

VOICES

Volunteer English Program Student Magazine

Winter 2018

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Happy New Year from all of us at VEP!

We hope you enjoyed the holiday season and wish you and your families a happy and healthy 2018! We celebrate your progress as you work toward your goals. Special thanks to your tutors for their work and support.

We were delighted to see so many of our students and tutors who attended VEP's Annual Global Gathering in November! The sharing of your cultural foods is one of the highlights of the event. Student speaker Mariana Ionescu brought tears to many eyes as she shared her journey as a Romanian immigrant. Read her story on Pages 4-5.

Also in this issue, VEP students share their thanks, memories of their homelands, discoveries in nature, and ways to improve English through volunteering. Enjoy!

Note from the Editors: To preserve the writers' tone and voice in their pieces, changes were made only to improve clarity and formatting.

"We are all together on a big journey with ups and downs but we should all pray for this most beautiful land, work hard, believe hard, and do everything with love."

Excerpt from Premisa Kerthi's Meditation at VEP 's 2018 Global Gathering

Holiday greetings from Student Fikreta Rezepagic Duzic:

"I wish to all of you Happy New Year, lots of joy, happiness, and the beauty that will paint your days in every field of your life in 2018. My happiness is because of your program, help for learning English and finding for me such a good tutor."





VENEZUELAN TRADITIONAL CHRISTMAS DINNER

I am Suncire Moniz. I am from Venezuela. I came to Pennsylvania (US) 3 years ago. I would like to talk today about the typical food that is prepared in my country for Christmas.

The famous Venezuelan Christmas meal contains hallaca, ham bread, chicken salad and pork. Let me explain how it's made.

Hallaca

It is a tamale typical of Venezuela. It consists of a corn meal dough seasoned with chicken or chicken broth and pigmented with orange red food coloring, it is stuffed with a stew of beef, pork and chicken to which are added olives, raisins, capers, paprika and onion. It is wrapped in a rectangular shape in banana leaves, to finally be tied with twine and boiled in water.

Ham Bread

Is part of the Venezuelan Christmas gastronomy. It is a bread stuffed with ham, bacon, raisins and green olives and usually stuffed with red paprika.

Chicken Salad

Is the complement of any Venezuela Christmas dinner along with the traditional ham bread. It's main ingredients are shredded chicken, carrots, peas and mayonnaise.

Roast Pork Leg

It is similar to roast turkey in the sense of the time it takes to prepare and the fact that it can easily make anyone feel overwhelmed by just looking at the size of it!. The first time I attempted to prepare it, I went for a pork loin for two reasons, it was smaller and easier to handle and pork legs were sold out. Yes, it is that popular to prepare during the holidays.

This is the traditional Christmas dinner of Venezuela. This is how I try to maintain my tradition, making it every Christmas even though I am not in Venezuela.



Bird Nests

By Chao Yang

In Xiamen City, there are almost no birds' nests on the trees. In America, the birds' nests can be seen everywhere. I found the birds place their nests in a tree in a secluded and quiet place, such as under our house deck and the tree next to the house. They don't like the pine tree to set up nests. I think there is a squirrel that often runs around the tree. The birds aren't safe.

The nest is crossed by the twigs of a tree, the shape is circular, and there are leaves and hay in the nest. It seems very comfortable.



Last year at my friend's house on the windowsill, there was a nest with four blue eggs. My niece told me it was the egg of a Pennsylvania state bird. The first time I saw bird's eggs under the deck and some young birds were just born. Their mom got food to feed them from a distance.

I am amazed the birds can set up their houses so firmly.



Japanese stone statue, "Ojizo-sama"

MEMORIES OF JAPAN

By Ikuko Ouki

My first memories of my life are the days when I was 3 or 4 years old.

I used to live in Hyogo prefecture where is middle west part of Japan. When I think back, our house was not so tiny for four people: my parents, my younger sister and me. It was a bit old and had a small, sunny inside garden. I could sometimes see a snake coiling around the tree branch in the garden, so I didn't like to pass in front of there.

There was a hair salon next to our house. We used to call the owner of the salon "Cham-san". I don't know why she was called that. Perhaps it came from her salon name. I remember that she and her daughter were really nice.

My mother sometimes took my sister and me out for a walk. We usually passed by the cow barn and went to the small temple to see the stone statue called "Ojizo-sama". We offered some sweets in front of the statue, then we took them called "Osagari" and ate them. "Osagari" means "take-back" or offerings withdrawn. Having something after offering it at a shrine or temple means that we can get some power, and we understand that we are given our life and we should appreciate it.

My memories of that time were pretty vivid. I hope to visit there again in the future.

2018 Global Gathering Student Speaker

Mariana Ionescu

Hello, my name is Mariana. This is my story.

I came to the United States four years ago from Romania, with my husband and my son Alex. We are living together in Downingtown, Pennsylvania.

In Romania, I studied electrical and mechanical engineering, and I worked in Human Resources at a coal mining company for 25 years. My husband was a coal mining engineer. He went into the mines twice a week, and also worked in emergency mining, going into the mines after explosions or fires. After 20 years as an engineer, he had the opportunity to retire early with a pension. Soon after we both retired, we began a new chapter in our lives. My husband and son wanted to live in America for opportunity. In 2013, we came together to the United States on a visa.



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Soon after we arrived, our friend hired my husband, son, & myself as subcontractors cleaning medical office buildings. Four years ago, our family opened our own subcontracting cleaning company. Cleaning was the only type of work we could do since we didn't speak English. In the evening we clean medical offices, laboratories, surgery centers, radiology offices, dentist offices, and physical therapy centers. We work very hard all week, five or six nights a week from about five o'clock until one or two in the morning. Sometimes I talk to people at our jobs when they stay late after work, to practice my English. It's very difficult in the winter because we have to battle the snow and ice to get to our jobs, and then it's a lot of extra work to clean the mud, ice, gravel and salt from the carpets in the offices. On Sundays, I cook our family's meals for the week.

It was not easy for my family and me to begin a new life in another country, especially because we didn't speak English. In school, I studied French and German, so while I know three languages, I only knew about ten words in English when we arrived in the United States. Soon after we arrived, we applied for an English program, but we were not lucky. They didn't choose us and weren't able to provide us a tutor to learn English.

Two years later, in 2015, we found the VEP of Chester County and here we were lucky, because in the shortest time we had a tutor. His name is Mark. Now, my family and I study twice a week at the Downingtown library with our tutor. It is a small amount of time, but Mark is a very good tutor. Usually, the VEP does not tutor families together, but ours was a special case because of our work schedule. Mark explains and answers all of our questions and he has a lot of patience with us. Pronunciation is very difficult for us because the vowel sounds are different in Romania.

A good contribution to our English lesson has been Karen, Mark's wife. While Mark teaches us, Karen teaches Alex separately. Sometimes, when our study room in the library is busy, we have English lessons at all sorts of places: the Kimberton store, Wegman's café, the bowling alley, the art store in Yellow Springs.

Mark helps us in so many ways. For example, he accompanied us to the bank, to the insurance company, to the franchise for our new company, to draw up contracts with our clients. He introduced us to SCORE, a nonprofit in Chester County that provides help to small business owners. Our families also go together to community events, like the fall festival and farmers' market in Downingtown. We were volunteers together at a tree planting for the Brandywine Conservancy. He sends us messages and emails about local events: farmers' markets, old car shows, free Wawa coffee, etc. Mark and Karen help to make us feel like we are part of the community here in America.

I have to study English. It is very important for me because I want to be successful in this country to realize my dream of living here, working here, and becoming a U.S. citizen. The VEP made our family's dream possible.

Now, I can say: We are successful in this country. But we have to continue our business to be fully successful. We were lucky because we met many people around us who helped us a lot. Thank you to our friend, because he gave us a chance to work for him when we didn't know anyone. Thank you, all our friends from our Romanian community, who gave us a place to stay when we first arrived. Thank you, VEP. And thank you, Mark and Karen.



How I Learned English

by Suncire Moniz

I have discovered that in the learning of any language and especially English practice is the key.

Three years ago I came to the US with very little English. I started with the Volunteer English Program two a half years ago with someone super special. She has patience and discipline so that with us working together a few hours a week, she helps me in my daily life. She has been responsible for advancing my English and she is Maureen Morgan.

After being with Maureen, I have learned that **volunteering** or working can make my learning much better and that is why for the past few months I use 5 days of the week practicing my English. I do two days of **volunteering** at Community Volunteers in Medicine (CVIM) and I work three days in a daycare. I consider that these past three months have been very enriching for me because I feel that understand more and I speak more English. This is important to me because my goal is to be able to speak English well.

**Would you like
more practice
speaking English?**

**Join a
Conversation
Group in your
community!**

Locations and times are on the
VEP website at
www.volunteerenglish.org

Click on the **Students** tab, then
Conversation Group Opportunities

Did you know? VEP volunteers gave close to 12,000 hours of time helping others learn English in 2017.

Thank you to all who make a difference in our lives!!

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Contact Us

We'd love to hear about your homeland, your culture, your experiences, and your accomplishments. If you have a story, letter, or poem you would like to submit for the Spring edition of Voices Magazine, please ask your tutor to contact us!

Photos are also welcome!