

VOICES

Volunteer English Program Student Magazine

Fall 2018

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The Season for Giving Thanks

Fall is the season when we celebrate the truly American holiday of Thanksgiving. Many people consider this their favorite holiday because of its simplicity: gathering family and friends together at a meal to give thanks for the many blessings as well as freedoms that set the United States apart from other countries.

VEP is especially thankful for the courage and resiliency of all our student immigrants as they pursue the difficult task of learning English and cultural norms to achieve their goals and enrich all our lives. We are thankful for our tutors who are committed to changing lives through volunteerism. Finally, we are thankful for all supporters who make our work possible through the spirit of philanthropy.

In this issue of Voices, three VEP students reflect on their experiences as immigrants. We hope you will have some thoughtful discussions about their stories and how they compare with yours.

Note from the Editors: The stories and poem in this issue are the work of VEP students. To preserve the writers' tone and voice in their pieces, changes were made only to improve clarity and formatting.

**VEP 2018
Global Gathering
Sunday, Nov. 11, 2018
3:00-5:30 P.M.**

**All VEP Students and
Tutors are invited to at-
tend this free, potluck
event at**

**Goshen Fire Company Hall
130 Park Avenue
West Chester, PA 19380**

**Bring a food to share
from your country or
heritage!**

**Reserve your seat
by Nov. 5
Call 610-918-8222 ext. 3**



“Here we are a big family... Here we have diversity, freedom, opportunities, that need courage to get in and to enjoy.”

- Premisa Kerthi, VEP 2017 Global Luncheon

WELCOMING IMMIGRANTS

by Premisa Kerthi

Hungry to help others
It's a wonderful feeling
Living in the United States
It thinks about immigrants
Thinks about changing lives
Thinks about developing them
It is all about care and love.

People (Immigrants) HAVE Courage to
break
Down their complexity
They try everything
I mean everything
They walk without knowing where
And they stand up
Taking small steps
Like a baby, without any fear
With that courage and power
That comes inside of them
To touch the biggest dream
Living and rebuilding a new life
Here, in the Golden doors

You gave us arms to fly
You gave us words to speak
You gave us the power to go over
barriers
You gave us force to continue
You gave us new feet to walk in this
beautiful land
You gave us that shiny word
"Welcoming"
You gave us the definition of dreams
That we can catch it and feel it

And then, we start flying and flying
Feeling that freedom of this beautiful
land
And see and being proud of those
amazing
Successful immigrants stories
You make our hearts beating and
beating
The same way they beat in our
countries
This is a miracle
To feel like you are in your home
Hug each other, clap for each other
success
How meaningful is that...

Talent is talent
Success is success
Art is art
Life is life
People are people
In whatever language you find them...

That is welcoming,
Welcoming diversity
Welcoming hunger
Welcoming talents
Welcoming people like you and me
Combining all those
Produces freedom and dream place

That is called

America.



Before and After Hurricane Maria

By Yameilha Gonzalez

Always when a government announces the possibility that a hurricane would come, my brother's family and my family will go to my mother's house. For us the meaning of a hurricane was a party or a get together. It was the day to play, to laugh, to eat, to talk, and to go to sleep late. It's a time to update each other.

In 2017 a different time came. My brother decided to stay in his home. Just only my family went to my mother's house. All of us were incredulous about if the hurricane would hit Puerto Rico. Of course, we had prepared with water and meat cans and necessities. Then, we were waiting for the hurricane. Suddenly the electricity was gone. I heard when my son said, "Oh no, I hope the light will turn on again fast." My mother and my husband were sleeping. My son said to me, "I'm bored." and I answered, "We can play Canicas." We put a flash light on and we played for 2 hours. Finally, at 12:00 p.m. he said, "Let's go to sleep."

When all of them were sleeping, I couldn't sleep. I began to walk inside the house trying to see through the windows what was happening, but it started at night, and it was so dark and raining that I couldn't see anything out. The scare was coming to me. I closed my eyes to try to sleep, but I heard the heavy wind blowing, roaring, and throwing things in a circuitous way. I was in my mother's bedroom. I opened my eyes and I imagined my mother and the window exploding and the glass falling over her. I ran to my husband and I said, "I have never see this before and I feel we are in danger. We need to stay together in this bedroom and with food." I almost couldn't talk. I was trembling. Finally, we were together waiting for the hurricane to end.

Few hours later, we were anxious about what had happened. We went out, and we saw how destroyed our neighborhood was. We didn't have electricity, water, and communication. All people were desperate. At night, we were completely in darkness. You needed to stay inside your home because the governor declared a curfew. We were lucky because my mother's house had an old wire phone line and old analog phone, and we connected both, they were working. I could call my brother in (Chester County) PA. His first words were, "Puerto Rico is as if a bomb will fall in a center on it and exploded." I felt short of breath as if someone will press my neck and I said, "Please buy us 3 tickets to fly to you." I just was thinking of my mother's health and my son's education. Always, I have dreamed to go to U.S.A. to learn English. I thought it's my bridge to make real my dream.

During the days after the hurricane, I had to stay in the house. Puerto Rico has hot weather and you need to drink cold water or something cold. Also, you are used to have air conditioner, refrigerator, electric stove to cook your meals, a faucet that sends water to take your bath, a washing machine, dryer, a toilet that you push a button to flush, TV, internet, and phone. Almost all things use electricity and water. And when we went out all was destroyed: poles, traffic lights, buildings, gas station, factories, houses, airport, and the nature. All looked horrible, and without hope to be fixed. Additionally almost all buildings were closed: supermarkets, gas stations, pharmacies, hospitals, doctor's offices, schools, and entertainment stores. My son wanted to be outside all the days and nights. It worried me.

We had a normal life and in one day everything changed. I used to leave my son at school, I cooked the food for the dinner, and worked in the house, I picked up my son at school, I studied with my son and my husband went to work. At the weekend, we planned something to share as a family and we went to church on Sunday.

When something like this happens, life teaches you what really is important. The life goes so fast. I thought it's time to love, to share with my family, and not to worry about anything. Now I will understand better what happens in the world and what people are feeling and suffering.

In my mornings, I'm thankful to God because I'm alive, I'm healthy, my family are separated, but all are well, I'm preparing me and my son for the future how always I dreamed, and my mother is with me and supporting me. I hope one day return to my mother what she is doing now for us.

Graduation and Party

By Marcia S.



In the beginning of summer 2018, my daughter graduated from kindergarten. In the classroom the parents had to be with the children and have a nice time. In my daughter's class there were children from different races (ethnic groups): Indians, Blacks, Japanese, Americans and Mexicans.

When (they) finished the graduation and songs, the teacher named the graduates. It was strange because the White people only talked to each other, the Black people spoke with Blacks only. Those from India just looked at each other and felt the difference of people. I did not feel comfortable but I had to continue for my daughter's comfort. I felt safe because I understood everything they talked about.

I was wondering in that place and at that moment because people think that the color of the skin makes us different. I think we all deserve respect and it does not matter where we come from and the skin color does not make the person. When I was in that place, I did not feel good about these differences between people. But I tried to make my daughter feel comfortable.

I also know that not all people see differences or think we are different and we can see that some of them are very good, friendly people. I hope that people reflect that very soon we will see how we should be like brothers.

That day the parents who wanted could bring something to eat for the meeting of parents and children. Some brought small sandwiches, fruit, water, juice, ice cream, tamales, tortilla with chicken etc. My daughter asked me to bring Mexican food. She wanted her friends to know and taste Mexican food and because it's the one my daughter likes the most. She invited her friends to try the food and explain how she eats those foods and what ingredients were used. When I observed this, I see that the children are very innocent, curious, most friendly. I compared the adults who were in that place.

The children talked, ate, laughed, some wondered, asked things like "Who is your Mom? Who are your parents?" But never did I see that the children compared or made gestures when they look at the parents of their friends. The children are very intelligent, innocent and in that innocence there is not malice or they do not care about the skin color or not speaking English well. I think that parents should take that example of children to be better adults and that children grow up seeing that equality, love towards neighbour. And if that happens, these children will grow up and they will be sensitive adults; better there will be no discrimination.

Remember that the children are growing and they are imitating the steps of the parents. Now is the time to teach our children to be good and there are differences. Because people can feel as if they are invisible when someone looks at them badly or sometimes does not look at them at all for the reason that they are of another race.

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Contact Us

If you have a story, letter, or poem you would like to submit for the next edition of Voices Magazine, please ask your tutor to contact us!