentially doubled. In the third quarter, 1,473 luxury apartments were on the market, compared with just 742 units in the third quarter of last year, an increase of 98.5 percent, according to the appraisal firm Miller Samuel. While luxury homes are being invested into tremendously so are shelters. Did you know

Welfare pays approximately \$3,000 a month per family to stay in a room in shelter buildings that are infested, full of mold and run down? That money can put every homeless mother, father and child into a beautiful, safe and secure three bedroom house instead. As Joseph Berger stated in The New York Times, "The city's Department of Homeless Services pays many times the amount the rooms would usually rent for, spending over \$3,000 a month for each threadbare room without a bathroom or kitchen because of an acute shortage in shelters for homeless men and women. Indeed, the amount the city pays roughly, half that amount goes to the landlord, while the other half pays for security and social services for homeless tenants."

Meanwhile, homelessness has increased tremendously. According to Coalition for the homeless, in recent years, homelessness in New York City has reached the highest levels since the Great Depression of the 1930s. They reported In September 2014, there were an all-time record 58,056 homeless people, including 13,922 homeless families with 24,631 homeless children, sleeping each night in the New York City municipal shelter system. Families comprise nearly four-fifths of the homeless shelter population. African-American and Latino New Yorkers are disproportionately affected by homelessness. Approximately 57 percent of New York City homeless shelter residents are African-American, 31 percent are Latino, 8 percent are white, 1 percent is Asian-American, and 4 percent are of unknown race/ethnicity. The remaining are thousands of unsheltered homeless people that live in the streets of New York whether it be in the subway, on the sidewalks or other public spaces. (Coalition for the Homeless)

So what are some solutions to make housing equal for all? In January of 2012 Picture the Homeless issued a report titled "Banking on Vacancy: Homelessness and Real Estate Speculation" which reported and states "The outstanding amount of underutilized housing stock that is available in just a third of New York City! Our survey proves that there are enough vacant properties in just 20 community districts, a third of the city, to potentially house 199,981 individuals essentially clearing out the shelter system! NYC vacant properties could house every homeless person and then some." (Picture the Homeless, Housing Campaign)

Secondly, we should voice out to our politicians and government to take the funds out of the shelter system and put into real affordable housing. Third, taking action and joining people in your communities who are fighting for the same cause. One way to take action would be to join nonprofit organizations in your cities to learn how to develop solutions, strategies and perhaps put a stop to the injustices going on around housing. Some organizations to look into

would be Picture the Homeless, Mothers on the Move, Rights to the City, Coalition for the Homeless and many more. There are many protests and events that take place all over the city as well. Find out on where these are happening and get involved to make a difference in your very own neighborhood. If we stay silent to this crisis, it will only get worse and the rich will continue taking over local communities and turn it into high priced areas making it impossible for people to afford.

In conclusion, housing equality is not really equality in the city of New York. Due to gentrification, rents and wages not equaling up, and money being spent poorly; people are being evicted which either pushes them into the revolving doors of the shelter system, on the cold streets or out of their home town into foreign places. The only way we can solve this crisis and take back our communities is to unify volunteer, raise awareness, raise our voices, strategize, and organize. It's time to make the ones who caused this housing and economic crisis accountable for their actions and stop holding the homeless accountable. The homeless people are not the ones to target, it is the filthy rich people in power that are gentrifying our neighborhoods and making it impossible to comfortably afford living in New York City.

 MARCELINO BONILLA

PROCESSED FOODS

There are some learning methods you never really knew you needed, that is until you've actually experience them. Service learning is indeed one of these learning methods. This unorthodox approach to learning took me out of my classroom and encouraged me to interact with the world around me. During service learning we all were assigned different groups on topics pertaining to both agriculture and social justice. Our group would interview different people regarding our group topic, which was processed foods. We all interviewed a very diverse set of people from all sorts of different nationalities, ethnicities, cultures and even social class. Our interviewees' locations also varied greatly; we did not just interview people from the Bronx but all over New York City. Finally, based on our results, we would then do secondary research. What I liked most about service learning is its hands on approach to learning. I myself am a bit more of a hands on learner and tend to learn best when I am physically learning about something, rather than just sitting all day in a regular old classroom.

Our group dealt with processed foods, which is any food that has been altered from its natural state in one way or another. Depending on the alteration, this new property can vary in its purpose: increased shelf life, change in color, and added sugars are all examples of foods being processed. The processed food topic was near and dear to me, and that is partly why I chose this topic. I also wanted to know more about my neighbors' eating habits. Nearly 10 years ago nutrition was my passion, and I realized how many people were so passive about the idea of healthy eating. I am saddened to say that while interviewing members of my community in the Bronx, I realized once again why I gave up on nutrition so long ago. People don't seem to care about what they eat. They see something that's appetizing and eat it, without ever worrying about the repercussions. Most of them were just too busy to eat healthy. Most of them also lack the funds to eat a well balanced meal. Based on my primary research, time and money were two of the most common reasons people fail to eat healthy foods. My other group members who all interviewed outside the Bronx also came to a similar conclusion. However, convenience and taste were ultimately their deciding factors when thinking about eating healthy or

processed food. Due to the interest of time and also considering taste was the most common answer overall, we all as a group decided to zero in on taste.

I really wanted to get to the bottom of this during secondary research and find a feasible solution for all. This was indeed very personal for me considering it's my neighborhood, and furthermore, that nutrition ideology still lingers within me. During extensive research our group found out that we all have evolutionary preferences for certain types of foods. And the food industry is responsible for feeding us products that are hard for us to turn down. Have you ever wondered why you can't just eat one potato chip, cookie, or even a slice of pizza? Monosodium glutamate is just one of the reasons for this occurrence. MSG is added to foods because it's known to drastically enhance the flavors of foods. The FDA has recognized MSG as "generally regarded as safe". However this decision remains highly controversial to say the least. MSG has been associated with rapid heartbeat, chest pain, headache, weakness, and numbness just to name a few side effects. Another real reason for this food addiction is dopamine. Whenever you do something that's essential for human survival, like sexual reproduction, exercising, maternal behaviors and eating, your brains releases a neurotransmitter called dopamine. This neurotransmitter is what's responsible for not only the overconsumption of food, but also it's addictive properties. The food industry is well informed about our inclinations, and rest assured they take full advantage of it.

The food industry also takes advantage of our sense of sight. For example, in general we all like brightly colored foods, since foods that are brightly colored are generally considered safer than darker color foods. In fact the color of food alone can have a profound effect on taste. Have you ever walked into a grocery store and noticed how all the meats have a similar looking bright red color to them? Well the truth of the matter is, the meat industry adds an organic poison called carbon monoxide to make the meat appear brightly red. But things aren't always what they seem. In actuality, the natural color of industrial meat is gray. The meat industry is well aware of the fact that consumers won't buy gray meat because of our evolutionary inclinations. You see our ancestors who were not able to distinguish bright colors from dark colors were not able to pass on their genetics to the next generation and died off. As you can see, (no pun intended) our sense of sight is a survival mechanism the food industry takes advantage of every single day.

We also have an evolutionary tendency to like foods that are high in both fat and sugar as they are often calorie-dense foods. And yet again the industrial food industry takes advantage of our evolutionary inclinations. In this case a McDonald's mcflurry can contain almost 1000 calories per serving. Ingesting

this amount of fat and sugar is certainly unprecedented. We are simply not accustomed to burn this amount of calories, and so, we store it as fat. This is unfortunately indeed, considering how dangerous fats are for our health. These fats can raise our bad cholesterol, which in turn can block an artery, causing a stroke or even a heart attack. Fats are also used to increase shelf life, which makes it possible for the processed foods, to stay in stores longer without rotting. Processed foods are also generally high in salt, which can be very harmful to your kidneys. Moreover it can also raise your blood pressure, which puts excessive stress on your heart. We need to understand that the food industry's main incentive is money, not our well being.

I was not surprised by the results one bit. I understood quite clearly that effects genetics can have on people. However I was surprised about how much I actually enjoy teaching other people about health. In fact that is what I enjoyed the most about service learning, teaching people who are oppressed about healthy eating. I know it might sound a bit counterintuitive but, I seemed to learn best by, teaching what I know to others. The more often I reiterated a speech, the more often we both learned. When I was at the bridge in Hostos, I felt even more empowered. Since for the first time, people chose to approach me, not the other way around. I felt an overwhelming sense of belonging, that unfortunately for me, never had the pleasure of experiencing, prior to severe learning.

Working with my group members was an amazing experience; I really did enjoy working with my group. We all are individuals and well all had our strengths and weaknesses. The trick was assigning each group member a job they excel at and, at the same time avoiding a job they may not be so good at. I for example am an amazing researcher, however I have a neurological disorder, which can make speaking difficult at times. Consequently during my project I spoke very little but, instead I contribute with a lot of research. The group project can be a bit difficult at times, and I was thankful I had my group member cheering me on at all times. I really felt like I've met lifelong friends during my service learning class, and personally I find that feeling to be priceless.

I also believe all other groups did an amazing job as well. I learned so much from all the different groups. In the agro-industry vs agriculture group I learned that agro-industry companies degrade the biodiversity and they even contribute to climate change. The farmers market group did a great job. I never stopped and realized by supporting your local farmer markets you're in essence supporting you local community, as opposed to some multi-million dollar corporation. The food desert group also did an amazing job. I never knew that what we eat, can greatly depend on what is available around us. Since many

poor people don't have a means for transportation, they simply eat what's close by. Unfortunately for them, more often than not it's processed foods. The other processed food group did not present to me any new information. However, that's only because I knew so much regarding the subject. Nevertheless, they also did an amazing job, we all did in fact.

I will now teach you guys some of the things we taught all other groups in our class. There are many misconceptions regarding processed foods out there. Many people we interviewed consider processed foods to have a few advantages over whole foods. Some of these advantages could include cost, convenience, fortification, and preservation. However the reality couldn't be further from the truth. For one thing, you can't compare nutritionally dense whole foods, with processed foods with added vitamins and minerals. These fortify foods are no where near as nutritionally dense as real whole foods. Canned foods may seem like a cost effective way to preserve food. However, more often than not canned foods are high in salt, refined sugars, and worst of all bisphenol A. According to our FDA there should be "some concern" regarding bisphenol A. Since it has been associated with hormonal, heart, brain, and behavior problems. Yes processed foods may seem more cheap and convenient, compared to conventional food at first. But things aren't always what they seem, cancer, obesity, and diabetes are not convenient or cheap disabilities to have.

We also taught the class how to avoid the dangers of processed foods. Here I will teach you guys how to avoid processed foods altogether. Though it may seem like a daunting task at first, it can be done with a bit of discipline. First things first, avoid any package foods containing ingredients that are unfamiliar to you, especially high-fructose corn syrup. Anything you can't even pronounce is also an excellent indicator, that the product has been processed. It's also best to avoid any products, containing more than five ingredients. When at a supermarket, always remember to stay away from the center aisle, that's where all the processes food is generally located. If this proposition is indeed too daunting for you, I urge you to simply consider a farmers markets which in nature, are a great place to NOT find any processed foods.

All in all, service learning has been a tremendous learning experience both in and out of the classroom. I am truly thankful to have the opportunity to experience this life changing course. I connected with my community and reconnected with my old passion; nutrition. I also learn a lot about myself and my community. For example during secondary researched I learned that eating high-calorie foods is instilled in our DNA for millions of years. Consequently, I should not give up on people so easily, even if it may seem like an insurmountable challenge at times. Prior to this course I never realized that by giv-

ing up on people, in essence am giving up on humanity as a whole. I no longer which to give up in people, in fact if the opportunity were to ever present itself, I would strongly take into consideration Hostos nutrition program, so I can help even more people. And if you found what i've just wrote interesting, I'll urge you to do the same. I hope what you've just read has changed you for the best, like it has me. This service learning class has certainly changed my life, by reconnecting me to my roots, once again.

THE PRECIPICE

Anna was pregnant and far from ready. It was mid-February in 2012. Anna was a Criminal Justice major at Bronx Community College. She was also working full time at Dunkin Donuts. Besides these obvious responsibilities she still had plenty of freedom. She was 21, carefree, and had a lively spirit. Things weren't weighing her down and her shoulders weren't burdened by responsibilities. She was living her life to the fullest. She finally had everything she ever hoped for: a job, her education, a fresh love interest, and herself. She was young, healthy, beautiful, and full of hope. But Anna had grown complacent and that made her weak and jaded. She assumed nothing bad could touch her. Little did she know that her world was about to drastically change. She would find out that no one is invincible and that experience would humble her. It's constantly said that, "it is humbling to become the thing you once mocked."

Anna was about to experience a pivotal moment in her life. She wouldn't just have to worry about just herself anymore. Her choices would have an impact on her and her child. She needed to realize that and come to grips with it. Anna would find out the news, slowly but surely. When her time of the month didn't actually come, she started to fear the worst. It usually came every twenty-eight days so as the days started to slip past here she became more and more unnerved. Anna was left feeling dread and an impending doom striding towards her. She became anxious at the thought of such a possibility. An unwanted pregnancy can't and shouldn't be in the books for her now. It wasn't the right time! She fought the rising panic and berated herself. These types of things happened, sure, but not to her.... She had been careless enough for it to happen. No amount of denial was going to rectify the situation. Anna had never been the type to humor delusions or fantasies. This marked one of the many changes she would undergo.

Her pregnancy was confirmed in the public restroom at a neighborhood fast food restaurant. When she gave the test a full three minutes she reluctantly looked at the result. The walk back to table where Victor waited was a blur. She numbly disclosed the result. Victor was initially shocked and then his mouth formed a severe line. The realization shook her to her core. She was at least four weeks pregnant. For several weeks, she kept her secret from her family. Her mother started to give her strange inquisitive looks. Anna was constantly preoccupied with thoughts yet on the outside she still managed to look detached, dissonant. This troubled everyone, they all silently wondered why she looked so forlorn. What they didn't know were the thoughts that were occupying her time.

Anna spent most hours making a decision, a difficult one. Should she keep the pregnancy and work through it? Or should she abort the fetus and

act like it never happened? Could she manage that façade? Keeping up appearances never was a big thing for her, she did not care how most people perceived her. Yet an abortion seemed so drastic and traumatic to her. Anna had researched the different methods but couldn't imagine actually going through with it. All the foreign machines and tools that would be used on and the room that she would have to lie in, scared her. Anna also spent a lot of that time feeling stupid. She had been careless and in that carelessness she had been reckless and thoughtless. Just thinking of the way Victor dismissed her a week ago at the restaurant, made her realize that at this moment it is really is just her and no one else.

She coped with feelings of disappointment and shame. She was scared of what would evidently happen and how she would break the news to her family. What would they think of her? What if they didn't want to support her? What if they chose to abandon her? What would she do? At that point Anna remembered that all this stress wasn't good for the pregnancy. She was considering her options and she tried to imagine each and every one of them. She considered how she would feel about herself in these various outcomes. At the end of the day she decided that what she picked would have to be the best for her mentally.

Victor didn't want to be a father. He decided that he would tell Anna what he thought. He didn't want her to keep the baby. He felt compelled to push his decision on Anna. In his mind it was the best for everyone involved. The next day Victor visited Anna at her apartment. She opened the door and stepped back. Victor took in the sad sight. Her eyes had bags under them, the same eyes that used to shine so brightly with optimism now looked exhausted. After she gave him a quick once over she slowly walked back to the couch and pulled her knees up into her body and pressed her forehead against them. She was clad in her pajamas and her hair was loose and disheveled.

"What happened to you?" Victor rasped. "Nothing except pregnancy and an ego death." "Oh! Don't be so morbid and melodramatic!" he barks.

"Ha! That's rich coming from you. As soon as I broke the news you shut me out and I haven't heard from you in a week! How exactly am I supposed to act?" she rebukes.

"It was a lot to handle, okay? I wasn't prepared to face that." he simpers.

"It was a lot for me too. The one person I wanted to lean on wasn't there. Is this how you will act when you're a father, running at the first sign of trouble?" she challenges.

He stands there and crosses his arms then shakes his head and whispers, "Yes, I'm not ready to be a father and I came here today to tell you that I believe you are also not ready for this and should do the right thing."

"You mean do what's right for you?" she counters. "No! What's right for both of us involved! We spoke about this a while ago and you always said you would deal with it accordingly because you have so much left to accomplish. You know this will hinder that."

"That was before I was in the actual situation. I never thought this would happen. It's easy to passively answer a question like that and not have to cope

with the actual weight that decision has. This decision will echo throughout my whole life. I've done the research and the whole process seems awful and barbaric. I can't cope with going through with it. I will always feel guilty and selfish for getting it taken care of."

"WHAT THE HELL, ANNA!" he bellowed. "You're making this bigger than it is. It's just a small procedure for a few hours. Please, I need you to hold on to the promise you made to me."

Anna looked at Victor like he had three heads. "Fuck you and your promise Victor. I did not allow you to come inside after ignoring me to have you browbeat me into getting your way!" She yelled back. In that moment Anna stood up and looked him in the eyes. "Get out of my house!"

He looked into her eyes and realized that he was beating a dead horse. He spun on his heel and stormed out slamming the front door behind him. Anna took a deep calming breath and put both her hands, palms down, on her stomach and lightly rubbed.

Around the corner, in the hallway, Anna's mom quivered with anxiety and stepped into the living room. "You're pregnant?" she whispered. Anna turned around and faced her, "Yes..." Her mother smiled and rushed in for a hug. "Don't worry about it, we'll figure it out." She sighed.



"Hope's Journey" by Alexander De La Cruz

JAMAICA BAY

Day,
Bright and busy
Waking dormant corpses from their slumber,
Expecting effervescent smiles and cheer to greet the sun.

Mid-day,
Flames permeating spine and bone
Intense
Burning hot embers
Stalking, preying on the pigment of skin.

There is no escape from the wrath.
No way to climb above or under or across
While feeble attempts to shade oneself prove futile.

How eager must you be to call yourself friend?
To hear the enigmas of joy and wonderment in every little heart.
To expose pain, heartbreak, and grief.

Day
You beg too much for ecstasy in this life.
Unwanted, unloved, still you come,
Then you depart again.

Night
Dark, restless, waiting for the sun to disappear like ether.
One dithers in your presence.
One becomes alive from a blighted existence.

Shadows dance across Jamaica Bay whenever you come calling.
Spread out like locusts around every corner of this island.
Black-crowned night herons eclipse the sky.
Silhouettes caressed by charmeuse sheets

Make music and new souls.
Voices echo off rooftops like lyrics off pages when sung out/aloud.
Whispers of reflective thoughts and ideas, shadow- dance upon the walls.
Mickle works of art, poetry, song and aspirations
come to fruition in dark, cool spaces.

Harvest moon
Here you are welcome.
Here you are a familiar comfort.
Here you are Shangri-La aglow in the eyes
A confidant and friend in the moonlight,
Turning dreams into creations.

CONGO

Evergreens towering above the Earth
As African oak and Red Cedar reach out to touch the sky.
Sounds echo of mammalian (ungulate) creatures in the near distance.
Red river hogs, Bush Buck, and Sitatungas roam free amidst the swamps and
forest.

Sweat trickles down the curve of her lower back
Reminding her just how small she is in a world so vast and untempered.
Her thin body a wisp easily blown away, lost in the thunder.
The blood coursing through her veins, spilling out like lava in the thicket.

Still she travels,
The charred soles of her feet, sluggishly move along.
Still she remembers
The terror of watching village women endure torture.
Still she staggers on,
Her fragmented spirit and vacant eyes haunting in the dim night sky.

In the wilderness, amongst the creatures and beasts is where it is safe.
Hidden by the deciduous trees is the closest she will ever come to a home,
While her blood soaked rags scarcely draping her skin
Leave tracks in the bush for any rebel soldier to find.



“Campesino” by Sofia Delgado

JOURNEY

Her tears fuse with the Passaic River
As she remembers the scent of Diavolo on her fingertips.
Bergamot and Mandarin Orange were an aphrodisiac
That lingered for days clouding her senses.
Then he left her to delve into the heart of another,
The curves of another, the sheets of another.
His scent still poignant in the air.

She is experiencing heart break.

Warmth from the embers burning in the fireplace
Crackle in the night.
Sweet smells of apples and cinnamon waft past her nose
Inviting her in from the frigid world
That harbors no love, just indifference.
The walls know her secrets
And there are no words, simply silence.

She is experiencing belonging.

INJUSTICE

I am living in a system
That tries holding down our spirit and wisdom.
Mental slavery is what they're feeding our children,
Families placed in infested buildings,
While others are holding down billions.

Summer time is too hot to bear!
While the workers have AC,
Residents suffer from no air.
Children don't deserve to suffer through this nightmare,
And I get on my knees and pray for justice to appear.

When it comes to policy,
They make themselves clear,
If you don't follow guidelines,
They implant your mind with fear.

Remember God is who placed us here,
So it's time to put on our righteous gear
As we take back our lives
And stop doing what everybody else wants to hear.

We are forced to sign so many papers,
That our very own trees are crying out for a savior,
Just to gain back a piece of Mother Nature.
Authorities talk down on us,
Like we signed ourselves up for childcare
And belittle us just for being there.

My best weapon is my spirit that's alive
That's why everywhere I go
People can feel my vibe.
I'm not one to take orders,

Instead, I'm crossing borders.
I'm trying to stack up bread -
I'm not trying to stack up quarters.

We are people, not caged animals.
So stop trying to eat us up like cannibals.
Despite this system of division,
I'm still giving thanks for the life I'm living
Because every experience enhances my visions
While I make conscious decisions.

 DANIELLE STELLUTO
OCCUPY WALL STREET

Time to release the beast and take back our streets.
Occupy Wall Street and defeat our true enemy that creeps.
The wicked hide their faces plotting against the poor.
It's time for a revolution to knock down their door
Taking back our jungle as we roar!

Students, teachers, and working families
Paying for a recession we didn't create.
They've created distractions and illusions
To strip us of our faith.
They treat us like bait - reeling us in -
Trapping us at a gate while teaching our minds to hate.

This is a peace rally
Yet there's police brutality
Where's people's sanity?
This is not a game, it's reality.

We've been sleeping for too long
Time to wake up to all the wrong
And form a nation beyond strong.

As the one percent eats up caviar
They throw us scraps in factory jars.
KFC, McDonald's, and Taco bell are filled with toxins
Putting our bodies through hell.
We can't even trust our own water
It's filled with pollution and chemicals
Creating mental disorders.
Our vegetables and fruits are no longer grown
Naturally from the earth
They're tainted with pesticides causing our bodies to hurt.

The government formed a one percent team
Feeding us a fairy tale dream
That's only played as a movie scene.
If we just unite we could win this fight
Gaining back what's right.
Religion was conquered over by corrupt rulers
For division causing one's mind to be in derision
When there's only one God in heaven.
We are one just as it describes in Corinthians
That's just my opinion in this world we are living in.

 CASSANDRA DEAN

IN LOVING & DEVOTED MEMORY

Here I stand
For the first time
In his presence.
The first time in months
Like years.
His face to feel
Is a gift.

To hear his voice
Again.
The vibrations
Like the nostalgia
Of an old radio
Playing near a warm meal
In a kitchen.
Skin permeating the vibratory
Language of simplicity
Through battles, wars.
No one hears
A simultaneous complexity
That can be outwardly
Processed as bare tears.

And they run
Running quickly down my face
A lunge of breath
And the grasp.
As the wives understand

Embraced the skin of dawn
Where light breaks away pain
Recovering strength
Long forgotten

Here I stand
In remembrance.

The time which stood in my heart so long
For so long.
Finally understood
Finally here
The rebirth of strength
The long withstanding.
Courage.

 ANITA BHATTACHARJEE

THE FALLACIES OF FAIRY TALES AND MY FIRST REAL PRINCE

When I was a young girl, I enjoyed reading Grimms' fairy tales where these stories brought me to a far away land in which good reigns over evil. With wild imagination, I wished for a young handsome prince to take me far away from my family. He would come with his shining armor, fight off my parents' objections and swoop my helpless being to a beautiful land. I was not aware of the fallacies of gender socialization of both sexes and the defamation of women by men in these tales until much later in my adult life. In this paper, I would like to discuss how women are depicted and stereotyped in the stories of "The Twelve Brothers", "Hansel and Gretel" and "The Juniper Tree".

In these stories, it is poignantly painful to see women who do not have power and often have to find alternative means to obtain it. At the beginning of "The Twelve Brothers", we see that the mother Queen was distressed when told by the father King that all their twelve sons would be killed if she gave birth to a female child. Wielding the power of patriarchy, the father King refused to share his kingdom with both sons and daughter. Seeking a solution to save her sons, the mother Queen sent them away to the forest before she gave birth to a female child. Being helpless, the mother Queen or any woman under such demand will seek a solution to save her children.

Another example of a powerless woman is in my reading of "The Juniper Tree". The wife of a rich man saw that her husband's wealth could not be inherited by her or her daughter but rather only by her husband's son. "She looked at the little boy and it seemed to cut her to the heart, for the thought came into her mind that he would always stand in her way, and she was thinking how she could get all the fortune for her daughter" (www.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimm-mtmp). Since the woman understood that the family's inheritance could only be passed down from father to son, she concocted a plan to kill her stepson. Asking her son to pick an apple from the chest, the stepmother dropped the heavy lid with a sharp heavy lock onto his neck and his head was chopped off. The stepmother then puts the boy's head back on and repositions him so that her daughter can shut the lid on him, removing the woman from blame.

As I delved further into the stories, I saw how gender roles pigeonholed good women to maintain silence with what they see and hear. In "The Juniper Tree", a good example is when Marlinchen is agonizing over the casualty of her dead stepbrother. "Marlinchen", said the mother, "what have you done, but be quiet and let no one know it, it cannot be helped now, we will make him into black-puddings" (www.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimm-mtmp). When her stepfather came home, Marlinchen could not reveal the fateful event. Helplessly, MarMy

linchen watched her stepfather consume the bread pudding her mother made of her brother's bones. She cried incessantly but said nothing. In Marlinchen's role as a "good" woman in this tale, her voice and the truths she knows could not be spoken.

After Marlinchen placed her stepbrother's bones under the juniper tree in the yard, a bird miraculously appeared. The bird, which was actually her revived brother, flew around the village, telling the truth. This story conveyed that women are pushed to a corner where they do not have the right to express themselves and what they know. When the truth needs to be told, only a male can unwrap the silence.

In the story of "The Twelve Brothers", I also saw how women stayed behind the line of silence in which they cannot reveal the truth. After the mother Queen told the young princess that her brothers were living in the forest, she went to find them. One day, she plucked twelve flowers from a witch's garden. The angry witch then transformed her brothers into ravens. The young princess wept and asked the witch for a way to help. "No, said the woman, there is but one in the whole world, and that is so hard that you will not save them by it, for you must be dumb for seven years, and may not speak or laugh, and if you speak one single word, and only an hour of the seven years is wanting, all is in vain, and your brothers will be killed by the one word" (www.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimmtmp). Thus, the princess, like Marlinchen, is silenced.

Another doomed role for women is that their muteness is regarded as connived intentions. While the princess in "The Twelve Brothers" was looked upon as good, her silence also coiled to slander her. Soon, a young King found her atop a tree and decided to marry her. However, her mother-in-law became suspicious of her son's new bride and her silence was thought to be mistrustful. Her mother-in-law was convinced that the princess was a common beggar. Just like her mother Queen, the young princess found herself in a dilemma and remained quiet. After much persuasion by his mother, the young King rolled out the princess's death sentence by agreeing to put her in the fire pit. The princess's fate was either to speak and save herself or die in the fire pit to protect her 12 brothers. Because the princess could not speak under her oath to save her brothers, therefore she was perceived as hiding some evil thoughts. Magically, her brothers, who were the ravens, came just in time to save her from the fire. Ironically, we see only males and no females to be the saviors of in the stories.

In society, the social norms for good women require them to be quiet and suffer. If they tell the truth, there are consequences and the outcomes may be perilous. What the story failed to promote is the courage of the princess in keeping her oath and the terrible dilemma she faced: to save herself by speaking or to save her brothers by remaining quiet.

During my life, I am flummoxed when I notice a dissonance between males and females being responsible for their acts. When a man makes a bad decision, the unfavorable consequence is often taken upon the woman as her responsibility. No blame is placed upon the male. In the confusion, children suffer and women grieve or die. Men hide their malevolent intentions and as a whole they are perceived as good persons. Let me examine again the story of

"The Twelve Brothers". The father King was prepared to kill his 12 sons over the birth of a daughter. He was the initial cause of the wrongs in the story. The King's decision, however, fell upon the mother Queen for a response and the young princess suffered all the consequences. However, the father was not condemned in the story. He disappears from the plot after he makes his murderous decree. Likewise in the latter part of the story, the young King doled out a death punishment for his wife. Because he still loves her, he is perceived as a loving person. How can that be? He was a heartless King who stood by and watched the princess's dress caught fire and she nearly died. Only the magical expiration of the spell permitted her to live, not the King's compassion.

Similarly in "The Juniper Tree", no blame was given to the father, who after all ate his dead son's bones. We saw that Marlinchen had cried until her tears became bloody and we saw that the stepmother was ultimately killed for her cruel act. In the "Hansel and Gretel" tale, this same plot and characterization is repeated in which the father is seen as blameless. A poor woodcutter is worried of not being able to provide food for his wife and his two children. "How are we to feed our poor children, when we no longer have anything even for ourselves. I'll tell you what, husband, answered the woman, early tomorrow morning we will take the children out into the forest to where it is the thickest" (www.cs.cmu.edu/~spok/grimmtmp).

As the story continues, the father and stepmother abandon Hansel and Gretel in the forest so that the parents will have enough to eat. Later, the children found a house made of bread and cakes, which belonged to a witch. As the witch hoped to eat the children, she tricked and captured them in her house. Luckily for the children, they escaped and returned home. There was a joyful ending with their father. Where is the stepmother? Although the father agreed with her plan, only the stepmother had to be eliminated from the story's final scene. She was not acknowledged for giving a small piece of bread to the children. Goodness and righteousness are traits assigned to men in these tales and "bad" women must be eliminated from the so-called "happy ending" where the patriarch prevails.

I can relate personally to the three stories. I thought my Chinese mother was the evil stepmother and had wished her death. Her punishments were painful like pinching my thighs until they bled, pulling my hair or whipping me with a cane. On the other hand, my father was the parent that I loved more. He was forever away at work and I would wait eagerly for his return to the home when the beatings would cease temporarily. I did not blame him even though he should have stopped my mother's punishments.

Later as an adult, I lived under the power of a man. An African man I met in Singapore took me away from my dysfunctional family to marry me in Gabon, West Africa. I thought he had saved me. But I went from burning pot to burning pit. I was docile and young. My African husband used my innocence to his advantage and became despotic. I was powerless and kept my silence. Like Marlinchen in the "Juniper Tree", I cried and cried. Despite my pleas for help to my in-laws, I was told to return to my marital home.

My abusive husband told me that it is the norm in his country for a husband to have full authority over a wife. I worried for the future of my young daughter who would grow up into this male dominated society. I was not given any choices.

In our fifteenth year of marriage, I applied for a divorce. My life was threatened and my three children were taken away from me for a year. In court, my ex-husband was not viewed as the abuser but rather my morals were scrutinized and judged and I was given a three-month prison term. When my attorney appealed this decision, the court decided to lighten my sentence to a three-month probation. With the lack of women's rights in Gabon and treated like a second-class citizen, I eventually left that country after obtaining full custody of my children.

From these readings and from my learning in Women's and Gender class, I can now interpret these fairy tales from new angles. My life experience and the fairy tales share some patterns of male and female characteristics. I also realized that these fairy tales teach passive acceptance of the stereotyped gender roles of females and males. The idea of a women being saved by "a prince" or "an ideal man" is misleading when we encounter real life situations. For example, For example, I was deluded and thought that my African husband could provide me with lifelong happiness and stability. Just like the fairy tales I read during my childhood where I see "a prince saves a helpless but beautiful princes" and the story ends with a happy ending.

And why, as happens in these tales, should only females suffer and have no freedom to speak? It was true that I was powerless in my first marriage and suffered in silence for many years. However, when I reclaimed my identity, my ex-spouse became like "a paper tiger" and his threats disappeared. In the stories, men are not judged for their negligence whereas bad women are condemned for acting to improve their status or situations. I had a similar experience with my daughter. In her teenage years, my daughter would blame me for taking her away from her father. However, as she grew into an adult, my daughter realized my tribulations as having been a domestic violence survivor. Women in fairy tales are falsely portrayed with attributions like being beautiful but docile; or they are portrayed as deceiving manipulators to be destroyed so that a prince or King can save the "good" girl or princess from the evil woman. Despite these portraits of women in fairy tales, my daughter today sees me as a loving and strong mother as well as a small business owner and a smart student. I strongly feel that these three tales are truly biased and should be re-scripted for the future generations.

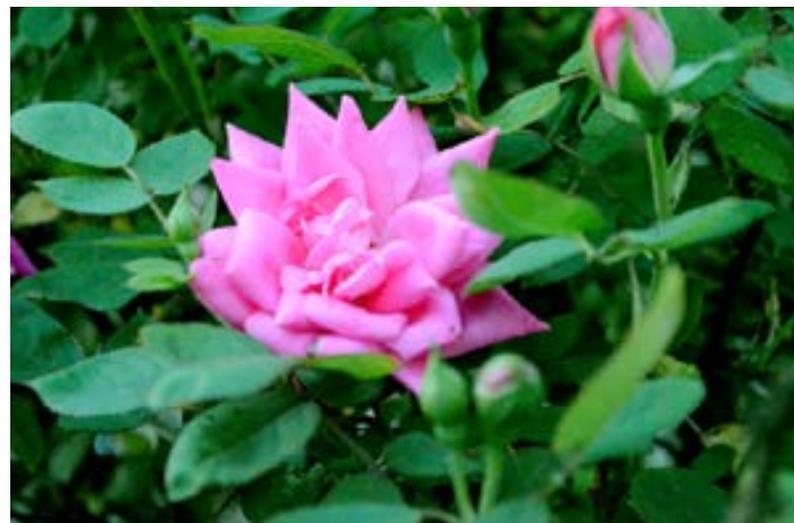


"Eye" by Xiomara Estevez

Continued on p.61



“Food Truck” by Karlene Almonte



“In Bloom” by Karlene Almonte



“Egg Offering” by Genoveva Carranza



“Hapless Hunters” by Genoveva Carranza



“Too Cool For Canvas”
by Badu Boakye



“Anger-Sad” by Diarra Mame Ndiaye



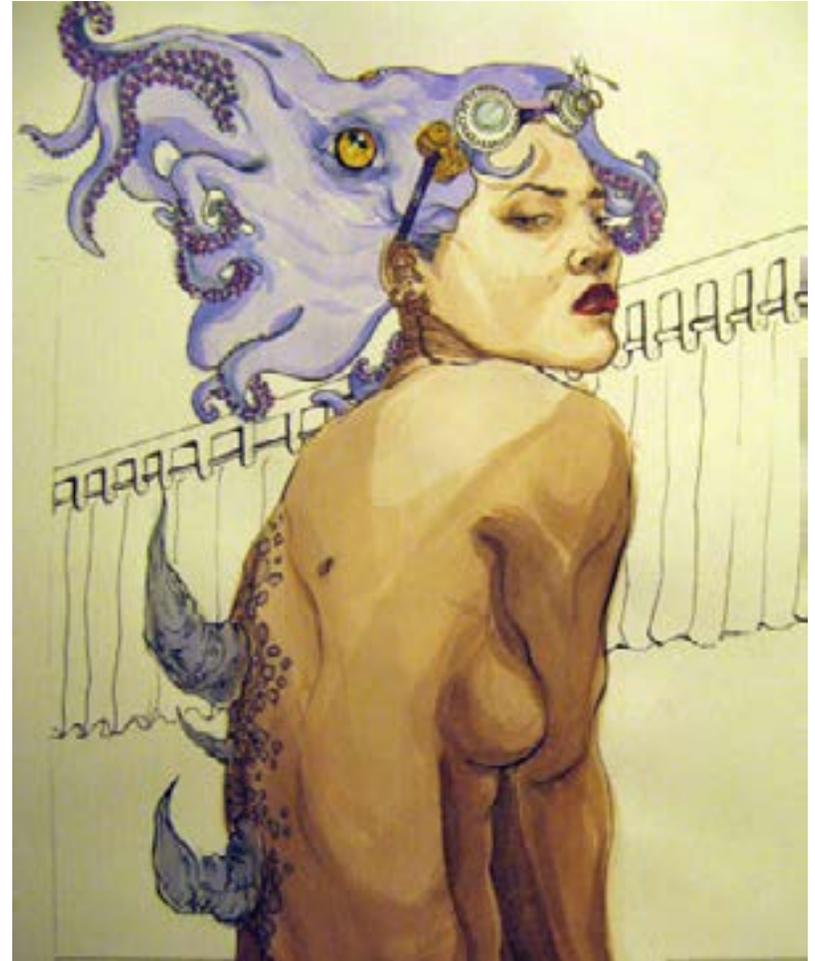
“Sapphic Guitar” by Jasmira Tejada



“Scratching Medusa” by Jazmin Sabino



“Psychedelic Photo Portrait” by Chinami Sugiyama



“Devil Woman” by Katherine Rodriguez



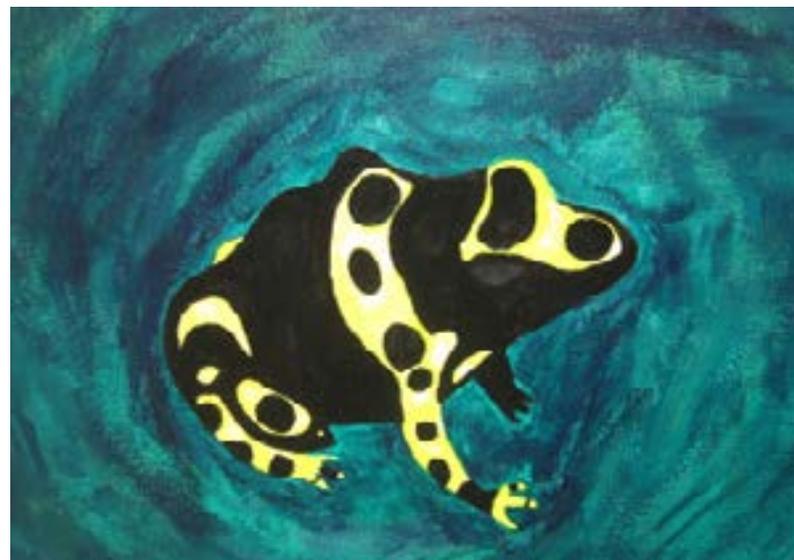
“The Pain in Life” by Federico Perez



“Identity Crisis” by Jing Chen



“Safe Space” by Christian Diaz



“Black Eyed Frog” by Nestor Rivera

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“NYC Life Columbus Circle” byKauk Chin

OPENING EYES TO A CRUEL REALITY

Two journalists for *The New York Times* newspaper set out to travel to developing countries in search of testimonies about the discrimination women face. Nicholas D. Kristof and Sheryl WuDunn are husband and wife journalists who have taken it upon themselves to introduce the world to the astonishing number of discriminatory acts against women occurring around the world each and every day. In their trek around the world they encountered many heart wrenching stories and forms of discrimination that inspired them to write a book about it: *Half the Sky: Turning Oppression into Opportunity for Women Worldwide*. This book covers different forms of oppression and discrimination against women such as rape, sex trafficking and prostitution, female genital mutilation and denial of maternal health care. Although reading this book is very difficult due to the horrible things that these women have had to endure at the hands of men and other community members, their stories also offer rays of hope that allow us to see that there are ways to prevent acts of discrimination like these from continuing to happen. *Half the Sky* offers in-depth explanations for solutions. Some of these are education, microfinancing, grassroots and individual efforts that help empower women and give them a chance to contribute financially to their families, communities and their countries' economies. As I read this book it was difficult for me to understand how people could be capable of such heinous acts of injustice and discrimination towards human beings, but Kristof, WuDunn and the brave women who told their stories did an excellent job in dissecting the causes for each act. This graphic and in-depth explanation allowed me to better grasp the situation and sense of despair these women have experienced and still do today.

One of the oldest forms of female discrimination and oppression is female trafficking and prostitution. Women are forced from very young ages to satisfy the sexual needs of paying customers. Young girls are often abducted or are sold by their own family members to sex businesses known as brothels. In these brothels, women as young as twelve are forced to engage in sexual intercourse with men who have paid money to the owners for this service. If the girls resist they are beaten, starved, raped, and even drugged so that they comply with the needs of the clients. Young girls often become victims of abduction by brothels because they have economic hardships and venture out in search of jobs to help their families.

Families also sell young women to brothel owners because they need the money and because they believe women don't have any other value other than satisfying a man's sexual needs. A young woman named Rath tells Kristof and WuDunn the story of how she was forced to work in a brothel: "When Rath was fifteen, her family ran out of money, so she decided to work as a dish-

washer in Thailand for two months to help pay the bills." This was the primary cause for which Rath left the safety of her home. Her search for work unfortunately led her to dishonest people who took her to Thailand under the pretense that she was going to work in a restaurant when in reality they were going to force her to work as a prostitute in a brothel. Brothel owners take advantage of impoverished girls, kidnapping them and selling their bodies for maximum profit.

These despicable activities occur all over the world. Meena Hasina also told Kristof of her experience with sex trafficking and prostitution between the Nepalese border and India. Meena's parents sold her when she was eight or nine years old and she was taken to India to eventually work in a brothel. She was too young at the time to attract any clients so she was kept until she was old enough to begin having sex with customers. At first Meena resisted being violated by clients but the brothel owners beat her and intoxicated her with wine so that she would have sex with the clients: "The induction was similar to that endured by Rath in Malaysia, for sex trafficking operates on the same business model worldwide, and the same methods are used to break girls everywhere."

Kristof highlights how sex traffickers all over the world use oppression as a means to bend girls to the brothel owner's will. Brothel owners use physical force, intimidation tactics, and go so far as to threatening to kill uncooperative girls in order to maintain control over them. These various forms of abuse break young girls' bodies as well as their minds. After periods of time forced to live in these conditions women lose their sense of self-worth and begin to accept that the only thing they are good for is to satisfy men's sexual inclinations and to increase the profits of the brothel owners. Brothel owners deny the girls their right to an education because uneducated and impoverished girls are more submissive and easier to dominate.

Half the Sky gave me insight into sex trafficking. Before reading it I was under the impression that prostitutes chose to work as sex providers for money. I had no idea that teenagers were being abducted and forced like slaves to do these things. Slavery is not dead as I had believed. Slavery has just taken on a different form and a different victim: "In other words, far more women and girls are shipped into brothels each year in the early twenty-first century than African slaves were shipped into slave plantations each year in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries...." Kristof and WuDunn effectively put into perspective just how serious the issue of sex trafficking is and how widespread women's discrimination has become.

Oppression of women does not only involve sex trafficking, it includes many other forms of female mistreatment and subjugation. Rape is not just a violent sexual act it is also a tool used to dominate and humiliate the victim. Rape is a very popular way to dishonor and devalue women in developing countries. The perpetrators of these brutal acts often go unpunished yet the victims suffer one hundred percent in the aftermath. By losing their virginity women are seen as impure, worthless and bringers of shame to their families and community. Raped women are often rejected by their fathers and neigh-

bors and are constantly judged by everyone around them. In places where rape is a common occurrence, law enforcement and the laws in place do not hold rapists accountable for their actions. Victims of rape feel so much shame that they often do not report that they have been raped. As one father of a rape victim said about the community's justice system: "More weight is still given to the crime of stealing a thing than to the stealing of a person." This statement depicts just how unimportant women are considered to be in places like Ethiopia. The fact that the members of an Ethiopian village value an object more than a girl is both baffling and sickening to me. Kristof and WuDunn's book was full of testimonies of acts of rape against women. Astonishing numbers of girls can testify to their bodies being violated by men who wanted to satisfy their needs.

One testimony about rape that stood out to me was that of Woineshet. Woineshet is an Ethiopian girl who was kidnapped and raped by a man who wanted to marry her. In this part of Ethiopia it was common for men to kidnap and rape a girl in order to devalue her and make the parents agree to let her daughter marry him. If the rapist would later marry the girl, the law would not prosecute him and they would get away with the crime. Women would often give in and marry their attackers because the man would usually continue kidnapping her and raping her until he was successful. Neighbors would hear the commotion and would not do anything about it. If the young woman would go to the police to press charges she would be looked down upon for breaking tradition and she would bring shame to the village and her family. "This is not a tidy world of tyrannical men and victimized women, but a messier realm of oppressive social customs adhered to by men and women alike."

When I used to think about gender oppression I thought that it was just that, men oppressing women, but it is not that clear cut, as Kristof and WuDunn show. Women often accept oppression because they believe their inferior status is the way of life based on their social and religious customs. Women also aid or play a major part in oppressing other women as well, based on these beliefs. Ideologies of women's subservience in places like Ethiopia essentially trap women into a life filled with discrimination, shame and low self-worth. With everyone around a woman talking negatively about her and ostracizing her for being a victim of rape through no fault of her own, women often commit suicide in order to escape their shame. Men are aware of the effect that social pressure and public opinion has on young women. Men take advantage of these social pressures to keep women under their control by using tactics such as rape. "They know that a woman humiliated in that way has no other recourse except suicide," Mukhtar wrote later. "They don't need to use their weapons. Rape kills her." Mukhtar, who experienced a gang rape paints a vivid picture of what goes on in the mind of a rape victim in places like the southern Punjab. Women believe that violations like rape robbed them of the only valuable part of themselves and that they are no longer worthy of living. Although implementing laws that punish rapists are necessary, it is of more importance to me that the culture is enlightened to the many assets and values women possess.[...]

Discriminated and oppressed women often times have low education levels. Many of the women written about in *Half the Sky* could not read or write. Education is a very important tool for women in order to battle discrimination. Providing education to women can help alleviate oppressive conditions like poverty and help future generations of women to break the discriminatory cycle. Women that are able to receive an education can leave their homes and find work or can start their own businesses. Earning money with their education allows women to contribute to the economy of their family as well as to the economy of their community.

In a very poor village in the mountains of China, Kristof and WuDunn experienced how much educating young women can affect the local economy. In this village Kristof and WuDunn met a young girl named Dai Manju, whose parents were sick and could not afford to pay for her schooling and needed the young Dai to tend to the chores of the house. Dai, however, desired to get an education and her determination and struggle inspired Kristof and WuDunn to write an article about her. As a result of the article, the school Dai attended received a generous donation from a bank that allowed Dai and other village girls to continue their education. Many of the girls including Dai were able to get jobs in larger cities and earn enough money to help those back home. "All this brought the hillside more prosperity and influence, and so a road was built to the village." By giving the girls of the village the opportunity to become educated, these women were able to improve their villages' economies, the economies of their families, and the overall economies of their villages. The donation that the school received allowed the young girls to get an education to better themselves but a small loan can be equally as effective in improving the status of women.

Generally women often do not manage the money in the household in developing countries, men do. As a result, women are not seen as equals. Women are seen as more of a servant. Microfinance provides women with a way to receive small loans that can help them build a business and contribute to the economy of the home. A small loan of money can result in women gaining confidence, higher economic status and respect from their husbands. Saima Muhammad was living a nightmare in Pakistan. Saima's house was in bad conditions due to poverty and debt. Saima's marriage was also deteriorating because her husband and mother in law beat her and mistreated her. Desperately, Saima took out a \$65 loan from a microfinance organization in Pakistan that went by the name of the Kashf Foundation. With the small loan Saima was able to start a business selling beaded embroidery. The business was prosperous and it quickly began to grow. She was able to pay off her husband's debts and even had her husband working for her. "Saima became the Tycoon of the neighborhood, and she was able to pay off her husband's entire debt, keep her daughters in school, renovate the house, connect running water to the house and buy a television." All the changes described by Kristoff and WuDunn were possible by loaning Saima \$65. The micro loan acted as a catalyst for the growth of Saima and the improvement of her bleak predicament. Even the relationship between Saima and her husband improved after she received

the loan. He began to see women in a different light and considered women equal to men. Grassroots organizations like the Kashf Foundation are essential in stopping women's oppression.

[...]

In West Africa there is a group of people that go by the name of Tostan, that have made significant progress in trying to stop female genital mutilation from being practiced. The members of the grassroots group named Tostan had witnessed how other foreign aid organizations had failed when they attempted to stop the practice of female genital mutilation. The problem was that foreign aid groups were not sympathetic to the customs of the Western African Area and the foreign organization did not understand how deeply connected this practice was to women's ability to marry. When the foreign aid groups launched campaigns against female genital cutting, the community would instead unite and further support the act of female genital mutilation because they felt their culture was threatened by the foreigners. "Indeed the international denunciations of FGM prompted a defensive backlash in some countries, leading tribal groups to rally around cutting as a tradition under attack by outsiders." To prevent similar reactions in their region, Tostan took a different approach. They chose to educate the women in the village on the health risks of genital cutting, and letting the women make their own decision. By educating the community Tostan has been more successful in their campaign against female genital mutilation. Grassroots organizations are better able to influence the communities because they better understand the hardships of each community and workers in these organizations are not seen as outsiders. Along with educating women, and providing micro loans, grassroots organizations can help women combat inequality and oppression by aiding women to show that they can be contributors to society and that women are not worthless.

In conjunction with education, microfinance and grassroots efforts, Wu-Dunn and Kristof used their writing skill and journalistic influence to put a spotlight on the topic of female discrimination and all the different ways that women suffer. To me, informing the public to these issues is the first essential step on the road to eliminating discrimination against women. Although reading *Half the Sky* is very difficult, due to the heart wrenching stories of what women have to endure, it is important to know what goes on in the world so that we can get involved and help stop such atrocities from taking place. I have learned many things from reading this book. For example I was under the impression that all prostitutes sold sex willingly and this is certainly not always the case. I also learned of female genital mutilation and how such a gruesome act can later cause serious complications during child birth. Women are human beings, and to me no human being should be treated in the way that women are treated. We should follow in the footsteps of Kristof and WuDunn and educate as many people as we can on this very important topic so that we can achieve a world of gender equality.

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SPEECH AND SILENCE



“Libe” by Moises Quezada

Former Queen of England, Elizabeth I, once said, “Though the sex to which I belong is considered weak you will nevertheless find me a rock that bends to no wind.” Throughout history, there has been a constant battle between speech and silence for women. It has been hard for women to have a voice and even more difficult for them to gain the authority to speak. While there are many other women who have gone against the norm, one woman who stood out was Julian of Norwich. In the 15th century she wrote a book entitled “Revelations of Divine Love.” Using religion, she creates the authority to speak.

During the time Julian of Norwich was alive, women were forbidden to do certain activities and bound by the laws of the church. The best way to catch people’s attention is through religion and this is exactly what Julian did. The first way she gained a voice was by giving herself up to God. She wanted to get sick so she could feel close to Jesus and God. She states, “If it is your will that I should have it, grant it to me. And if it is not your will, good Lord, do not be displeased, for I only want what you want”(176). To let religion take over you is one of the best things a person can do during this time. It helps to show and prove that she is faithful and a good person. Then in this statement, she does not force it to happen. She gives the “good Lord” (look at her word choice) an option to make her sick. She uses the adjective “good” to describe the Lord and this allows the readers to feel more connected to her as though she is speaking like she is a part of the church. This helps to show what kind of person she is. It shows she is a well-mannered, faithful woman who is willing to give herself over to God.

Julian lived during a time when everyone was close because it was a small community and everyone believed in the church because it was the way of life. Everyone was supposed to believe in God and using this, she creates the authority to speak by wanting to share God with everyone. She is saying that God is for everyone. She states, “For it is universal and addressed to all because we are all one, and I am sure I saw it for the advantage of many others” (181). She is stating that her vision is for everyone. Her vision was for the people as a message from God. She also says, “I wanted it to comfort them all as it did me, for the vision was shown for everyone and not any one particular person” (182). She is saying that no one, including herself is special. Her vision from God was to make everyone feel comfortable. This is the same feeling she felt when she had the vision.

Although women were not allowed to have much say in certain parts of religious activities, Julian had a vision from God. No one will challenge God,

so she creates the authority to speak by saying God is speaking through her. One of the paragraphs that she does this is in chapter 6. It states, “And if any man or woman ceases to love any of his fellow Christians then he loves none, for he does not love all; and so at that moment he is not saved”(181). Between the paragraphs, you can sense a change in voice, tone and point of view from this paragraph compared to the others. She does not use the words “I” or “we” but uses “he.” This signifies that this is not about her any one person but for and about everyone. The frequent use of the word and way it is being used is similar to the language and writings found in the Bible. This will make you believe that her word is true and that God is the one speaking. Although it is for everyone, it seems like it is directed to and for the reader only. If this is true, he is saying that you, the reader, should love everyone around you. If you do not love everyone, then you will not be saved by God. Especially during this time, that is a serious issue. Everyone wants to be in God’s good graces and this will force you to change your ways.

By now, she has gained credibility and most people would want to know more and may even want to follow her works. This is not something that should happen. She has gained too much power and being the smart woman she is, realizes this. So what allows her to sustain her authority to speak is by her belittling herself and relinquishing all power to God. A good example of this is when she declares, “But God forbid that you should say or assume that I am a teacher, for that is not what I mean; nor did I ever mean it; for I am a woman, ignorant, weak, and frail. But I know well that I have received, what I say from him who is the supreme teacher” (181-182). In the first sentence, she belittles herself. She describes herself as just a weak, ignorant woman. She makes the reader believe that she is not important, that she is not someone you should focus on and learn from. The one that you should be learning from is the “supreme teacher.” The “supreme teacher” is God. God is the one who gave her the visions and God is the one you should focus on and learn from. By saying this, she has relinquished all and any “power” she may have gained to God.

Julian of Norwich may seem very strange or even crazy at first but by the time you get to chapter 6, it is clear to see that she is a very clever woman. You may even think at first that all her power is gone by the end of the chapter but she nullifies her own criticisms of herself. She questions, “Just because I am a woman, must I therefore believe that I must not tell you about the goodness of God, when I saw at the same time both his goodness and his wish that it should be known?” (182). If the giving herself to God, sharing God, speaking as God and giving him power did not fully give her the right and authority to speak, then this sure did. She sort of guilt trips those who doubt her because she is a woman who wants others to listen and pay attention to what she has to say. Although women were not supposed to have a voice in the church, she gained the power through her visions. This boosts her authority to speak because anyone who does not want to hear her message is always saying that they do not want to hear what God has to say either.

Even though Julian of Norwich prayed for the visions, it was still God’s choice who would receive them and God chose her and this, therefore, gives

her full authority to speak even though she is a woman. She professes that God wanted her to share the message from her visions with everyone. For those who are deeply religious and especially during this time, who is going to question God?

THE COLOR PURPLE AND THE IMPORTANCE OF WRITING

In several of the literary works that we've read in English class, writing has been a major factor in influencing and inspiring women to be independent. In *The Color Purple* by Alice Walker, Celie learns the importance of writing to communicate and it helps her gain independence. In Valerie Babb's article, "The Color Purple: Writing to Undo What Writing Has Done" Babb elaborates on how relevant writing has been for Celie's development, uniquely making a positive impact in her life. Likewise, in *The House on Mango Street* by Sandra Cisneros, writing influences Esperanza to want more for herself and to be free from the poverty of her neighborhood. We also have Linda Brent in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs, a woman who is inspired to write her own story about slavery in order to teach a part of this history not often told. Through writing, Linda utilizes her expressive skills to break free from oppression and the mental captivity of slavery.

For Celie, writing became a way to express her feelings and communicate with her sister via letters. A perfect example is when Nettie left Celie's home and they wanted to keep in touch with one another. Celie tells her

"I say, write. She, say what? I say, write. She say, nothing but death can keep me from it" (Walker, 19). Writing gave Celie the opportunity to tell her story and about all that she had gone through and experienced. Not everyone influenced Celie to write. Sometimes she was criticized about it; for instance, during her conversation with Shug Avery:

"When I told Shug I'm writing to you instead of to God she laugh. Nettie don't know these people, she say. Considering who I been writing to, this strike me funny" (Walker, 198). No matter what Celie knew or didn't know, writing was beneficial to her and no one's opinion could deter her. The bond that the two sisters shared was very strong, because of their ability to write to one another. Through writing they became closer and learned so much about each other. Writing frees the two sisters by allowing them to communicate, something that they were forbidden to do, because of Mr.'s control over their lives. To further elaborate, Valerie Babb also writes "both Celie and Nettie learn to master the written word and to modify its form and function so that they as black women are no longer complete victims of racial and sexual oppression a white, ethnocentric use of writing can dictate" (Babb, 390).

Being able to communicate and express herself, Celie found freedom. Her writing helped her to self-reflect, which allowed her to improve not only her skills of reading and writing but also the ability to question Mr. The more she wrote, the more confident she became. She gained her voice and she started to speak against the sexual abuse and overall abuse that she received from her

husband. Her confidence allowed her to stand up for herself, as we see when she talks to her husband before leaving him:

"Did I ever ast you for money? I say. I never ast you for nothing. Not even for you sorry hand in marriage" (Walker, 200). Celie became stronger as a result of her writing and she became wiser too. She frees herself from the mental prison that she's been subjected to by her husband and other males in her life; she breaks free from the fear she lived with throughout her entire marriage.

Most importantly, writing was an expressive outlet for Celie as it was for many of the women in each piece of literature that we read. Writing has helped Celie become an independent woman. Valerie Babb tells us how important writing has been in Celie's life, in her critical essay. She also explains all of the benefits of writing for Celie and how it affected her life. She makes it clear that the power to read and write has long been a tool used to control those not in control. What she means is that writing was a privilege that white men used to control black women. Valerie Babb explains that writing is effective in telling stories; it projects self-reflections, and helps to improve one's knowledge and understanding. As she refers to Celie's skill of writing, the critic goes on to say that "she uses writing to fix the events of her life, thereby lending them coherence and making their review and understanding possible" (Babb, 391). Here we see that through writing, Celie was able to communicate well with others. Writing empowers Celie to speak her mind not just in letters to Nettie but also in heated conversation with Mr. at first, and later in "civil" conversation with him. Celie gains confidence through her writing and with that confidence she is able to speak up and express her feelings verbally.

In Sandra Cisneros' *The House on Mango Street*, Esperanza uses writing to tell us about her life and the people in it. She shares with us the importance of education and being able to write. Esperanza wrote about how poor she is and how poverty had such a negative impact on her family, friends and neighbors. Esperanza wrote poetry in order to escape from her reality. Her aunt Guadalupe (Aunt Lupe) encouraged her to keep writing so that she would be successful. Guadalupe tells Esperanza "you just remember to keep writing, Esperanza. You must keep writing. It will keep you free" (Cisneros, 61). What her aunt was teaching her was that there are great benefits to reading and writing. Aunt Lupe knew that the only way to get out of poverty and change her circumstances was to be motivated, educated and ambitious. Esperanza knew at the end that she would be free as long as she continued to write and so she says "I put it down on paper and then the ghost does not ache so much. I write it down and Mango says goodbye sometimes. She does not hold me with both arms. She sets me free" (Cisneros, 110). For Esperanza, writing influenced her to want a better life and to strive for success; she wanted to be free from poverty.

Linda Brent uses writing to tell us her story and show us how writing changed her life. In her autobiography *Incidents in The Life of a Slave Girl*, she writes about her own experiences of being born a slave woman. She writes as a way to raise self-awareness and to share an important part of history for women. In her opening statement Brent writes "I want to add my testimony

to that of abler pens to convince the people of the free states what slavery really is” (Brent, 2). Linda’s writing gave insight on how life was for black women slaves. She reminds us of the torture she endured from slavery, being sexually abused and then she shows us how she used her abuse to her advantage: “She was placed in favorable circumstances after she came to the north; having frequent intercourse with intelligent persons, who felt a friendly interest in her welfare, and were disposed to give her opportunities for self-improvement” (Brent, 3). Brent was fortunate enough to be able to learn how to read and write as a result of her abuse. She was given a privilege that other slaves were denied during that time. Writing freed her from white supremacy and oppression. It gave her a voice and a way to communicate with others without being heard. For Linda Brent, education was very powerful:

“If those heathens in our Christian land had as much teaching as some Hindoos, they would think otherwise. They would know that liberty is more valuable than life. They would begin to understand their own capabilities, and exert themselves to become men and women” (Brent, 42). Ignorance was used to manipulate, deprive and deter slaves but Brent knew that in order to be free she would have to learn to read and write and educate others through her book about her experiences as a slave girl sexually victimized by Dr. Flint, her white “master.”

In conclusion, we can look back at these different female characters who emerge as strong by the end of their stories. What we will see is that they all have in common their use of writing. Writing has been shown to be a very important, influential factor for these women. It has influenced women to become emotionally stronger and intellectually wiser. It has helped women to communicate and become more confident. Also, writing has helped each of these women escape poverty by showing a way out of their oppressive circumstances.. I think that Valerie Babb speaks for all of these characters when she writes of Celie as a character whose letters position her to emerge from her shell of ignorance: “once aware of the conspicuous presence of writing, we cannot help but note that a transformation occurs in terms of both its function and form” (Babb, 389). Writing has been inspirational for Celie, Linda and Esperanza, helping each of them to achieve independence from sexist domination and other limitations imposed by their gender.

EL RABO DEL PUERCO

Es Era un viernes después del viernes santo, y se podía oler desde el patio trasero el aroma de la cena más pretenciosa, apetecible y matajambre que pudiese existir. Había moro, ensaladas, plátanos de todo tipo; había de todo, hasta frutas con sabor a oro y un cerdo tan sazonado que con tan solo tener el privilegio de olerlo, uno podía darse por bien servido. Solo en esa bendita casa tan gigantesca de Don Betancourt se podía apreciar una vaina tan grande... no había boda o celebración de quinceañera que se le comparara a tal derroche alimenticio. Las tres criadas tenían ya cuatro días preparando todo el asunto, tanto comprando como cocinando o supervisando, todas estaban haciendo su trabajo; asegurándose que todo estuviese listo para la gran noche. La más joven no podía ya con tanta presión, estaba que no dormía ni comía bien, todo por estar preparando el “cocinado” del tan esperado viernes. En uno de sus ataques casi mortíferos de hambre, la pobre loca trato de comerse a escondidas una manzana, a lo que la criada mayor la vio con unos ojos fastidiados, juzgándola como si fuese Eva comiéndose la manzana y dándole a entender que no debió intentar tragarse la mísera fruta; que era mejor que se diera por muerta. Como la pobre anémica estaba más cerca de la tumba que del altar, dejaron que se fuera a descansar y le dieron la sagrada oportunidad de trabajar allí a una joven pero trabajadora muchacha llamada María Francisca, mejor conocida como “Maro” y también a su marido Cabebe, en la finca.

Cuando Maro tuvo la celestial oportunidad de conocer a Don Betancourt, no podía creer que un señor tan angelical, bueno y con un aura tan pura pudiese tener tanto dinero. Ella siempre pensaba que para ser tan rico había que ser avaro, cruel y de alma fría. Para su sorpresa, Don Betancourt era un semisanto, ella nunca supo su primer nombre, pero supuso que él se llamaba Jesús o Cristo. El señor trabajaba en la ciudad, y solo llegaba a su casa cada viernes, pero estuvo allí ese día por unos minutos para recibir a sus nuevos empleados. La casa era más grande que una catedral; todo en ella era exagerado y caro, e incluso las hijas del señor tenían damas de compañía. Cuando Maro empezó a trabajar allí, le pareció muy extraño que Don Betancourt tuviera tanta gente trabajando para él, y más aún, que ninguno de sus empleados conociera mucho del señor, pero aun así le fueran fieles con tanta devoción. En su primer día de trabajo, la muchacha se sentía agotada; como si estuviese a punto de ser crucificada y lo mismo le pasaba a Cabebe, el marido, pero aguantaron y llegaron a su casucha para regresar al día siguiente.

Eran apenas las cuatro de la mañana cuando Cabebe se encontraba ya listo para salir a trabajar. Maro seguía aun dormida con el medio fondo puesto, manchado con el pulcro sucio de la casa de Don Betancourt, roncando poco a poco el último cansancio del día anterior, con un sostén que ya no le servía y le

dejaba medio pezón afuera, como saludando al mundo. La mujer se despertaba siempre con el grito de su hija recién nacida; la cual dormía en la misma habitación que ellos y que sus dos otras hijas, Ana Bélgica y Ramona. A las cuatro y cuarenta y seis minutos con cinco segundos y tres décimas, la chamaquita de apenas dos meses y medio, hacía buen uso de sus cuerdas vocales y vociferaba como chiva loca para que la alimentaran. Ella servía de despertador sin necesidad de usar baterías, algo que era bastante conveniente en esos tiempos de pobreza. Gritaba tanto como fuera necesario, ya que su instinto y costumbre le hablaban y le decían que si no comía bien a esa hora, no iba a poder hacerlo en todo el día. Ana Bélgica, de cinco años y Ramona de nueve, se encargaban de la casucha en la que vivían. Antes de irse, Maro le dejaba los plátanos cocinando en el fogón y les preparaba una bolsita con azúcar para que la mezclaran con agua y se la dieran a beber a Aura, la bebe. Por supuesto que las dos chamaquitas se comían el azúcar y no alimentaban a su hermana, pero no se podía esperar mucho de dos niñas que no sabían nada del mundo; ni estaban en edad de ser castigadas por pecar así.

Tras más de diez horas de trabajo duro, Cabebe ya empezaba a perder la vista. Todo se veía borroso en aquel campo cubierto de hojas de ochocientos colores; verdes, amarillos, marrones y hasta moradas si uno las veía fijamente cerrando un ojo, luego cerrando el otro e imaginándolas. Tras sobarse agua por los ojos, el enclenque se dirigía a buscar a su mujer para ambos ir a la casucha, ver a las niñas y finalmente morir en su cama pequeña y dura, para luego resucitar antes del tercer día; resucitar al día siguiente para volver a la rutina. En el camino se encontró con una mujercilla, la cual pensó era una simple puta perdida, pero se desconcertó tras ver que no traía nada puesto en ese campo que podía congelar hasta al fuego, de tan frío que era. Si andaba encuerada, era porque podía cubrirse con su cabello... y si podía cubrirse con su cabello... era porque a lo mejor también tenía los pies al revés, y si tenía los pies al revés... era posible que no pudiera hablar... y si no podía hablar: era una ciguapa.

La mujercilla no hacía nada más que caminar hacia donde iba, con talaje de borracha firme, pero Cabebe seguía intrigado. No quería seguirla por miedo a que alguien lo viera y le fuera con el chisme a su mujer, pero aun así lo hizo; para asegurarse que la muchacha estaba bien. La llamó, como con tono de compasión:

-Quien tu ere? ta muy frio pa andar sin ropa, yo trabajo a tre cuadra de aquí, en la finca e Don Betancourt, si tu quiere yo te llevo a que te den ropa, o lo que sea pa que no te malogre.

La según él, puta, salió corriendo como si estuviese loca. No dijo una palabra. Solo se fue espantada como si hubiese visto y escuchado al anticristo, dejando al pobre enclenque con cierto sentimiento de responsabilidad, mucho miedo y culpa, sin razón de sentirse así. Cabebe se apendejó y decidió irse rápido a donde le convenía. Fue a buscar a Maro para que los dos se fueran de allí, porque tenía un mal presentimiento, pero ella, como muchacha altanera que siempre fue, no le hizo caso:

-Irme pa donde y pa que? Tu te apendeja demasiao rápido, si tú te quiere ir, vete tú, que yo no te vua seguir. Y ya déjame que tengo que cocinai.

Por más que intentó, el pobre loco no pudo convencer ni a su mujer, ni a nadie. Todo el mundo hablaba de como Don Betancourt ya iba a regresar de la ciudad, y que la gran cena del Don, y que los preparativos para recibir al Don, y que todos parecían hacer sacrificios humanos para recibir al Don; al cual trataban no como a Don o un jefe, o un rey, sino como a un dios... no como a un simple dios: lo trataban como si fuera Dios.

Las carajitas de Maro seguían en la casa; comiendo azúcar y jugando con la arena que se entraba a la casucha. Cuando Cabebe llegó las chamaquitas pretendían estar dormidas, para menos joder. A pesar de que eran menores de diez años, ellas se asombraron de que su madre no había llegado, pero no reclamaron. Ni la bebe llorona lloró esa noche, porque supuso que Maro estaba demasiado entretenida con la cabeza llena de alitas de cucaracha, junto a sus compañeras las otras criadas esperando al señor.

Eran ya las diez y treinta y siete minutos con ocho segundos y cinco décimas cuando Don Betancourt entró por la puerta principal, con sus criados recibiéndolo; criados que tenían más aura de peregrinos que de otra cosa. En la cocina todas las muchachas empezaron a sudar en frío, a peinarse el pelo con las manos y los tenedores y a acomodarse las tetas como si fuesen a dar el primer golpe de gusto en su noche de bodas. Maro empezaba ya a sentirse asustada y más apendejada que Cabebe hace un par de horas: "ya me jodí bien jodía, ya si, ya si fue, ya si fue, coño, ya si fue" pensaba la muchacha. Nadie le explicaba lo que estaba pasando, pero ella sabía que bueno no era porque los corazones de las criadas, jardineros, amas de llave, niñeras, gatos y cucarachas de la casa, estaban latiendo al mismo tiempo y tan fuerte, que habían provocado un temblor de tierra que había durado sesenta y seis segundos con seis décimas. Todas corrieron al comedor principal, a terminar de acomodar la mesa. Ahí llegaba Don Betancourt con su sonrisa gloriosa y sus dos bolsas de dinero y otras ganancias que había obtenido en esa semana. Las puso a su costado izquierdo, para luego sentarse completamente solo en la última silla en la mesa enorme que tenía 18 asientos disponibles. Maro era la única que se había quedado brechando, para ver que era la gran cosa que iba a pasar.

A las once y trece minutos con veintitrés segundos y cuatro décimas, Don Betancourt se acomodaba las mangas de la camisa para empezar a comer. Maro seguía detrás de la puerta grande, como esperando a que pasara algo interesante, no por curiosa, sino porque el corazón se le estaba saliendo del pecho y no sabía qué hacer, si irse, o quedarse o calmarse o morir. No había pestañado desde hace rato, pero en el momento que lo hizo, al abrir los ojos pudo ver algo que no había presenciado jamás.

Ahí estaban todos los alimentos en la mesa, gritando por ayuda, pidiendo socorro para protegerse de tal matanza que estaba ocurriendo. En menos de dos segundos el Santo don Betancourt empezó a devorar la mesa completa con todo lo que estaba servido. El señor se había transformado en una bestia; en la bestia. Con los ojos rojos, botando espuma azul por la boca, con las cejas despeinadas y el cabello alborotado, Don Betancourt acababa con toda la comida con un odio tan grande que no cabía en la casa entera. Lo hacía con furia: los platos saltaban, las cucharas corrían y las frutas llamaban a Maro con

LA VIDA ES UNA SEMILLA QUE RINDE FRUTOS

Es debido reconocer que la vida no es elegida, no es elegida desde un principio. Desde las semillas hasta los frutos. No es justa esta vida. Una vida que no es elegida ni justa, que más puede traerle a una persona sino que desesperanza, depresión y enojo. Desesperanza por construir nuevos sueños, depresión por la limitación de crear metas, y enojo por encontrar desgracias hasta en los rincones más recónditos de este mundo. Una vida mundana, al final. Una vida llena de lo que no se encontraría en la libre imaginación de un infante, o en los anhelados recuerdos de un anciano. Esta vida, da mucho de qué hablar en este presente, incluso este presente es el que genera esta vida de insatisfacción. Un presente que nos rebosa de razones para no desear, ni demandar un mejor mañana. Este presente nos restringe de posibilidades, nos limita las opciones y nos detiene los sueños.

Yo, sin embargo, quisiera demandar un mejor mañana. Quisiera soñar con el canto de alegrías de niños y con la satisfacción en los ancianos de relatar sus memorias. Yo me indignaré, claro que sí, por el presente. Pero no desistiré. No permitiré decirme en algún momento de mi mundana vida que mi decisión fue limitada y oprimida. Me diré que mi vida fue una continua lucha por la insubordinación en contra de la injusticia y opresión. Aunque la vida me desahucie continuamente mis anhelos, y la estructura de ésta misma me aseguré el estéril campo en el cual he nacido, he podido conocer durante este infortunado recorrido lo mucho que puede reconocerse de este mundo funesto. He vivido maravillas, muy parecidas a las que se viven en la cándida niñez. Pude desmentir ciertos aspectos infaustos que se ven en la vida, y pude retratarlos y recolectarlos como experiencias irrepetibles e incondicionales en mi vida. Sumadas estas experiencias con las ansias de un cambio necesario, se va construyendo una vida digna.

Es ésta la vida que todas las semillas germinando en un campo infértil deberían de vivir hasta la creación de prolíficos frutos.

desperación, como para que las rescatara de tal despilfarro. La muchacha se quedó estupefacta, con un ojo más abierto que el otro, sin poder moverse ni hablar, mientras Don Betancourt seguía poseído por el mismo demonio manifestándose en una gula eterna.

Pero lo peor no había ocurrido aun. Cuando el semisatanás había terminado de jartarse casi toda la comida, quedaba el detalle más importante: el cerdo. Ya Maro estaba verde del miedo, pero ya iba entendiendo de donde salía tanto dinero, riqueza, gente y lujos: todo era obra del mismo demonio. Esa gula tan pronunciada solo podía ser parte de uno de esos pactos demoniacos que hacían los pobres imbéciles para salirse con la suya, vendiéndole el alma al diablo para conseguir sus riquezas. Cuando Maro estaba a tres segundos de orinarse del pánico, vio que el cerdo ya cocinado, bien horneado, sazonado y con su manzana bien roja metida en la boca, empezaba a correr en círculos por la mesa, como para no dejarse devorar por el demonio. El hombre, convertido ya en una bestia total, se subió en la mesa con una familiaridad increíble, y de una mordida agarro al puerco por el rabo...tragándose lo completamente, sin piedad ni remordimiento.

En ese momento la muchacha se desmayó parada, pero sus piernas empezaron a correr como por obra del señor. Con los ojos cerrados y el torso dormido, Maro salió de la casota a la velocidad de un gato asustado. Corrió como por media hora hasta llegar al frente de su casucha, a morir tranquila para resucitar al otro día. La recién nacida empezó a llorar a las cuatro y cuarenta y seis minutos con cinco segundos y tres décimas, ya que sabía que su madre estaba cerca para alimentarla. Cabebe se despertó y salió a buscarla, para darse cuenta de que Maro estaba afuera, todavía durmiendo. Allí amaneció con miedo a despertar, pero al mismo tiempo, con ganas de poder abrir los ojos para pretender que lo que había visto había sido una horrenda pesadilla. Cuando logro despertar, pudo alimentar a la bebe pero no dijo una palabra.

Todavía seguía como petrificada del terror y Cabebe lo sabía; él no sabía que había pasado, pero sabía que definitivamente algo había pasado:

-Dime Maro, como se dio la bienvenida del Don? Tuvo buena?

-Majomeno, regular ahí, no fue la gran cosa, majomeno.

BRONX GRAFFITI

My class has been studying the history of the Bronx, and looking at pictures of the Bronx from the 1970's. We also watched a film called "Wild Style," about the graffiti culture in the Bronx in the 1970's. Graffiti was used by artists to express their feelings and it was considered to be vandalism. It is still illegal, but today many people think it is an art. Either way, it is part of our culture. According to Wikipedia "The first graffiti was found in Philadelphia in the early sixties, when "Cornbread" and "Cool Earl" scrawled their names all over the city. By the late sixties it was flourishing in Washington Heights, Brooklyn, and the Bronx" (Wikipedia). The word GRAFFITI simply means words or drawings scratched or written on a wall (graffiti.org).

Back in the early sixties, the community did not accept the art of graffiti. One of

the biggest problems was that some gangs used to paint walls to mark their territory with their graffiti signatures, or "tags." If someone painted over the gang's name, the gangs would go after this person until they found him, to teach him or her a lesson about respect for their territory. Sometimes it ended up in death.

In my personal opinion, graffiti is an art. The problem with this particular art is that it was created by the poor class and those people didn't have, in the 70's, the resources to make it a career. In the 70's there were not enough jobs for the young population. They had a lot of free time and many burnt buildings where they were able to express their feelings in the form of graffiti.

The movie "Wild Style," produced by Charlie Ahearn, shows the art of the South Bronx in the 70's and all those special events that happened in that time. The character of Zorro, a graffiti writer in the movie, shows how it was the beginning of graffiti and the Hip-hop music.

In the movie, Zorro is played by Lee Quinones, a real graffiti artist and one of the pioneers in graffiti art. In the movie, Zorro's girlfriend was also a real graffiti writer who started "The Union" which was a group of graffiti artists. The movie is a combination of art, love, Hip-hop and decisions. The film shows the subways spray-painted with graffiti and also the beginning of Hip-hop. The teenagers were at school making those funny sounds with their mouth to get a song. In addition, the film showed what the Bronx looked like in the 70's.

I believe if all the population of the world saw how much passion graffiti artists have for their work, graffiti would be more appreciated. Before I started with this project I never stopped to admire any graffiti. Now when I'm driving, I'm looking for graffiti with significance.

Last Sunday I was on my way to Brooklyn with my husband and my son. I asked my husband to stop in MacDonalds to buy a happy meal. To my sur-

prise I found the most amazing graffiti art that I have ever seen. This graffiti is located in MacDonald at 67-69 Bruckner Blvd Bronx NY.

It is a combination of four different graffiti murals. The first one describes life, music, happiness, love, and fame. The second mural is a green man riding a dolphin with trying to escape from a green piranha and a beautiful star shows him the way. The third mural is composed of colored straight lines with a woman's face showing through a partly-unzipped fabric.

In conclusion, the art of graffiti is one picture on a wall that can express the interior of the people and their most intimate feelings.



THE BRONX GENERAL POST OFFICE

The Bronx General Post Office occupies an entire block, across the street from Hostos Community College, at 149th St. and Grand Concourse. Its walls are plain brick made above a terrace that has different levels. It has three entrances on the Grand Concourse. According to a website created by the Bronx Neighborhood Preservation Center, the entrance steps are covered by “rosettes and flags of other countries.” The most beautiful thing about the building is the windows because the arches are very tall and were built with precious stone, like marble. Inside the Post Office there are thirteen mural panels painted by the artist Ben Shahn, inspired by the great Brooklyn poet, Walt Whitman’s poem “I Hear America Singing.” The murals are related to the demand for jobs in the Bronx caused by the Great Depression and show the dignity of workers.



My attention was captured by a picture of was a man with a drill in his hand. The picture was a little blurry and its general color was brown. The picture shows a worker holding a drill. He was wearing a grey overall with white gloves in both hands and a white helmet on his head. This picture is life-size (or maybe larger than life size.). The man looks like he is in a workshop.

The Bronx Central Post Office is a historic building that was built during the Great Depression: “It was designed by consulting architect Thomas Harlan Ellett from 1935 to 1937” (“U.S. Post Office,” Wikipedia) We know that during the Great Depression many people were unemployed; The post office helped many people who did not have jobs. Therefore, I believe that the post office should be preserved because even though we have computers that make it easier to correspond with emails, we still need to send and receive packages. However, the way the post office is used is more accurate than internet email.

When the post office was built, this area called Mott Haven, was a famous place because there were a lot of legal buildings and businesses. The city of New York needs to keep this historic building because it can tell us a lot about the past.

To conclude, the Bronx General Post Office is our primary resource to send whatever we want in this neighborhood. This Post Office is important for its location in the neighborhood. It has a large connection to the area because near it is Yankee Stadium, Hostos Community College, the Bronx Courthouse and more. The Post Office provides a good service for the area.

BRONX FAUNA: PIGEONS

When I started my research about “Fauna” in NYC, I understood what the word fauna meant but I didn’t have any idea about the wildlife diversity living in NYC. That’s why I decided to start my project by taking pictures in many places like Van Cortlant Park. This park is located at 242St. and Broadway. This park is also the shelter for hundreds of animals living in freedom all around the city. The second place where I took pictures was in the school backyard where I work. Many articles and research notes that some species leave their natural habitat in the wild and move to areas in or nearby cities. These animals, usually show intelligence and learn new skills to help them adapt.

My class watched a short nature film that showed animals such as rats, raccoons, and pigeons leaving their natural habitat and learning new skills. Furthermore, they are developing intelligence, especially raccoons. They have already learned how to open things such as trash cans and doors in our homes. But nowadays raccoons are losing some of their own natural skills such as fishing; they are also becoming fat because raccoons are eating human food they find inside trash cans in their new environment.



I took these pictures of a pigeon walking in the park between the Hostos College B and C buildings during my lunch break. The pigeon came to my friend and me for food. Some websites say that pigeons can remember human faces. One of the articles I read was called "Pigeons Recognize Human Faces." That means pigeons can remember a human face when a person feeds them often. One example is when an old lady visits the park and often feeds pigeons with bread or cookies, the next time these pigeons recognize the old lady’s face from a long distance.

According to my favorite website, Wikipedia, some studies have been performed discovering that "pigeons can find their way back home from places never visited before" (magio). This is another proof that pigeons have a wonderful skill that the humans do not have.

Pigeons a long time ago were used to send letters and messages and according to

Wikipedia, messenger pigeons were very famous during World War I and World War II. Furthermore, according to the website “Beauty Of Bird,” “The sport of flying homing

pigeons was established as early as 3000 years ago to proclaim the winner of the Greek Olympics" (kethrus).

In my opinion, the wildlife diversity in New York City is very big and there are many types of birds. In addition, each animal living in the city is improving some skills and losing other skills. But the fact is that they are updating their skills and their life in the city showing

intelligence. That makes me think that this is why humans rule the planet Earth. But in the

future who will rule the world, humans or animals?.

Little girl, little girl,
Who told you that the skirt with the frills is only to be worn,
By proper little girls?
And that a baseball can only be held firm by the creases of a
Little boy's palms?

Who told you playing house was only pretend?
And that it is a coincidence that often,
When you play house,
You're a single mom,
With dusting, cooking, and cleaning as your amusement.

Little girl, little girl,
Who told you that you aren't allowed
To cradle the color blue as your own?
Is it because the sky is a man,
Who can't sit still for tea parties?
Is it because he can't handle it
When you tell him there is procedure in your logic?
Did he say you weren't dainty enough?
Were your biscuits a bit stale?

Little girl, little girl,
Did you know your palms can halt the mightiest of winds?
Rearrange the biggest of planets?
Did you know that no one is in charge around here?
And we all make the rules as we go?
Did you know that you don't need to be tough?
Or love mud and dig for worms with Nico and Charlie?

You don't need to be a princess
And marry the most charming,
Because charm confounds the mind,
And never has clear intentions.

Little girl, little girl,
Who told you that the night was inherited by thieves,
And vicious men?
Your integrity produces far more terror.
So steady your heart, meandering through
The eggplant fabric of night.
The moon's mystery is shunned by none,
The night's stillness should never incite your fears,
Because it is yours
It is mine,
For as long as we breathe.

DEPTH

There's always a tinge of orange when you swim
Through the ocean.

Perhaps it is to remind us,
That no matter how refreshing,
The ocean can still burn,
In memory,
In reverie.

Within the confines of my school,
There is no room for discovery;
Just rehearsed aphorisms
That have traded substance for making sense.
Sometimes, I like to leave the other fish behind
And befriend solitude.
And there,
Amid abandoned ships I see uncharted horizons
In liquid form.

I am a sculptor, and I'm figuring it out.
I'm figuring out what these humans meant
When they left their remains scattered
In this sinking vessel.

The lipstick on the cup,
You meant to leave your mark.
The hair in the sink,
Dead keratin finds life,
Swirling with the palpating waves of the sea.

Sea men who search for their own
By being left behind -
You meant to give us a lesson on valor
But we found your fingerprints

And eyelashes smothered on the window panes,
Your shriveled scabs and nibbled nails
Commas that couldn't keep up,

The blood stains and dead cells in a solution of shower water -
Scattered with the efficacy of the bird,
Who unwittingly disperses seeds during its flight.

And I couldn't find an unsettled piece of coral,
Only devastation intertwined with your fall.

It took a trip to the surface to feel it
Your breath
Gusts of words parading through the gaps on my fins,
Sentences that have linked hands
And waltz in rings through a vacant ballroom,
The brilliance in your madness brought me here.

MY GUARDIAN ANGEL

My dear uncle Chorty,
It was the shocking news that brought tears to my eyes
And you made me remember what it was like to cry.
On that dreadful day God decided it was your timeto go,
He took your precious life away.

Everyone felt the pain
The pain that you had been suffering for so long.
Being without you makes life harder than we ever thought.
So the family will always think of you
And we will always know that
You will be looking down on us.
Keeping us safe, being our guardian angel.
Making sure everything is okay
Making sure that we lived a good life
Just like you did until the day God
Decided that it was your time to go,
And we cried as the rain fell that day.

Little drops of rain, whisper of pain,
Tears in the love lost in the days gone by.
I hope you were watching
The day the family gathered around your casket
To see you lying there cold faced with a look of happiness,
Knowing that we were all there to show you that we cared a lot about you,
No matter how much you think we didn't care
Te day we gathered around your body to say good-bye or I love you
Proved we cared.

We still sit here and think about you,
I sit here and cry for you.
You have always been in my life, through thick and thin
Now my lonely journey without you will begin.
For you were my hero forever and a day
You will always remain that hero,
Until I meet you again someday.

I will embrace you in my arms, and hold on tight
I will stand by your side,

And you will never leave my sight
I miss you so much, the pain does not ease
I pray you are happy
And finally at peace.

A DAY IN THE PARK

A day at the park with my lonesome,
I look around me and all I see,
Are children riding their bikes and scooters,
Playing ball with their peers,
Kids being pushed around in strollers.

I see dogs being walked by their owners,
People just simply reading a book,
Couples enjoying this beautiful day
And myself, sitting in front of the water fountain writing this poem.

The day is oh so sunny and windy at the same time,
The sky is nice and blue, with a few clouds here and there.
Those little planes leaving behind those white marks in the sky,
The trees are green and beautiful,
They are dancing in the breeze.

Cars are passing by not so far,
There's a mini stage that they have small concerts in the summer.
A small white gazebo, with a bell and the town's history
And upcoming events beneath it,
The trees are all sizes, whether short or tall, big or small.

A few of those park benches are in memory of the lost citizens of this town,
Today, a beautiful and peaceful Sunday,
The perfect day to be off from work and school,
Nice enough to have a picnic with a loved one.

The view around me is just priceless,
Watching these kids, running around having fun,
And not making mischief,
Very old couples, showing us youngsters how it's done.

There are still a few attractions outside this park,
Few blocks down is a huge library,
Down some more they're building a stadium,
In the opposite direction is a hospital, one of three,
Blocks away is a college about six blocks long on both sides of the street.

We're surrounded by more parks a lot smaller though,
They are fairgrounds, malls, restaurants, churches, and so on,
This town may be small but it sure fits a lot into it,
Less than fifteen minutes away is one of the biggest theme parks.

Where is this place I am talking about?
Well, that's for me to know and you to figure out.
Why is this place so important?
What makes this place so special?
Three words, HOME SWEET HOME!

LOVE'S STRENGTH

The love I have for you, no one can come close to.
The love you have for me, no one can replace.
When I first met you, I never would have thought
I would have loved you the way I do.
If happened so fast, but I didn't care
It was okay and well deserved.

The love I had for you, will never leave
The love you had for me, will never be forgotten.
Everywhere I go, I hear your voice
I see you smile
I hear your laughter
I hear those words you used so often.

I miss you telling me
How much I made you proud.
I miss hearing you tell me
That you love me.
I miss the advice you would give me
About school, work, and everything else in between.

Who will I call to tell about my grades?
Who will I email my papers to, to get a feedback?
Who will call and check on me when I'm not well?
Who will be willing to leave the comfort of their home to visit me?

I miss you every day that God blesses me with.
I know you are no longer with us,
But you are still here in my heart
Still here in my memories
Still here in my thoughts
You will always and forever be a part of me.

I find myself using your words more and more
I find myself wondering what you would say
If you saw or heard me do or say something I am not supposed to.
I want you to know that your words of encouragement
Will always be with me
I promise, I will continue to make you proud.

If God blesses me with a son,
I promise your name will live on
As will your memory and all you have done
To make me into the woman I am today.

Besides my husband, I have never met a man
I love or respect as I loved and respected you
And I am 100% certain I never will again
Because you are one in a million
You are irreplaceable and unforgettable.

No matter how old I get or how far I reach in life.
I will always be grateful to have learned from you
How to love, how to treat others,
How to be loved and how to be treated by others.

I am not mad at you for leaving
I am just sad that you are gone
Even more fortunate to have met you
I will never forget you nor will I ever stop loving you.

I love you dad.

Dedicated to my Dad Marvin Mcloy Wheeler.

BEWARE THE WORLD

Beware the world
It hollows itself
Follows itself
Sins never learned from, pillared with smiles.

Daydream to reconcile
To make worthwhile
Time spent in this forgone conclusion.

All the sky's beauty, magnificent
How misspent
Untrained eyes gaze downward relenting.

This machine won't give way
Long here to stay
Consuming what could have been as it churns.

Was there ever a time
That we held the gun?
Had we won?
Blank pages neither written nor turned.

Resign or resolve
Though neither it solves
For this song has no notes to end.

So keep your own counsel,
Breathe free from time to time.....
What is more than what you own?

"WHENEVER YOU FIND A GREAT MAN..."

"Whenever you find a great man, you will find a great mother or a great wife standing behind him—or so they used to say. It would be interesting to know how many great woman have had great fathers and great husbands behind them" - Dorothy L. Sayers

Back when my mother was growing up and even when my grandmother was growing up, men mostly took care of the family. They went to work and made sure the bills were paid. But the mothers were the backbone that kept the house running. Mothers took care of the kids, cooked every meal, cleaned every article of clothing and most important of all gave the love and the support their family needed. Look at all the well-known families: the Kennedys, the Roosevelts, and the Clintons— I would even throw in the Bush family. Jackie Kennedy, Barbara Bush, Eleanor Roosevelt and Hillary Clinton may have not played a big role for the citizens of United States but they played a big part in their husbands' lives by staying by their husbands' sides in every decision they made, whether it was good or bad. [Most of these wives of presidents did become leaders, elected officials and women with power. – Ed.]

However, some females who have succeeded in life really didn't have a father figure present or got married in the prime of their careers. I personally believe a female doesn't need a father figure. Females live mostly off of nurture from the mother instead of nature from the father. I used to envy the girls in my school that had fathers but after a while I realized that my father being absent really didn't affect me as much as it did my brother but we're still better off without him. From experience, I can say my father was absent 98 percent of my life after I was born. In total, I could only remember seeing him five times but in those five times he had always told me "No matter what, no matter what people say, nobody can tell you that your mother was not there for you when you needed her. Every mistake I have made she had forgiven me and still supported me after I messed up. I know after a while she gave up and I understand that but I realized I made a big mistake by leaving her and my children." Each time my father told me this I couldn't even be mad at him. Yet he wasn't the greatest of men but he valued how much of a great mother my mom was, and he would always have my respect for that.

Sadly, now-a-days there are not a lot of important male figures present in the household. My oldest brother is lucky to have his father present but I know his life would've gone downhill if he would've stayed with him. My mother took custody of him, pushed him all through school plus gave him the parental guidance he needed. Gave him tough love on how hard it would be for him if he didn't get an education and how his life would be if he chose the other op-

tions. They would fight constantly but I know deep down inside, my brother is forever grateful because my mother raised him to be a well-mannered, well-oriented gentleman.

Personally every good man has a great mother. If you have a great mother; that man would hopefully want a wife that duplicates his mother's attributes: loving, supportive, conscious, devoted, so when he wants to start his own family, he would get the same unconditional love he was getting from his mother but also his children would be treated the same too.

✿ RAFIK MICHAEL

"HOW WOMEN ARE SHAMED"

"We teach girls shame. Close your legs, cover yourself, we make them feel as though being born female they're already guilty of something. And so, girls grow up to be women who cannot say they have desire. They grow up to be women who silence themselves. They grow up to be women who cannot say what they truly think. And they grow up--and this is the worst thing we do to girls--they grow up to be women who have turned pretense into an art form."

-Chimamanda

anda Ngozi Adichie.

If pedophiles are your concern, teaching your girls to keep their legs closed won't help. The power differential between a child and an adult would nullify any teachings. This is the point missed by so many: why do we need to teach our girls that their safety is in their hands only? If our efforts were instead placed on teaching our boys and men that protecting women and girls is a job for us all, we would be better off. Furthermore, if this country took better care of its people and provided mental health care for those who so desperately need it we might find ourselves with fewer pedophiles to begin with. The structural issues cannot be overcome through individual-level strategies.

The fact that everyone focuses on the "close your legs" reference is ridiculous and without insight- try to look at the whole picture. I don't run around topless often (in the privacy of my home, the river or a wide open meadow), there is a time and place for propriety. What our attention should be drawn to is the lack of self-respect being taught to women - the fear instilled- the shame, most women have been sexually assaulted and few speak out. Why? Because they were taught it was their fault; their inherent sexuality provoked it. After these traumatizing experiences women fluctuate from one extreme of expression to another, trying to find a voice, freedom, support and acceptance. We cannot expect women to shut off their sexuality. But we do. Our over-sexed society doesn't help. We objectify and then we shame. How do we expect women, young or old, to make sense of this baseless double standard? Huh? Women are supposed to be pretty and sexy, right. Not too sexy, though, not too pretty and definitely not comfortable. We teach girls shame. Close your legs, cover yourself, we make them feel as though by being born female they're already guilty of something.

'Lady' is social term that denotes a woman's place in society. If the society is sexist, then the position of lady is inherently unequal. First Lady is not a bad thing, we all love and admire Michelle, but it isn't the same as being President. I'm not knocking the ladies out there, but the term doesn't make men think

“equal”. I think boys should be told to close their legs, there’s no need to take up that much room on the train. And nobody wants to see your unsightly bulge. Keep it to yourself. Learn some shame.

It just blows my mind that there are women in this world who truly believe that being told to “close their legs and cover up” actually believe it taught them to respect themselves. I firmly believe it teaches women to devalue themselves to the point where their untouched, “pure” bodies are the only reasons they’re worthy. We don’t shove this crap down men’s throats do we? No, we don’t.

No woman’s experience is universal, yet the world somehow manages to teach women universal lessons. The world teaches women how to pretend. Women have done it many times. Women have done it when women have wanted to say something but decided that it would be too “unladylike” or too aggressive or too something or the other to come from their mouths. And so women have let many things go, and have kept quiet because women didn’t want to make it a big deal and because women wanted to let peace reign. Only to later agonize about the incident and realize that women perpetuated the cycle of women being seen and not heard.

The world teaches women to define themselves by their bodies. I love bodies; I really do, and I find the societal discourse around them fascinating. I think that women’s bodies are very beautifully created. But I also think there is a collective practice of disciplining women’s bodies. We do it every time we refer to women by “slut,” “whore,” and other names that we have constructed to chastise women. Even when I have not said these things about women, I have thought them; knowing full-well that those words have also been used on them. And it’s very difficult to change. It’s very easy to pretend that those words do not participate in constructing women’s bodies as the property of society.

In western cultures, women consider themselves equal to men while in some other parts of the world such as Africa and Asia, women are subjected to violence, sexual abuses, and exploitation by men who consider them as their legal or sexual property. Because tradition and religion play a crucial role in the life of the people of these regions, women are forced to live according to their culture in order for them to fit in the society. From murderous husbands in India, inhuman Islamic laws in Pakistan, to genital mutilation practiced in Africa, these unjustifiable acts are virtually impossible to explain because they all go against the moral principles and values of a civilized society.

When a parent deliberately kills his daughter without having remorse because of financial reasons, the first thing that comes into ordinary people’s minds is sorrow and grief. Because dowry is paid by the bride’s family in India, cruel and selfish husbands have killed their second daughter in order to avoid paying a second expensive dowry. Dowry in India can account for more than 50% of a household income. (Journeyman Pictures LTD, January 2001). For that reason, fathers murder their female child. Even if a second female child makes it through childhood, she may still have a marriage on the rocks if her dowry is not enough to satisfy her in-laws. It is very shocking and disturbing to know that these fathers are still doing it with impunity. The most outrageous of all is that the government of India is aware of these killings and does not take

drastic measures to stop it. Because it is culturally right in India to do so, women cannot oppose it to the risk of being physically abused by their husbands.

This is the case where I am from both geographically and culturally. But I guess this isn’t the same everywhere and there will be countries where certain religious beliefs might be taken out of context to discourage freedom of opinion and expression. So while it’s not how I feel it’s still valid. Women have been repressed for a long time and still are. They carry this within their psyche forever.

"THOUGH THE SEX TO WHICH I BELONG IS CONSIDERED WEAK..."

"Though the sex to which I belong is considered weak you will never the less find me a rock that bends to no wind." – Queen Elizabeth

Queen Elizabeth means although she is woman and is considered to be weak, there are no men that could change her ways. Queen Elizabeth didn't let her father's decision to deny her the throne bring her down. In that era, a king would pass the throne to his first born son. King Henry had girls and he excluded his daughters from the throne because he had his son. King Henry considered women to be weak and not right to rule a kingdom. It took Queen Elizabeth years to be established at the throne and when she ruled her kingdom she was a great leader.

I can relate to this quote because this is still happening today. If it is not in our jobs, it is in our homes, where the men dominate the women. Men always underestimate what women can bring to the table. For example, Hillary Clinton, wife of former President Bill Clinton would like to run for president. A lot of men do not believe that she can do a man's job. Is she a good candidate? Yes but can she do the job? If she has an opportunity to do the job she could probably do a good job.

It goes to say that men still try to make all decisions. In today's world not so much has changed since then. But Elizabeth inspires us women to work hard on what we believe in and do not let man over power us.

"MY MOTHER WAS THE ONE WHO RAISED US..."

"My mother was the one who raised us, so I never really saw women in a passive role because my mother was a businesswoman, and she was active in the community.... In my growing up, I never saw women as being subservient or passive. I think it was when I became an adult.... that I saw women in a whole different role, because in our household, we were equal—my two brothers and myself. My brothers had to wash dishes and make beds....I never thought that women had to be in a second class category, ever. It was the opposite. My mother was definitely the leader in our family." – Dolores Huerta

Dolores Huerta's words have a special significance to me. This quote compares personal experiences to the implied given role women have in society. In the "big picture" many people of different cultures view women as secondary and even dependent on men. My mother was neither of these, and neither was Dolores Huerta's mom. Many view the role of woman as mother to have a clear role of being supportive toward her man. Without a man, she cannot raise a healthy, strong family.

My two brothers and I were removed from my biological mother's custody upon birth. My adoptive mom and maternal grandmother, Elmira Mabelle Vines was there to take us home as family and raise us as her own. Elmira went through the lengthy process to adopt my brothers and I. I would imagine it took its toll on her at the age of 55 years old. I cannot remember life without my mom, Elmira. While we were half brothers, we were raised in such a way that such a term did not exist. Unlike Dolores Huerta, my mom Elmira was not a businesswoman, but she was definitely a woman of business! She was a strong woman who had a strong sense of self-discipline and was highly respected in my community.

Growing up, I never saw women as secondary. If anything, they received more respect than male figures of authority because my grandma was not subservient in the slightest. She was strict yet loving; Tough yet funny; respected but family. I personally believe these values are hard to find in many parents, regardless of sex, in modern day America, yet my adoptive mom and my biological mother possessed these traits equally. As I was growing up, my grandma played the role of mom, dad, and aunt (I refer to her as all these statuses because she effectively played each role). She was the absolute authority in my household. She included my brothers and I in activities such as coloring and cooking. (We did not know at the time this amazing phenomenon of a person was improving birth related motor defects and coordination). She was vigilant when it came to chores and if done improperly there were definite consequences. She molded my two brothers and I to be outstanding men.

We never went hungry, we always had clothes, and education was always top priority. These values were kept sacred without dependency upon any man. While growing up I would hear people say “That’s girly” but I have to be honest. My grandma Elmira never even came to mind. She didn’t fit such a lame stereotype. If anything she was too “manly”. And why is that? To be “manly” is symbolic of strength. To be “girly” is universally symbolic of weakness, cuteness and dependency. Well, I must congratulate my Mother – Grandmother – Uncle- Aunt- Dad: Elmira, for breaking the norm. I personally feel that it is not the born sex that determines the role, but the strength that lies within.



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