

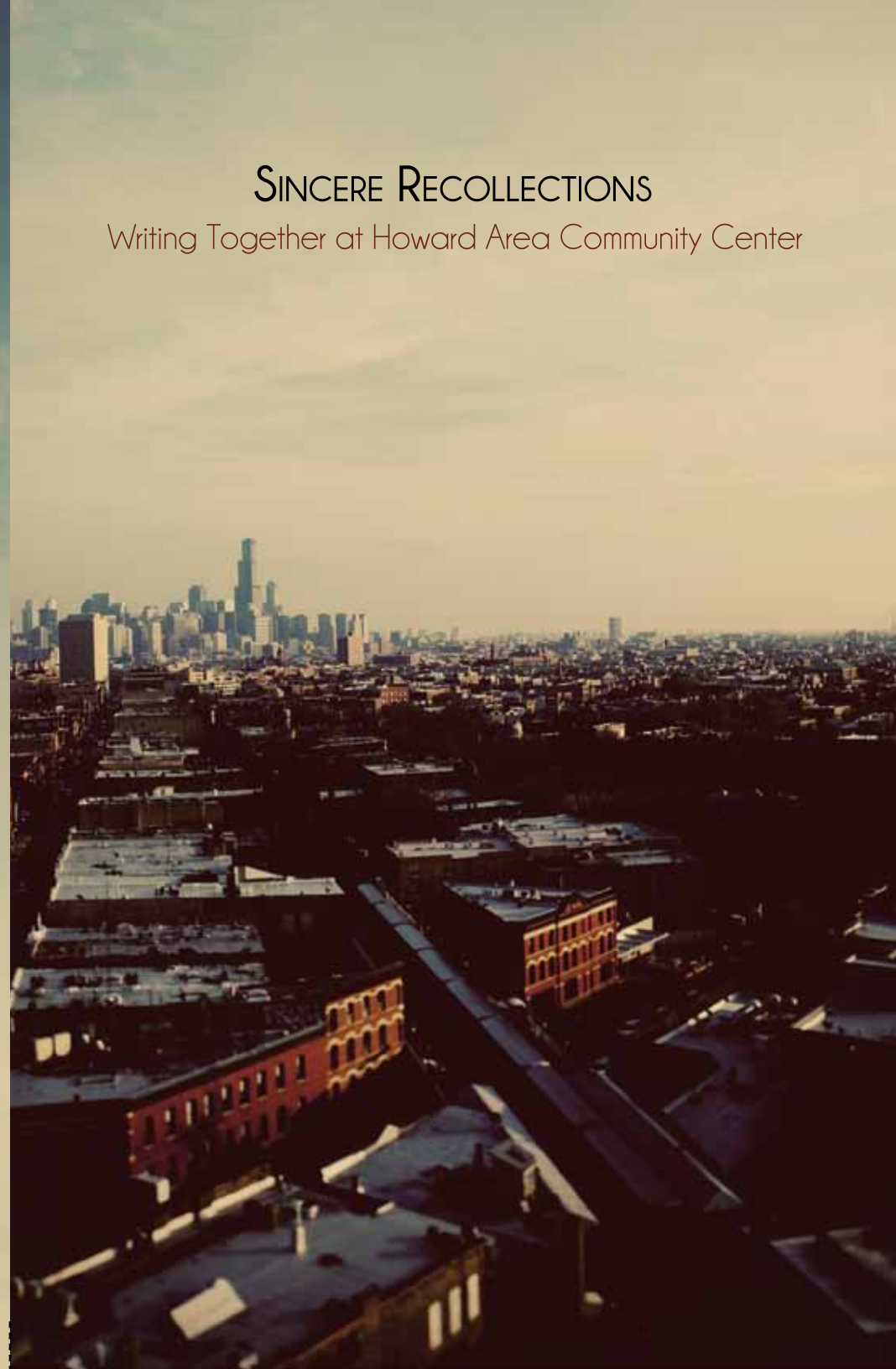


SINCERE RECOLLECTIONS

Writing Together at Howard Area Community Center

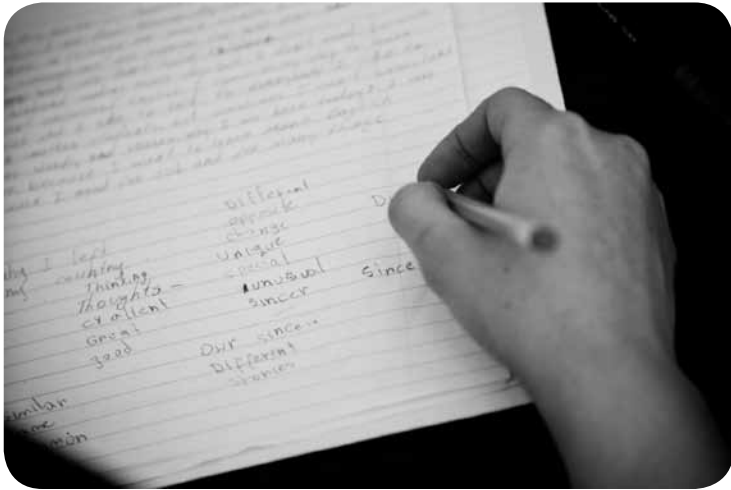


SINCERE RECOLLECTIONS is the result of Writers' Circle, an 8-week writing workshop facilitated by Literacy Works in partnership with Howard Area Community Center.



SINCERE RECOLLECTIONS

Writing Together at Howard Area Community Center





HOWARD AREA COMMUNITY CENTER

The mission of Howard Area Community Center is to assist low-income individuals and families in and near Rogers Park to stabilize their lives and develop the skills necessary to become productive community members.

Through Howard Area Community Center's Adult Basic Education program, over five hundred students a year study reading, writing, and math or learn English. We offer classes in Adult Basic Education, GED preparation and English as a Second Language as well as individual and small group tutoring to meet the diverse needs of our students. Students can also participate in our Family Literacy program, where parents are taught that they are their child's first and most important teacher. Numerous other services such as a food pantry, youth programming, early childhood programming, a dental clinic, and the Employment Resource Center are also available. Through their participation in HACC's services and educational opportunities, students can empower themselves and achieve their personal goals.

Howard Area Community Center

Adult Basic Education Program

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Chicago, IL 60626

www.howardarea.org

Writing can be a daunting task for many of us. It can be difficult to reveal yourself on the page, especially when you are in the process of learning English or improving your literacy skills, but these writers brought a contagious enthusiasm to this project. It's hard not to want to pick up a pen yourself after reading their compelling words. I am so thrilled that they have chosen to share their stories from Rogers Park and around the world to inspire our community.

We would like to thank Literacy Works for providing such an important program as the Writers' Circle. In addition, we would like to thank Literacy Works Program Director Megan Wells and Janise Hurtig of the Community Writing Project for all the time and care they took with our students and their words. Thanks to Andrew Collings and Charlene Epple for the end result of this lovely book.

Melanie Sampson

Adult Education Coordinator

Howard Area Community Center

A FEW WORDS FROM LITERACY WORKS

The writers who participated in this publication are adult learners at Howard Area Community Center in the Rogers Park neighborhood of Chicago. The rich diversity of the neighborhood is reflected in this Writers' Circle. While the authors may call France, Kosovo, Lebanon, Bhutan, Mexico, Sierra Leone, Iran or Armenia "home," their writing reveals the struggle to make a new home here in the United States.

One theme that many of the writers wanted to express was the need to learn English. Within this discussion we also reflected on the way languages intersect with our lives. What role does English play in my home life? What opportunities does learning English provide for my family and me? What type of learning environment helps one learn a language? According to the writers, Howard Area is providing just the type of warm, caring and engaging environment that not only fosters their acquisition of English but also builds community. Read Artur Badasyan's story "My First Education in Chicago" to learn more.

The writers also delve into other personal struggles such as Alice Mbayo's story, "Not All Mothers Are Mothers," a tale of injustice within her early family life in Sierra Leone. A group discussion on why people feel the push and pull to leave their home countries led some to write about the difference in village and city life. Although the United States offers more opportunities in some ways, the dominant culture here may cause more stress, as described in Irene Villegas' story. Our book ends with Zhanna Hambardzumyan's touching recollection of a poem from her homeland that she remembers as she walks through a Virginian forest.

During our weekly gatherings I had the privilege to witness the bonding these writers have made to each other as well as the process of writing (and writing in a language other than their native tongue). I would like to thank the staff of Howard Area Community Center, especially Melanie Sampson and Sean Pomroy, who have participated in the workshop as editors and have committed to sustain this vital space beyond its eight-week term. Deep gratitude goes to Janise Hurtig of the Community Writing Project for her weekly participation in this workshop as well as her mentorship. Thank you to Betsy Rubin for using her eagle eyes to edit the final text. And a special thanks to Andrew Collings for his stunning photography and to Charlene Epple for designing the beautiful book you now hold in your hands.

Megan Wells

Program Director
Literacy Works

WRITERS' CIRCLE FROM HOWARD AREA COMMUNITY CENTER, SUMMER 2011

Jessy Diasilva

Sherife Rexhepi

Hanaa Kteish

Uma Sapkota

Tek Dahal

Devi Dhital

Dhaka Dahal

Irene Villegas

Alice Mbayo

Amir Zeinali

Artur Badasyan

Zhanna Hambardzumyan

JESSY DIASILVA

The English Language and Me

Today I want to tell you about languages in my life. My first language is French. Many people in the world speak French but it is not the first language in the world. When I was a young teenager, I began to study English at school. But the teacher was very, very bad and I didn't have any pleasure to learn English. And then I began to learn German when I was about 18 and Portuguese when I was about 25. That was a big challenge because, for example, the German language is very different from French. I like challenge. Now I speak three languages and learn English.

I think English is very important. If you can speak it correctly, you can communicate with many people from different cultures and countries in the world.

When I came to Chicago for the first time, I didn't understand any word.

The Chicago accent is very hard for me. For example, I was yesterday to the doctor and I had a problem to understand the nurse. I said to her to speak slowly and clearly. After that everything was better.

I want to speak good English for many reasons. English is the language that most people in the world speak. I like to see other countries in the world. I was in many countries and every time I need someone as translator to communicate with others. That is for me hard and I feel bad to be like that.



In the past I tried to learn English but I had not enough time to practice it. Now I'm here to improve it. It is for me a big chance to really learn English.

English is not the only one that I want to learn as language. Next language, Spanish.

Refuge

Refuge: that word takes me back to my parents' house in France. I love this time. I remember my father liked to hear music from Cuba. I mean "Salsa" and "cha cha cha." Especially one of the musicians. His name is "Johnny Pacheco." He was famous and my father liked him.

I see my father sitting in his rocking chair and closing his eyes, one cup of red wine in his hand and listening to "Guantanamera" from his favorite musician. That made me happy. And my mother brought him some shish kebabs... It was a great time. Life could be sometimes easy.

Today when I feel something is going wrong in my life, I return to go back to my father's house.

To See Other Countries

I grew up in a big city. And I moved a lot with my parents because my father was a steward in a big aviation company. So I visited many countries in the world.

I like to visit different people and their cultures. Thirty years ago, I was in South Africa. And what I saw there I could not believe it. "The Apartheid." It was a big shock in my life. Thanks God, the world changes. I saw many things too. I don't have time to tell you but maybe I will write a book; it is a better way to tell my experiences. One day! Who knows?



SHERIFE REXHEPI

More English

Hi, Sherife is my name. I am from Kosovo. The first language in my life is Albanian. I like this language, but I would like to learn many languages. I have lived in Chicago for nine months. I am

here with my husband. We have been married for nine years and we are happy, but we don't have children.

My husband works every day but I don't work because I can't understand English. I come to school every day to learn English and I like to talk to everybody. I like to talk to other students but sometimes I can't understand many words. Why am I here in this class today? I am here because I want to learn more English because I need a job and many things.

My Life in Chicago

When I was in my country, my city was small but it was beautiful. Now I live in Chicago. Chicago is a big city for me. I like it but it is very difficult for me because it has many streets, many people and sometimes I am very confused. But I hope that maybe in two years, I can learn many good and positive things from this place.

I live on Belmont Avenue. This street is very nice. I like this street because many people are beautiful. I like downtown Chicago. When the people are working it's very good but when they aren't working it's very bad. But in this school I am thankful to the teachers for everything.

HANAA KTEISH

My English

I'm Hanaa Kteish. I'm from Lebanon. I have been here one year and five months. When I came over here my English was very bad. I didn't study English in my country. When I moved to the United States I was more confused. Everything is difficult for me. But I went to school. I studied English. Now I'm feeling better than when I first came. I want and I need to write and read well.

Why I Left My Country

I like and I miss my country. I was very happy with my family and friends. There aren't any problems in my country but I left there because my husband was not comfortable in my country. He didn't find a job over there and if he got a job he didn't make a lot of money. My country was more expensive than his country.

This is why I left my country.

Living in the Village and the City

I was born in the village in southern Lebanon. I was living there many years. I was over there with my parents and friends. They are very friendly and kind people. When there was a war in that area, I moved to my capital city. I feel different places make different people. For example, the people in the village are more generous than people from the city.

Stress in My Life

I'm Hanaa. I feel stress every day. I do many things for the stress to go away. I go to school for studying. I do my homework. I clean my home. I cook and watch TV.

Sometimes I go with my son to the park to play with him. All of my time is full. But I still feel the same. So, I want to feel better. Maybe when I get a good job, when I'm comfortable for everything, things will change.

UMA SAPKOTA

English Is Very Important

My first name is Uma.

My last name is Sapkota.

I come from Bhutan.

I have lived in Chicago for one year.

My language is Nepali.

I am in level three English.

I am in English class and I practice English.

I don't understand, but I practice.

This Is My Story

Chicago has different people and different languages. My mother and father went to Seattle, Washington. I have one brother in Nepal. We are not together. I have been practicing English for nine months.

I have three children. My children like writing, reading and dancing. My children's school is very good. My children's favorite color is red. My children eat eggs, butter, milk, bananas and apples.

My favorite activity is reading. My favorite food is rice and curry. My family is in Bhutan. I like my country's food.



TEK DAHAL

My Story

I was born in Bhutan.

I lived in Nepal for 17 years in the refugee camp.

My family is in Chicago.

I have to now practice the English language.

I don't go shopping. Big problem.

I go to school for reading and writing.

I go to work. I have good work.

I am very happy.

Now I go to work.

Thanks.

DEVI DHITAL

When I Came to Chicago

I tell about my short history.

I am Devi. I am from Bhutan. I came to Chicago 09-09-2008 at night 11:30pm. Then I went to sleep that night. 09-10-2008 I wake up in the morning 6:30am and I brush my teeth. Then I went to visit outside in Chicago.

I like Chicago. In two, three weeks I am at home. I didn't have English in my country and I study English. I should study English because in USA no English, no anything. I am coming today to learn writing, listening and speaking English.

My History

I tell about my country history, about my father and my mother history. My father's name is Kapil. He worked on his cattle farm. He had many animals. He cut grass for his cows. I helped my father some time. My mother worked in the vegetable garden. She planted potato, tomato, cucumber, pumpkin and chili pepper. Sometimes my sister helped my mother.



DHAKA DAHAL

Why I Left My Country

My name is Dhaka Dahal. I am from Bhutan. I left my mother country because of the religious and political situation, but I didn't understand because I could not read the Dzongkha language and had no English and my children were small at this time.

Now everybody understands my children but I still have no English. I will study every day. I hope to read because there are people of many countries living here, many friends. They are good friends, good teachers.

I live in Chicago. It is a big and beautiful city. There is a lake outside. I like the lake and singing birds. All the time, I am happy with my family.



English in My Life

I came from Bhutan but now I live in Chicago. I am learning English every day but I don't remember because I am old. I am interested and happy because many people of many countries are living here. I have met so many friends in Chicago. The schools and hospitals and transportation and everything is good but I don't have language. No language, no job. No job, big problem. Good luck. Have a good day.

IRENE VILLEGAS

English Is Very Important for Many Things

My name is Irene. I'm from Michoacan, Mexico. I'm married. I have four children, three girls and one boy. This is my story.

When I came from Mexico I didn't go to school because I didn't know where to go. But I need to study because in this country English is very important for the people. For me English is very important for many things. For example, when I go to the hospital the doctor explains to me but I don't understand. And when I go to pick up the report cards of my children it is difficult for me because I don't understand. But I need to learn English to help my children

with their homework because my children are very important for me. I love them and I want to help them with their homework. With the help of God I am learning more and more.



Places to Relax

I like Chicago. But I miss my country. I was very happy with my family because I have a big family. I passed happy times with them. We played together. But in this country it's different. The people are stressing for thinking and thinking, for example, about their family or about their problems. But my country is a place that is beautiful for relaxing. The people listen to the birds singing and look up to the blue sky, smell the different kinds of flowers and play different games with the family. For example, we play *la lotería*, volleyball and many other games. But in this city it's different. The people move a lot and think a lot about their problems. They are stressing a lot.

But in this city to relax I go to church and listen to the music of many different songs of God and reading my favorite book, the Bible. With that I'm very relaxed because in my life Jesus is very important.

ALICE MBAYO

Not All Mothers Are Mothers

My name is Alice Mbayo. This is the beginning of my life story.

When I was five years old my mother's cousin came to visit us in the

village. She came from the city. She asked my mother to take me with her, to the city. I was happy and my mother and father were happy too. She and I stayed together for three days before we left for the city. She promised my mother and father that she would send me to school but she didn't do what she promised them.

I stayed with her for three years.

She never sent me to school.

One day she took me to see my uncle in the city where we were living. She took me over to see him and his wife. My uncle saw the way I looked, he was very discouraged and he asked me to tell him what was wrong with me. I explained everything that

she had done to me and my uncle was so angry, he told me, "I am going to send a letter to my sister. I am going to ask her why she sent you to stay with this wicked woman." My uncle did as he said. The next day I saw my father's younger brother. He came to take us back to my village. The wicked woman was angry. She started to cry and pretend that she loved me.

My father's brother that came did not listen to her. He told her we will have to go now. She started to cry and my uncle that came asked her, "Why are you crying? You are so wicked to her, now you are pretending you love her. Don't pretend that you love her because I'm not going to leave her with you anymore."

"Her father wants to see her now," my uncle told her. He told her, "If you love her, all what you have done to her, you should have not



done. Now you want to pretend that everything is ok, you are more wicked than anything.”

I came back home to my mother and father. They were so happy to see me alive because the way that my uncle wrote them the letter they were so worried and scared that I would be dead before my uncle got there. So when I got back home to my mother and father they started to ask me about what happened. I told them: “She keeps me hungry, naked, thirsty, does not care for me. She just wants me to work for her and her children every day. So, when I work and work and I get tired she still wanted me to be working. One day when I was pounding the rice I passed out.”

Not all mothers are mothers. For example, the woman who treated me badly is not a lovely mother even though she had three boys of her own. She wanted a girl to work for her family. A good mother means that you have to care for other children, not only for yours. If you can feed your child you can feed another child, too. You know when the child is hungry, thirsty, naked. I said to myself if God gives me life, even 10 children, I will not give my child to anyone not even my sister.

AMIR ZEINALI

Kinda Cyber Life!

I never get bored if I have Internet in my home. I like to watch movies and listen to music online. It seems you have a full archive of movies and music and you can choose it depends on your mood.



But that’s not all the Internet is doing in my life. In fact, not only my life, today the “world wide web” is doing everything almost. You buy what you need from the Internet, you can order what you want to eat or choose where you would like to dine, buy any ticket for anywhere, pay your bill and your banking deals, make appointment at different places, find university for study or a job for working. Somebody can even work online from their home. Somebody may prefer dating online. The Internet makes people who are in different places in the world closer. Video conversations with your family or friends who are living far away are as easy as a “click” and you can do a lot of other daily things that people 20 years ago couldn’t imagine. That’s not really a long time ago, just when you watch the old movies, even from the 80’s, you realize how were our lives and world. It’s changing every day, more and more and I don’t have any idea what will be next!

Book Review: Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and the Sea: the Glory of Victory*

The old fisherman had 84 days without catching any fish.

Eventually the big fish is caught which was so great. After two and a half days with great effort, he took only the skeleton to the beach.

In the fight between the old man and the sharks who were trying to take a piece of his fish-trophy, the old man triumphed. With pride he brought his wounded body to the beach.

He went home to get sleep for a while when other fisherman and people stared at the grand skeleton of the fish that was down on the beach. It was enough for the old man.

The old man Santiago’s battle with the sharks is like the endless human

struggle with the world. It's not important that he couldn't bring the body of the fish. It was his emotions, his sense of feeling of humanity which is important. It is a story of who won and who is invincible.



ARTUR BADASYAN

My First Education in Chicago

Today was a very good day for me. I met a new teacher and new students. The writing group will help me to write right. I think this school very important for all immigrants.

Many students are here to learn and improve their English. I have studied here about seven months and I think that is special. Well-chosen teachers are working here.

All teachers give us interesting and understanding programs. They are very friendly, sociable, human teachers. I like this school. The students of our class are good too. They are friendly. The teachers and students have become like relatives to me. I feel rich because I am surrounded by good people.

What Is the Meaning of Life

Usually I am a sensitive man. I am writing about Love now. It's given me the meaning for my life. It's a very important feeling for me and all people. I read many books. The best book for me is the Bible. It writes about love. There are many kinds of love. The best kind of love is "Agape." It can unite two hearts. Love is lonely, suffering and kind. Love is not jealous. It does not brag, does not get puffed up, does not behave indecently, does not look for its own interests and

does not become provoked. It does not keep account of the injury. It does not rejoice over unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth. It bears all things, believes in all things. Love never fails. I think that when there is Love in life, it has meaning and is of full value. My conscience was educated by the Bible's principles. I love my God, my family and my friends very much.

Can We Be Successful in this Dangerous World?

We live in a big country where there are many possibilities for us. We become successful. Also, there are different nationalities, various cultures, habits and mentalities. But there is a similarity among us. We want to find and to have our place in this dangerous world.

Some people receive education, a good job, a career and wealth. They feel very successful. It's okay. But we live in critically hard times because people have become lovers of themselves, lovers of money, self-assuming, haughty, disloyal, slanderous, disobedient to parents, unthankful, without self-control, without love of goodness and headstrong. Often I think when can we live quietly? I know, however, we need to be very watchful so we can choose the right way, right responsibility and friends and keep our acquisitions. We can overcome all obstacles. I feel very successful because I'm around careful, intelligent, honest, punctual and kind people.

ZHANNA HAMBARDZUMYAN

One Life

I am from Armenia. I came here because of my children. My son was studying in college and my



daughter was studying at a university. They needed help with their children. I watch their daughter and help the others with homework. I speak Russian and Armenian language but I don't understand English. That makes my work very hard.

I like my country. I miss my friends, relatives, school, children, the commotion of celebration days and holidays. They are very interesting. Students are singing, dancing and presenting shows. I worked there as a teacher and taught for 30 years.

But I love USA too. Here people are very human, generous and kind. I like Chicago. This is a very big city. There is a beautiful lake here. I am from the capital and I like big cities.

Spring One Day

Today is a very good day, sunny and windy. I woke up early. I want to go to the lake, but I have English class. I am going to school. After class I will go to my son's home. He lives in Skokie. My family will go see my granddaughter. She is seven and she has a temperature. My family thinks to give her good food and medicine. There is a very good park nearby. My family with my granddaughter will go to the park.

The park is interesting. There are beautiful flowers and today sun shining and birds are singing. Flowers are very wonderful. There the sick people can recover. Clear air and walk are very helpful for people.

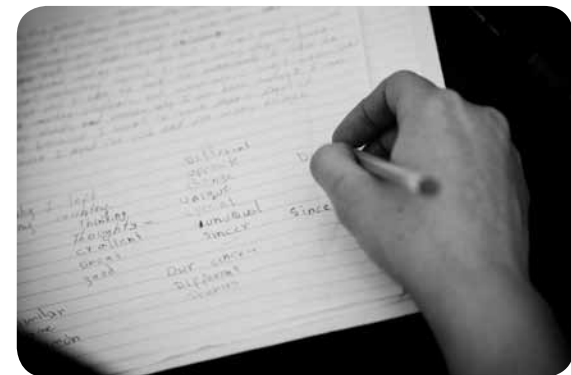
Former Recollections

Five years ago my family lived in Virginia. There is a very beautiful city which has a pleasant forest with slim fir trees. The forests grow wonderful trees, flowers and bushes. In the forests, there are many leaves through which the sunrays do not penetrate.

One time I took a walk in the forest. Suddenly I saw a miracle tree. My heart beat very fast. I felt my country beat. There were beautiful poplar trees that grew to the sky. I sat and thought and I saw also the weeping willow. The forest listened to the leaves rustle and the birds sing, which made my heart fill with memories. I remembered a poem.

One man went off to war and he was wounded. He was found dead and in his hand he has one picture, which on the back was written: "For this girl, for my fatherland needs everyone to fight and die." He was buried under the willow. The willow was singing, the willow was crying. The willow remembers the young man and the girl. They first kissed under willow leaves and spoke their first lovely words. The girl goes to the forest and asks the wind, "Did you see my lovely creature?" He says, "War took him but he did not come back." The poplar tree swings his head, the willow cries. The willow cries and makes a small lake. The willow feels guilty and ashamed. Under the willow grows a flower, red in color, because of the lovely man's blood.

Every time I see the willow and poplar tree my heart starts to quiver. I remember my Armenia's breath. People talking to the willow ask about the couple. The willow every time puts his hand to his head. The willow tenderly swings his head and cries. The poplar tree rustles, the poplar cries, again, to see each other girl and man.



“Sincere Recollections” is a result of Writers’ Circle, an 8-week writing workshop facilitated by Literacy Works in partnership with Howard Area Community Center.

Literacy Works’ mission is to fulfill the promise of a basic human right: the right to read, write, and interpret the world.



To fulfill its mission, Literacy Works provides workshops, trainings and direct literacy services to 50 agencies throughout the Chicago area.

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