

Love, Across Borders

A Collection of Creative Non-Fiction by
Immigrant Seniors and Mount Royal University Students

2024



ABOUT THIS ANTHOLOGY

This anthology is the result of a collaboration between Immigrant Services Calgary (ISC) and Mount Royal University (MRU). Facilitated through the Community Initiatives for Immigrant Seniors Program (CISP), funded by Family & Community Support Services (FCSS), it was over the course of ten weeks that immigrant seniors worked with Prof. Natalie Meisner, PhD and creative writing students to write and craft creative non-fiction pieces about love.

In partnership with

Funding provided by

COMMUNITY INITIATIVES FOR IMMIGRANT SENIORS PROGRAM (CISP)

The Community Initiatives for Immigrant Seniors Program (CISP) is a locally funded social inclusion initiative designed to enhance the integration and inclusion of vulnerable immigrant seniors from diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, creating welcoming and supportive environments to help them feel respected and valued.

This program adopts a proactive, holistic, outcome-driven approach to address the physical, emotional, psychological, social and intellectual needs of immigrant seniors and facilitate their integration in the Canadian society. CISP focuses on empowerment and building the capacity of our seniors to be active and contributing members in the community, and it provides them with opportunities to take part in spearheading, implementing and sustaining meaningful community-based projects.

If you are interested in learning more about CISP, or want to join this program, please visit us at Immigrant Services Calgary.

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CISP IMMIGRANT SENIORS



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Irina Zhukova was born in Moldova, a small country between the Carpathian Mountains and the Black Sea plains. After finishing school and graduating from university, she moved to Moscow Russia to join her husband. She lived in Moscow for more than 40 years and moved to Calgary to be with her daughter and granddaughters. She enjoys walking around Calgary, hiking in the Canadian Rocky Mountains, and improving her English.

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CONTRIBUTORS

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Campton Hancock is an aspiring writer and communicator from Calgary who is inspired by the mundane and the magnificent. She loves to put moments under the microscope to discern what is interesting and dream up fictional scenarios to answer the "what if" questions in her head. When writing about love, Campton has often returned to a song lyric from her favourite band: "I've got so much love to give."

Jules de Guzman is from Vancouver, BC but has lived in Calgary for the past 5 years. They began writing as a child. Their first story was about a potato heist to win a free meeting with Rihanna which they wrote in grade three. They have several poems published in Arts and Literary publications. They are completing their Bachelor of Arts in Sociology with a minor in Creative Writing at Mount Royal University. Next, Jules is pursuing a master's degree in Library and Information Studies. They vow to continue writing even if only in short poems beside grocery lists.

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PROJECT SUPPORT TEAM



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FOREWORD

by Professor Natalie Meisner



When we pitched love as the theme of our fifth creative collaboration, to our group of Immigrant Seniors and Mount Royal Creative Writing students, there was an immediate flutter of questions: What kind of love? Romantic or familial? Love for a son or daughter, a sister or a brother, fathers and sons? Love of country? Love of best friends? Love for oneself?

“Yes,” the group replied. “All of the above,” and we knew we were onto something.

One of the immigrant seniors here featured, thoughtfully notes:

If you ask me “What is love?” I can’t define it with some words or some sentences. I think love resembles the ocean: Sometimes calm and beautiful with small waves and sometimes dangerous and deadly roaring to destroy everything in its path.

So you will find in these pages both the tender and enthralling chutes of new love, as well as some of the sharper edges of love lost, but on every page there is honesty, great writing and passion. The seniors once again were wonderfully generous with their stories. The students challenged themselves to write their own stories from the heart while also bringing their excellent creative writing technique and English language editing skills to the table for their Senior partners. Each year this project provides co-learning opportunities for everyone connected with it, including the MRU students enrolled in the capstone course 4802 (Experiential Studies in Creative Writing), the wonderful seniors enrolled in Immigrant Services Calgary’s Creative Writing Project under CISP, and we MRU Faculty and CISP staff who help to facilitate the project. The project, since its inception, has been about far more than teaching and learning outcomes. Students find career paths and seniors gain new skills but we all also learn in ways that are intercultural and intergenerational. We shared food, laughter, stories, and friendship during a semester while we made the book you are about to read and we hope you enjoy it.

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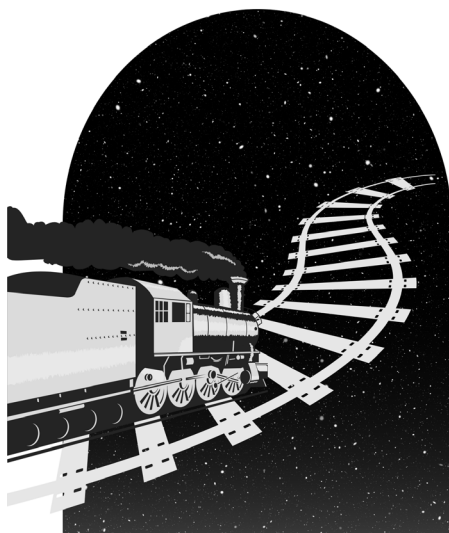
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ALONG
THE WAY





8008

BY CAMPTON HANCOCK

We walked down the tracks in the dark, taking long steps to land on each slat of wood stretched between the rails. My sneakers made echoey thuds and the tracks seemed endless, disappearing on a long straightaway towards Malakwa. The steel beams of a bridge cut strong silhouettes against a navy, star-speckled night. The gaps between the wooden slats became more daunting when the tracks extended over the Eagle River onto the bridge. I followed two boys across the bridge to the centre beam, which criss-crossed up into the sky like a big, industrial ladder.

One boy went first and the other followed me, like two bumpers who believed that I could do anything. They really did believe I could do anything, those boys. The steel was cold and rough on my hands as I climbed the industrial rungs. My time hanging over the river and far above the tracks dilated. I hoisted myself up onto the wide beam and shimmied down.

We sat on the beam in silence at first, and I told the boys that the train

bridge wasn't nearly as scary as the tree we had climbed the night before. That tree had swayed precariously in the winds, its limbs grumbling under our weight, the darkness below truly endless. My hands were covered in sap that night, so I wiped them carelessly on my dark denim jeans. I wore those same jeans again, the next night, on the train bridge, and wiped rust and coal dust across the knees. They told me that they knew I'd be able to climb the bridge; they had so much confidence in me, those boys.

We lit up a joint and passed it down our line, talking about our greatest fears and motorcycles and Germany. We talked a lot about Germany, actually. That was when we decided that one day we would ride motorcycles in Germany, given our shared interest in the country. We agreed, that night, that everything was more exciting on motorcycles; and that summer, everything was.

I watched one boy, Lukas, swing his legs as he sat on the train bridge next to me. He was always in motion and wore his cowboy boots proudly. In the distance, the track lights blinked red and green. I didn't know how to read them, but the boys did. They loved trains, these boys. They said the track was open, so a train would be coming anytime, really. I saw a light approaching from the east and my heart thundered; I pointed it out, but Lukas explained that it was just a service truck sliding down the tracks. We talked a little more, this time about working for the railway and what it would be like to drive a service truck down the tracks.

When the train finally did come, it interrupted our conversation. Lukas looked past me down the tracks and excitement flinted in his hazel eyes.

"We have a train, baby," is how he announced it.

We shimmied down the beam to space ourselves out and laid on our stomachs. I looked at the soles of Lukas's cowboy boots, and then rested my cheek against the cool, dirty beam as the train's single headlight barrelled towards us. The train unleashed its powerful whistle at a crossing down the line and I felt the force in my chest. The boys said that they always laid down when the train approached because they didn't want to scare the conductor. They worried that the conductor would think that they'd jump and splatter across the front window.

The train got closer and the bridge started to shake. One long, low whistle wrapped around us as the engine burst underneath the sturdy, steel arms of the bridge. A warm blast of exhaust blew stray hairs from my ponytail. The containers rushed underneath us as the boys sat up, whooping with

excitement and chattering about the cargo that the engine hauled towards a gradual slope further up the line.

I stayed glued to the beam on my stomach and revelled in the adrenaline rush, too stunned to sit up straight. Lukas gestured to me, and I raised my body from the beam. That boy, in particular, believed I could do anything.

I sat up and clutched the beam as he shimmied towards me. He put an arm behind me, not quite around me, and I felt safe. As I leaned backwards into the crook of his arm, the radiant warmth of his body gentle against my back, I realized that I never wanted to be much further away from him than that. That even resting, just barely, in the crook of his arm seemed slightly too far away.

It was the beginning of our baby love: the type of love that made me feel like a teenager again, on a train bridge, over the Eagle River in the sticky summer heat.

“8008,” Lukas said. “That was the engine number.”

I fell a little more in love with his attention to detail.



BUMPER CARS

BY ALLEY BILLINGS

It is on winter drives that I miss Sal the most. The snow-dressed roads are thick with slush and hidden ice patches that cause tires to spin out and thrust my heart into overdrive. Blanched knuckles grip the steering wheel careful not to over-correct the skid but panicked all the same. Sal always made me feel safe. He had his problems, of course, the rear de-frost lines didn't work, no AC, and that one time in the height of winter when the fan and heat stopped working. I had texted my dad, he is my go-to for all things cars, and he asked, "Did you try kicking it?"

I thought he was joking. Turns out a quick bang to the undercarriage of my glovebox solved everything. Too bad I hadn't taken this suggestion seriously, otherwise I could have had a heated car in minus twenty-five-degree weather weeks earlier.

Despite the kinks in Sal, he was my first and best car. I had affectionately named him Salazar, after Salazar Slytherin, for his emerald-green paint job, but he was more of a Hufflepuff in spirit. We shared the same birth year, 1998, but he looked far worse for wear than I did. His rusted spots were focused at the rear of his quarter panels and his hood was dented in as if multiple bodies had been flung onto it. The boys at work had teased me about how such big dents could have been incurred on Sal but they wouldn't believe me when I told them I have bought it like that; \$500 can only get you so far. Perhaps it's because they knew that when I bought Sal, he had deep scuff marks on his right hind quarters, and then one day he had matching ones on his left side. I had tried to pass off these marks as if they had always been there but to no avail. The truth was that I had attempted to back Sal into my underground parking stall that just so happened to be neighbored by a nifty cement pillar to which I had so affectionately grazed by accident. And thus, the story of Sal's "racing stripes" was born. But Sal never held it against me. Unless he did.

Plotting for his revenge to come to fruition, roughly a year later, when he had left me stranded one October night on the turn-off from Deerfoot to 130 Ave SE. It was after ten when I found myself cruising down Blackfoot trail when Sal's radio, with a mind of its own, decided that the volume of

the country station should indeed be varied inconsistently from high to low. And so, who does one call in this situation? The Ghost Busters perhaps, as haunted cars are serious business, but I rang my dad. At this point, the lightsaber arms of the speedometer and other gauges began to spin without a sense of direction. As I explained the happenings of my automobile to my father, he deduced that “it’s probably your alternator.”

And me, knowing precisely nothing about what that means, responded with an enthusiastic, “Oh, great.”

As I approached a stop light, and being able to mildly assume that there was some kind of power problem with Sal, I asked my dad, “Is my car going to die if I come to a stop?” to which he responded, unbothered, “Probably.”

And just like that, as I came to a complete stop, we were toast. Powerless, helpless, listless.

“Welp,” I said into the phone to my father. “Can you come get me?”

Since he lived on the outskirts of town, he was reluctant, “It’s gonna take a while for me to get there.”

“I’m not going anywhere,” I assured him.

The hour passed slowly. Through the reflection of the back window in Sal’s rearview, I watched people in their cars struggle to navigate the situation. It’s amazing how many people will sit behind a stationary car, with no lights, in front of a green light before they honk and clue in that you’re not going to move.

“Turn on your hazards!” one person yells out their window.

Funny thing about cars that don’t have any power, their lights don’t work...

Agitated, I exit Sal’s lukewarm embrace into the crisp street lamp lit night and park my rear on Sal’s. I attempt to guide traffic around me and Sal from his trunk lid. Turns out, pointing enthusiastically to the adjacent lane is also ineffective. My heart goes out to traffic patrollers. A truck driver pulls up beside me, “You shouldn’t sit on your car like that, I’ve seen a lot of drunk drivers come zooming up roads like these, and I’d hate for you to be hit.”

I thank him for his concern, slide off Sal, and go and stand on a patch of yellow grass beside the road’s curb. For the next few moments, I anxiously watch cars as they come up the road, imagining them obliterating Sal, sending his panels flying like limbs. No more than ten minutes later the trucker is back.

“I really don’t feel comfortable leaving you alone out here like this, can I

take you up to the Timmie's?" he asks.

He sounds genuine enough, and there was a Timmie's just a stretch up the road, but a young girl can't take chances.

"I have someone coming," I assure him. "They should be here soon."

I can see the doubtful concern in the man's eyes, but he leaves without argument. Time ticks by on my cell phone's screen.

A black SUV slowly pulls up behind Sal. Rolling my eyes I point and mouth "Go around." The SUV creeps up beside us as the limo-tinted driver's window slowly rolls down. An attractive man with chin-length hair looks at me and my situation.

"Everything okay?" he asks.

"My car died," I say moving closer to the stranger's vehicle, so I don't have to shout.

"It's too bad I don't have my jumper cables with me," he says, seeming to want to help.

"That's okay, I have someone on the way," I respond.

He leaves me, and I think: It's too bad he didn't want to take me to Timmie's.

Finally, my hero arrives on his steed, an early 2000's burgundy Chevrolet Trailblazer named Ruby. Excited to get the hell off the side of the road I saddle up in the passenger seat.

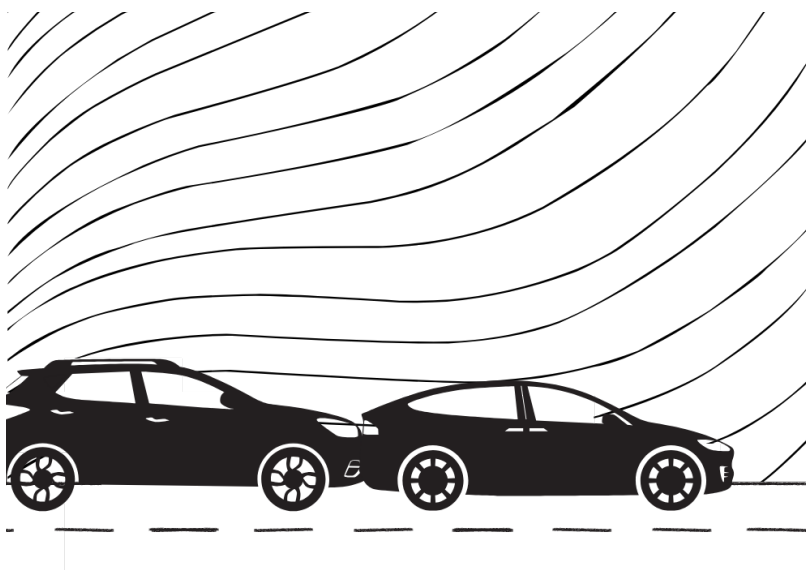
"So, what's the plan? Did you bring some rope to pull it?"

But of course, this was naive thinking on my part.

"No," my dad says with a nonsensical look. "We're gonna push it."

Back in Sal's driver's seat, the transmission in neutral and Ruby's nose snuffed against Sal's rear, we await the green light. And we're off. With a shove at Sal's back end, we coast through the intersection as I furiously heave the steering wheel to the left to make the turn. We come to a stop. 130th Avenue is thankfully deserted. A thud at Sal's butt sends us soaring, at a whopping 5 kilometers an hour, down the road. Expertly executed by my dad's rear-ending skills, Sal and I come to a rolling stop just in front of the shopping mall entrance we were aiming for. The Walmart parking lot will be Sal's accommodations for the night.

Now comes the tricky part. It will take three turns within the tight mall parking lot entrance to reach our destination. One right turn, a left, and then another right. Still immobile, I crank the wheels to the right. Bang. We roll, the first turn is a success, but we overshoot the second. Detour. We continue



in a straight line until we can turn around in painful slow motion. A dance of touch and go choreographed by four left-footed wheels; the lack of power steering fluid being pumped through Sal's system makes for poor dancing shoes. We're almost at the finish line now. If Sal's lifeless body could rev his engine, he would, as we stare down the last stretch. There only stands a parking median between us and one of the many deserted stalls. A quick maneuvered right-hand turn and a slight correction should do it. One final kick in the ass and I rag on the steering wheel sailing us home around the median. Unbelievably, Sal comes to a stop perfectly between the two yellow lines of a stall. "Nice!" I celebrate in the empty cab of the car.


Climbing out of Sal, my heart pounds from the action, and I jump in Ruby. My dad and I laugh at the monstrosity of the process that was, and with Sal tucked in safe Rudy takes me home.



PUMPING GASOLINE

BY CAMPTON HANCOCK

Normally, I decide to get gasoline when the gas light goes on. Sometimes, if I'm proactive, I catch it with a quarter tank left. I tend to frequent Essos, even though I lost my rewards card a year and a half ago. It's an all-weather experience. Your hand can freeze on the pump in the depths of winter, and you can be fanning yourself with an open hand with sweat dripping from your brow in peak summer.



I have the sequence of questions that the digital pump asks almost memorized. My gas tank is on the left side of my car. I pull up to the curb carefully and estimate when my tank will be lined up with the pump. You don't want to park too far from the pump, especially at a tight station, but you don't want to park too close to the pump and feel like you're squeezed between the pump and the car. That's normally how I try to park. Sometimes, there are dead bugs caught between the panes of glass that cover the meter. Suspended there. I try not to look at those.

I had a boyfriend once who told me a story about pumping gas. When his grandfather died, his grandmother was left alone. She knew how to drive and drove often. As time passed, and the service industry changed, some gas stations in Kamloops were closing down. A particular gas station, one of the ones attached to a Co-op, shut its doors, and that boyfriend's grandma could no longer get gas for her car. It was the last full-service station that she knew of; you know, the kind that has people outside the station to pump your gas for you. And she didn't know how to pump gas herself.

I thought that this was a little sad; not sad that his grandma couldn't fend for herself, but sad that she had never gotten the chance to pump her own gas. I love pumping my own gas. It's liberating. I wonder what she would have thought of cold knuckles or a trickle of sweat or the weight of the pump in her hand. I especially wonder what she would've thought of the dead bugs.



LOVE ESCORTS US TO SAFETY

BY YAN JIA (HELLEN)

I still remember the day August 8th, 2017, I experienced the great love from the people around me and the beauty of human nature. I was also moved by the people's courage to fight against the disaster and their courage to face the sudden crushing blow of a Magnitude 7 earthquake in Jiuzhaigou Valley Scenic and Historic Area. I was lucky because I was one of those people who were on the site and survived the disaster.

Jiuzhaigou Valley is famous for its natural scenery, it has various forms of higher plants such as red pines, firs, red birches, springwoods, and fragrant trees. Algae and bryophytes belong to lower plants, and piebald moss is the most famous and unique moss in Jiuzhaigou Valley. Bryophytes are recognized as the most sensitive air pollution indicator plants in the world. There are numerous lakes and different kinds of vegetation, mainly including the following types: coniferous forests, bamboo forests, drought-tolerant vegetation, shrub meadows, and lianas. It was inscribed on World Heritage List by UNESCO in December 1992 and in October 1995, it entered reserves for Man and the Biosphere Program. It is called the fairyland of China.

We arrived at Jiuzhaigou Valley on the evening, August 7th and arranged to stay at an ordinary bed and breakfast which is a three-story wooden frame building. It looks extremely ordinary from outside, but it stood tall despite the 7 magnitude earthquake. Having a simple meal to eat, my husband and I began to hang out around the hotel. It was a quiet and peaceful night, with stars dotting the sky. The whole town was full of human life, warm and comfortable. Tourists from all over the country happily strolled through the Valley shrouded in darkness. Some sat around drinking the famous highland barley wine and talking about the scenery they had seen in the daytime; some were enjoying the local food at the street market, some were bargaining with the shop owner for the local products: beef jerky and tea. My husband and I were walking around streets and looking forward to visiting the Valley to see

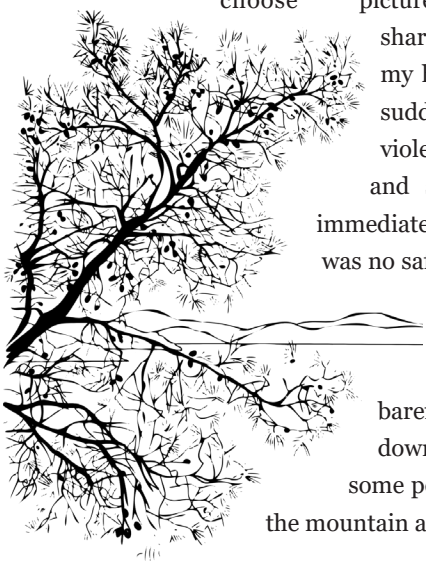
the fantastic scenery of Jiuzhaigou Valley.

We got up early the next morning, took the necessary food, drinks and climbing equipment, and gathered in Jiuzhaigou Valley. When we entered into the Valley, we were attracted by the lakes; it is said there are 40 lakes in the valley and the lakes vary in colour according to their depths, residues and scenery around them. Some lakes appear turquoise just like green jades bracelets; some appear azure, and sparkle with blue-green in the sunlight; some lakes are bluer, and look even darker when viewed from a height. The lakes are crystal clear and rippling with color. The lakes in Jiuzhaigou Valley are comparable to the lakes in Banff. The waterfalls in Jiuzhaigou Valley are also spectacular. Looking from afar, the vast green mountains are lined with silver, like a white ribbon hanging on the mountain, and clear water pours down from the mountain. Looking closely at the waterfall, you will feel like you are facing a formation of thousands of galloping horses. The water hits the rocks like thunder piercing your ears, which is thrilling. We took a lot of photos of the natural scenery of Jiuzhaigou Valley. In one photo, you can see mountains covered with green plants, a emerald green lake which is surrounded by different kinds of trees. This photo reminds me of the photos taken in Banff National Park. They are so similar, as if they are the two pearls embedded in the East and the West, which makes people linger.

After a day's trip, we were very tired, however, we were so excited that we couldn't sleep. At that moment (9:19 p.m.), I was leaning on the bed to

choose pictures we had taken in the daytime. I wanted to share them with my friends on WeChat, while my husband was going to have a shower. All of a sudden, the room began to shake up and down violently, and the power went out. I was shocked and suffering from brain blank. But I realized immediately that it was an earthquake, I knew that there was no safe place for us to hide in the room so I shouted to my husband, "Earthquake! Run out of the room!"

We rushed out of the room and ran barefoot in the dark. I didn't know how we stumbled downstairs and came to a small flatland where some people had already gathered there. The night in the mountain area was extremely cold. Most people only wore



vests and shorts and stood barefoot on the only small piece of flat ground near the hotel. Emotions of fear, anxiety, helplessness and restlessness lingered over the earthquake area. We didn't know what to do; we also didn't know the situation around us, there was no power, no radio signal, we couldn't get any information from outside. We were cut off with the outside world and were confined on the mountain surrounded area.

Suddenly, there was a commotion in the crowd, a girl cried for help for her mother fainted and had lost consciousness. There was no doctor and we couldn't get in touch with the outside world. Our guide was a young girl who didn't know what to do either and she was shivering in the cold. At that moment, someone took the initiative and helped to put the mother on the ground and make the necessary treatments. Most people stood there at a loss. From time to time desperate cries broke out from the crowd as if the end of the world was coming. I really didn't know why I was so calm in the face of disaster. I asked the tour guide to gather the tourists together, and then I stood and told everyone that the top priority was to solve our problem of keeping out the cold.

"Let's unite," I said. "As long as we could spend this night safely, things would be easy to handle at dawn."

After I finished talking, the crowd started whispering to each other; someone said, "What the sister said is true. We must unite to solve the problem of keeping out the cold."

After having a short discussion, we decided to divide our tourists into several groups. The old, weak and the sick stayed where they were, while the able-bodied ones split up to find the locals for help. With the help of the local people, we got what we needed for the night. Everyone knew it was still dangerous at that time, and continuous aftershocks made people afraid to enter the room to get their belongs. However, the local residents, without thinking of their own safety, took out the bedding from the hotel rooms and spread them on the ground, making us spend an unforgettable night. I was touched by the action of these people and I didn't know how to express my gratitude to them. Thousands of words were condensed into one sentence, "Thank you! I wish you a safe life."

After all the things were in order, we lay in the warm quilt in the open air and spent a sleepless night.

It is said that the weather would be very bad after the earthquake, and heavy rain would fall continuously, making human survival almost

impossible. But we were lucky because there was no rain after the earthquake in Jiuzhaigou Valley. It was 11 o'clock before people became quiet and we divided the only quilts we had had into men's groups and women and children's groups, and huddled on the stones. I closed my eyes and tried to sleep but I couldn't. A middle-aged woman who was next to me couldn't sleep either.

She whispered, "Sister, do you feel that the earth beneath us has been shaking?"

I said, "Yes, the earth has been shaking from time to time."

She said, "I don't know what my husband is doing now. But I am sure he must be worrying about me and my daughter."

"My son in Canada must be worrying about my husband and me," I said to her.

We were not in the mood to continue talking. Both of us stared at the dark night sky and fell into silent longing. I didn't know how much time passed, a boy suddenly sat up and said to his father aggrievedly, "I am so cold that I can't sleep any more."

Hearing this, the father could no longer hold back, he jumped up from the ground and ran towards the hotel room, left his wife crying desperately behind him. Soon the man brought their belongings back with him; everyone was finally relieved of their nervousness. Seeing this, a few bold men ran back to their rooms to get their things. My husband also wanted to go and he said to me, "Let me go, everything will be fine."

I insisted that he should wait. For this time, he didn't listen to me and ran towards the room in which we stayed without hesitation. I waited in fear, time passed so slowly, the only three minutes seemed like half a century. When my husband came back, we found dozens of missed calls on our cell phones from my son, my brother and sister, my close friends and the former colleagues who knew where we were travelling. They called or sent messages one after another to comfort us and give us their sincerely greetings.

Early the next morning, the local police rode motorcycles through the street to inform the tourists that there were two ways to evacuate the earthquake area, hearing that people went back to their rooms and took their belongings, quickly got on the bus and began to withdraw from the place. The enthusiastic hotel owner cooked porridge for us, but tourists who were eager to return home declined the owner's kindness and reluctantly said goodbye wishing them a safe life after the earthquake.

The way back to Chengdu was also dangerous. Jiuzhaigou Valley is a mountainous area, and the road in and out is narrow. There are mountains on one side and ravines on the other. The road after the earthquake was even more difficult. Vehicles hit by rolling rocks occupied parts of the road because they could not be cleared in time. Aftershocks continued, and debris from the mountain continued to roll down. We drove hard on the narrow mountain road. The bus went and stopped. I sat on the bus but I didn't dare to sleep, looking out the window alertly. I saw some militiamen risked their lives by standing on the roadside and closely watched the changes in the mountains to keep the vehicles going through the earthquake areas safely. Whenever there was any sight of falling rocks, vehicles had to stop and wait until the danger is over. If the rocks blocked the road, the militiamen rushed to clean them up regardless of their own safety. We were still in the epicenter until noon. Some people started crying because no one had had any food or water for 17 hours. Seeing this, I took out a small bag of cucumbers and some fruit to share with them, and also gave them to the bus driver to ensure that he had the strength to drive us to safety. Later, someone asked why I did that, I told them because I wanted to make the world a better place in my own way. After another 10 hours' drive, we finally arrived in Chengdu.

Disasters leave wounds but also teach strength. Time travels through suffering and witnesses rebirth. (There are kind people in the world and there are some wicked ones too, such as driving without regard for the safety of others, and some cruel scenes of death and injury will leave deep memories in our minds.) Thanks to the local people and the government of Jiuzhaigou Valley, we are lucky to have survived the disaster. I know it is love that escorts us to safety. It is love that supports us to care for each other. It is love that supports us to believe ourselves to face the disaster bravely. It is love that gives us courage to unite and defeats the fear in our minds. It is love that lets us witness the people who run the risk of their lives to save the victims. It is love that makes us understand the virtue of human beings. It is love that encourages us to go forward to meet the bright future.



FRIENDSHIP:
THE GOLDEN
THREAD



STEAMING TEA

BY RAISA ARODZ

Have you ever smelled freshly brewed herbal tea steaming in your cup? It is so memorable and alluring. It is a feeling I have experienced many times when I lived in Russia. The aroma of freshly brewed tea reminds me, with anticipation, of my upcoming trip to my home country and of my friend.

I have a best friend, her name is Tatiana. I've known her for over 45 years, and we met in a small town in 1976, where we worked as teachers. We shared common viewpoints on life and the same interests for different thoughts. This allowed us to become friends for such a long time. I am so happy to have that kind of friendship.

She lives in the village of Chubovka, 60 kilometers from Samara, where I lived before moving to Canada. Tatiana has a vegetable garden. Every spring, as soon as the snow melts, fresh young grass like lemon balm and mint grow in. These herbs can be used to make a healing, fragrant tea; this is another reason to visit my friend.

We sit at the small round table in her cozy little kitchen with a large window overlooking the garden. In the kitchen with bright sunny wallpaper, a white kitchen set, and comfortable upholstered furniture, we usually brew tea directly in cups. Tatiana and I eagerly watch the young leaves swell, becoming the dark green as the smell takes over the entire kitchen. We inhale the heady aroma of tea and drink this enchanting beverage in slow sips. A quiet, intimate conversation flows smoothly, like a trickle, relieving our sour soulmates and filling our hearts with warmth.



MAKING THE MOMENT ETERNITY

BY YAN JIA (HELLEN)

Photographing is my favorite hobby. I not only like taking photos for my family, my friends, and taking photos of the beautiful scenery that I see, but leaving my own shadows in them as well.

After retiring from work, life became relaxed and comfortable. I had more time to stay with my family, had more opportunities to get together with friends, and it became possible to travel and revel in the embrace of nature. One day, I was sitting in my study looking through my old photo albums, lamenting the passage of time. An idea suddenly came to my mind, “Why not start learning photography and use the lens to record my retirement life and enrich myself?” Since then, I began to take up this hobby to remember all these beautiful moments. Taking photos is indeed a pleasant thing, whether it is taking photos of scenery, taking photos of myself or with friends, the photos I take are not as beautiful as those taken by professionals, but they all full of interesting memories.

For the last ten years I have taken many photos for my friends which gives me many valuable records. One of my favourite photos is of me with my friends which holds great memories. That photo was taken in April 2021, after I returned home from Canada. My original plan was to visit my son and his family in Canada and celebrated the Chinese Reunion Festival, Spring Festival, together and then came back home. Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic forced my husband and me to stay in Canada for nearly one year. After overcoming many difficulties, we returned home safely finally. In order to welcome my return, my friends couldn’t wait to get together we chose a restaurant and ate and talked. After the meal, we walked to a river bank near the restaurant and took some photos. We took photos while walking, we wanted to take a group photo at that time, but there were no one around. Just as we were about to leave, a middle-aged woman appeared and we asked her for help and left behind this precious

photo. Why did I say this photo is precious because the place we stood on was the place we had stayed 50 years ago.

There are six ladies in the photo, they are my dear friends and we have been friends for half a century. We met in the summer of 1973 on a farm which lies in the suburbs of our city. At that time there was no public transport to the suburbs so most of us had to go the farm on foot and it would take us two hours. Because we were young and energetic, full of curiosity and expectations for the future, nothing could stop young people from yearning for a new life. However, when we set foot there, what greeted us was an empty land. Since there was no house for us to live in, we had to live in an abandoned warehouse, with more than 30 young girls crowded into less than 20 beds. We put the beds together to make two big beds, which solved the sleeping problem. During the day the warehouse was unbearably hot and smelled bad. The night was even more difficult, with flies and mosquitoes buzzing around



us. Because of the big bed, it is not easy for us to place mosquito nets. Mosquitoes were everywhere. Especially in the quiet night, the sound of swatting mosquitoes is endless. For each night we slept there was a battle against mosquitoes. With the sound of swatting mosquitoes, one said, “A mosquito is killed by me.”

Another followed with, “Another mosquito is wiped out by me.”

Here was the sound of swatting, there was the sound of slapping. The girls fell asleep at last after working hard in the fields all day.

It was at that time the bond of friendship had connected us together tightly. Although we were young girls (19 years old), we did the same work as boys in the countryside. In early spring, we raised seedlings together, got up in the midnight to check the temperature of the

seedlings, and then transplanted the rice seedlings in the cold biting water, we had to endure the invasion of locusts for one really didn't know when the stinging pain turns out to be the locusts burrowing into the legs of the rice-planting girls in the rice field; we had to pull weeds in the rice fields in early summer. The scene of pulling weeds in the rice fields is still unforgettable to me. There were 11 blood blisters on my 10 fingers. We cut rice in the fields together, dried it together, and carried the rice together, made rice peeling in the yard together. We spent three happy and difficult years together. We raised pigs and chickens, we cleaned the river bed in late Autumn. We went to the city to collect slag and mixed them together with manure to ferment them into organic fertilizer. We did all what we could at that time. The hard life then can only be understood by those who have experienced it. Time has witnessed our friendship.

After returning to the city, we worked in different fields but we still care about each other until now. The photo was taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, but everyone in it was smiling and optimism. Although we were isolated from time to time, we kept in touch and encouraged each other through WeChat. In WeChat, we have a special group named Zhishu Kunjue. Zhishu was our brigade name when we were on the farm. Kunjue means Ladies. We can understand it as Ladies of Zhishu Brigade. Every morning, we would greet each other and send blessings.

"Hello, is everyone feeling well today?" one said in the WeChat.

"I am fine for I had a good sleep in the night."

"I had a dream and dreamed of singing together. How I miss all of you! I look forward to meeting you soon."

"I hope the COVID-19 will end and we can get together soon."

"I will present a song to everyone, the name of the song is 'You raise me up', and I hope everyone will take care of yourselves and I believe we can see each other soon."

Sometimes we sang songs which we had often sang together on the farm, sometimes we played piano and shared the experiences on playing piano; sometimes we shared cooking skills at home.

When one's family was in trouble, support would come from all directions. Once, there was a suspected case in our community, people who lived there were not allowed to leave the community for half a

month. Daily necessities became a big problem. It was my friends who extended their hands and delivered daily necessities to the gate of our community, which solved the problem for me. All of this is a prove of our unbreakable friendship.

Each photo has its own story. When I see this photo, I can't help but think of my friends and me experienced together.

I have taken many photos, but this one stands out. Photographing let my retirement life colorful, whenever I feel lonely and bored, I look back at the old photos and recall the story of that happy time. Photographing has not only helped me rediscover the meaning of life but made me further understand that the friendship between friends in need is indestructible. At the beginning, I was not satisfied with the photos I had taken, but through learning and exploration I have been improving my photography skills. Every time I pick up the camera to take photos, I feel mentally happy and satisfied. Even if I take a photo of a fallen leaf in late autumn, a cloud in summer, leisure time with my friends and myself in the lens, these ordinary people and things become so smart and beautiful in the lens, I will feel infinite emotion about the good time.



HOW LOVE CONQUERED A TERRORIST

BY PROF. MANJIT SINGH

It was a dark summer evening and twilight had merged into complete darkness. We squatted on a mat to have our dinner along with our children. Suddenly the door of our house opened as we had forgotten to bolt it from inside and there appeared a man wielding a revolver in his right hand.

“Don’t move from your place and do as directed,” he said.

We were stunned and at a complete loss to understand what was happening.

“I am a dreaded terrorist. The police are after me and I want asylum for the night. Tomorrow I’ll leave your house without causing any trouble. Go upstairs and don’t try to inform the police otherwise you will be no more.”

It was not possible for us to give shelter, I implored, because if the police found out, we would be arrested and charged according to the law of the land. But he was adamant and ominously pointed the revolver towards me. Then he forced us to go upstairs and bolted our room from outside. One can well imagine our miserable plight during the whole night. My three children were too young to do anything. The whole night was spent in prayers to the Almighty to save us from this predicament. At 4.00 am a police van started circling our house. We were sure that the police had got a wind of his presence in our house and now there would be crossfire between the police and the terrorist. But the police van soon left and we feared he was doing everything with the connivance of the local police.

After about five minutes the man with the revolver unbolted the door and told us that he was leaving our house. He asked me to see him off at the gate so that nobody outside should recognize him as some dangerous person. I accompanied him to the gate, and bade him goodbye. When he had entered our house the previous night he had only a revolver in his hand but now he had two full bags. I asked him about it and he admitted that they were full of costly things taken from my house and cash from my wallet. I

said, "Okay gentleman, you are free to take away all these things, we don't mind but will you please spend only another five minutes with us as we want to present you a more precious thing."

Hesitantly and after thinking for a while he came in. We offered him palatable sweets with a cup of tea. We patted him on his back and offered our sincere love and affection. We asked how he had been reduced to such

nefarious activities. He stood up and wanted to leave, but again showered him with parental love and expressed deep sympathy. Finally we persuaded him to tell us his whole story.

"I was kidnapped from my school by some gangsters for a heavy ransom. But my parents were not rich enough to pay that. The consequences were horrible. Rather than killing me they killed my parents."

He choked and I noticed there were tears in his eyes which started rolling down. My wife consoled him again with love and affection and he began again, "I was all alone now in the world except a distant uncle who did not bother about me. The results were disastrous. I fell into evil ways, learnt all the sinister designs and started committing various sorts of crimes one after the other and this is how I am here before you."

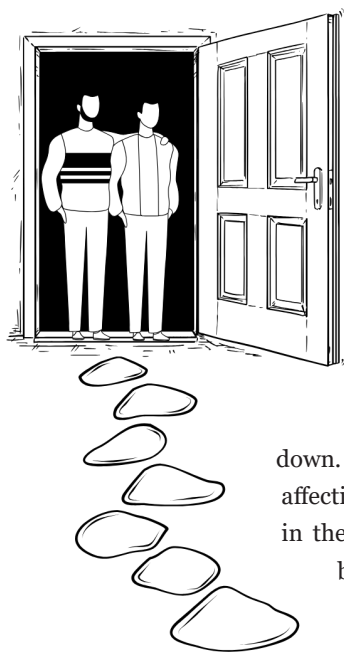
We expressed deep sympathy with him and gave him many examples of how honest living and noble life can do wonders for one's life. He kept silent for a moment and then, leaving both the bags there, he wanted to go out.

"So sorry," he said, "that I caused you mental torture throughout the night but I was helpless."

"No worries", we said, "You can take away all the things you have put in he bags but leave this nasty path".

I do not know what was flashing across his mind but leaving both the bags there, he touched our feet and bade us good bye.

After a year or so he met me on a taxi stand. There was a brilliant smile



on his face. He again bowed down and said:

“Sir, you have changed my life. I am indebted to you for all the invaluable guidance you gave me. I am the owner of a cab which I purchased by dint of hard work and it is all because of you. I am leading a very happy and comfortable life now and I shall never forget you.”

My joy knew no bounds at that moment. Thanking the Almighty Lord I gave him a bear hug and we departed.



A HAPPY GET TOGETHER

BY NAZMUS SALEHIN

I have been here in Calgary for about a year. Calgary is on the other side of the Globe from my country, Bangladesh. The two are separated by about 20,000 kilometers. Bangladesh is a South-East Asian country located on the eastern side of India. It takes more than 30 hours to fly from Bangladesh to Calgary. It is easily conceivable how far I am away from my people. While living here, I have been spending time with my son's family, and grandchildren. I enjoy Canada and its natural beauty, like the Rocky Mountains, Banff Resorts, Lakes and Parks. Canada is a winter-dominated country whereas I am from a tropical region. Though I am not accustomed to the snowfall, I still explore and enjoy this kind of winter. Calgary is one of the most livable cities in the world as per the Global liveability Index. I like this City. I find people are liberal and amiable here. It is the Country of diversity and immigrants. Still, I will always miss my home. I miss my family and friends, ex-colleagues, my society, and my culture. I reminisce about numerous memories back home. I always think if only I could meet my friends here in Calgary.

One day God helped me to do just that. All of a sudden, I received a phone call from a friend, Harinarayan Das.

"Sir, I am Harinayan. I'm in Calgary now," he said.

I couldn't believe my ears.

"Did you say you're in Calgary?" I replied.

"Yes sir," he responded.

It was like a gift from God. Harinarayan had come to visit his son's house. What could be more desirable than that? I could not dream of meeting an old friend in this distant land. Surprising me even more, he said, "Another friend Tapan Kumar Ghosh is also in Calgary."

How could this happen? Three friends together here in Calgary! I enquired about Tapan; he was visiting his brother's family, Harinarayan told me. I proposed that we get together. Then we decided to meet at a Coffee Shop on the second week of September 23. Harinarayan said he would invite Tapan to attend.

I was reminiscing! We three were colleagues in the largest Bank in Bangladesh-Sonali Bank. Initially, I worked at the field level as Branch Manager, and Regional Manager. Later on, I moved to the Head office and played a role as a mid-level Executive. At one stage I moved to another Bank and at last retired as the Chief Executive Officer. It was 37 years I served in the Banks. Tapan had a brilliant career in the Bank as well. He also reached top-level Executive before he retired. Harinarayan was another brilliant man. He became the Principal of Bank Staff College. Sonali Bank is the largest State-owned Bank. It was not a profit-motivated Bank but entrusted with the implementation of the Government's rural economic development endeavors. We invested in rural areas, especially in Agri-sector. In fact, Bangladesh is an Agri-based economy, it needs investment in the Agri-sector, especially in crop production. As a result, Bangladesh went from being in a food deficit to being self-sufficient. Being involved in these activities, made us happy and proud as we had opportunities to do good for the people. We were good friends and worked together. Sonal Bank underwent a World Bank-sponsored 'Enterprise Growth and Bank Modernisation Project'. The World Bank Project suggested the closure of loss-making rural branches, but our government desired to continue the rural branches investing in rural areas. There was a conflict to some extent. However, our government managed the World Bank Project by closing a few rural branches, but not all as prescribed by the Project. The three of us were witnesses to all these events and played a proactive role. What a wonderful time we had! All is

past now and won't come back, but we cherish those memories.



The much-anticipated moment came. I went to the Starbucks in Country Village NE as decided earlier. My son dropped me off. It was the afternoon of the second week of September, and it was a cloudy and cold day. I wore a jacket. I was the first to arrive there and eagerly awaited their arrival. Harinarayan was the second to arrive; dropped off there by his son. I was actually waiting outside of the Coffee Shop and received Harinarayan

at the car's door. I hugged him. He expressed surprise and said, "It's great, sir, that I meet you here. I will carry this memory for a long time."

"I too! Seeing you after such a long time," I replied.

It could not be expressed in words what a feeling it was! Unbelievable! How could it be that we meet in Calgary thousands and thousands of kilometers away from back home! Actually, God made it happen so to say. We gossiped while eagerly waiting for Tapan. At last, we found Tapan getting out of the car, and we raised our hands to him. His brother dropped him off. In the same way we received Tapan: Tapan said, "I was counting days until we would meet."

We hugged each other. Tapan was dressed in a Bangladeshi-style tropical suit. After a long period of about 5-6 years, it was a reunion. We ordered coffee and snacks. I had a plan to pay, but Harinarayan's son took the chance. We took the table outside, in front of the shop. My son went home and would come back to pick me up. Harinarayan's son and Tapan's brother left us to give us exclusive time together. While enjoying coffee and snacks, memories of back home came into our discussions.

What sweet memories they were. We remembered it was the prestigious, largest Bank that we worked in. Friends like Prodip, Ataur, and Humayun came up in our discussions, who all served as Chief Executive Officers. It is a sad memory that Humayan was entangled in a loan scam case and now is living in exile. Tapan brought reference to our senior boss and Principal S C Chakraborty and said, "He has been in good health despite his old age."

He is 85 years old and has been single all his life. I went further and said, "We really have a profound regard for him. It is really sad that another Ex. chief executive officer S M Aminur Rahman expired recently."

We remembered the ups and downs of our beloved organization. Expressed our satisfaction with the present performance of the Bank. How nice it was to reminisce. Activities of the Retired Officers Association also came up in the discussion. The association, (with about 10,00 retired officers) created a platform to exchange and share views and feelings. The overall aspect of our home country was not left out of the discussion. We expressed our dissatisfaction that after 50 years of our independence, political stability was not yet established. Unstable political conditions retarded the economic progress of our country, we observed.

The day was ending, and the cold intensified. The discussion had come to an end, but we didn't want to finish visiting. After a long time together, which

we enjoyed very much, we didn't know when we would meet again, or if at all! I realized the value of friendship. In the meantime, my son came along with my granddaughter to pick me up. My son, granddaughter, Harinarayan's son, and Tapan's brother joined our discussion. It gave it another dimension and they facilitated our discussion. Without their intervention, it would not have happened. They became part of the memories created there. We will cherish them for a long time. We started toward our destination, hugged, looked back at each other, and then went out of sight.



SPECIAL
OCCASIONS



THE SCENT FROM MOM

BY LILI ZHANG

The Spring Festival, also known as the Lunar New Year, is the most important time for Chinese people. My mom began to prepare for the Festival about a month before. She would do the general cleaning for our rooms. She cleaned the walls, windows, cooking utensils, and mopped the floors. She also washed the beddings and clothes for the whole family by hand.

Mom had to prepare special foods for the Festival. She made steamed buns in the shape of a hedgehog, mouse and rabbit. She made red-bean paste buns, red-date buns, and Niangao—sticky rice cakes—for the New Year. In Chinese, Nian means sticky and has the same pronunciation as year, Gao means cakes, and has the same pronunciation as high, so Niangao indicates that our life will rise higher year after year. A big multi-layered pagoda-shaped red-date bun was made for the whole family. Each of the family members would have a piece of the big bun during the Festival. Besides these foods, my mom had to stew pork, chicken, and to fry fish. She also made some local foods from her home town, such as deep fried potato, bean curd, and Tuosu-- deep fried dough balls. She grew raw green-bean sprouts by herself for a special dish. Mom had to prepare enough foods for the family to eat for a week because we mainly ate the ready-made foods during the Festival. We often smelled the food fragrance coming from the kitchen during these days. Now this scent has gone away. I can only smell it in my heart when the Spring Festival is coming.

Mom left home to work during the day; she had to do all these things when she returned home and on Sundays. She had no time to eat breakfast at home. She often took a bun with her and ate it while walking to her work place. She got up earliest and went to bed latest. When I went to bed, Mom was still busy working in the kitchen; when I woke up, she had been working quietly. She did all these things with all of her strength and love for the family.

All of the kids were happy for the Festival because they would have the best foods of the year, and have the opportunity to put on new clothes, light firecrackers, watch fireworks and go to movies. However, we did not think of

how much hard work our mom had put into this.

“Your grandpa often said: ‘A child will only eat without doing anything at home for ten years’,” Mom said to me.

When I was near ten years old, Mom asked me to help her to do some house work. Mom taught me how to clean windows, wash clothes, make steamed buns, chop vegetables, wash tableware and sew a quilt. Many of the life skills I have were taught by my mom. She said these skills would be useful for me in the future.

When we grew up and had our own families, on every Lunar New Year’s Eve, we still came to our parents’ home and had the Lunar New Year’s Eve dinner together. This is a Chinese tradition to have a family reunion dinner with the parents on the Lunar New Year’s Eve, no matter if they live in the same place or not. After decades of hard work for this family, Mother was getting old; nevertheless, she still worried about the New Year’s Eve dinner and every children’s families. She told us to prepare for the Lunar New Year, and to buy and cook foods for the New Year’s Eve reunion dinner. On the New Year’s Eve, all of my brothers with their wives and kids, over ten people, would come to our parents’ home. Mom and Dad’s faces were full of smiles, especially when their grandchildren said hello to them. Mom could not stop looking at us one by one. There was a smile on my mother’s face that she did not usually have.

When various kinds of food, including cold dishes and hot dishes, were laid on the table, we began to sit around the table in order of age. Mom and Dad sat in the main seats, my brothers and I with our wives sat on both sides of our parents, and then the grandchildren sat. First we toasted our parents. We stood up and raised our glasses with wine to wish Mom and Dad good health, longevity and happiness. Mom and Dad expressed their happiness to see all of us, and to know that we were all doing well. Our parents picked up the dishes with chopsticks first, then we started to pick up the dishes. All the kids were eager to pick up what they liked most, and they ate happily. Mom looked at their eating with smile. After a while, half of the foods were gone. Mom only took a little bit of food from the big plates on which there were more foods left. There was only a small amount of food on Mom’s plate. I knew the favorite dish for Mom was braised pork. I picked up a piece of the braised pork and put it on Mom’s plate.

“Mom, have a piece of the braised pork. It is delicious,” I said.

Mother glanced at me and said, “I am not hungry. Help yourself.”

Mom put the piece of braised pork back to the big plate. Mom ate a little during the dinner.

Most of us had enough and left the dinner table. We started clearing the table. Some big plates had some food left and some big plates had no food left. Mom brought a big plate to herself, which there was some soup left on. She put some rice on the plate, and mixed the rice with the soup on the plate and ate it.

“Mom, have some dishes. There are still some left,” I said.

Mom shook her head and said, “I know. I’m full.”

Seeing this, my heart was crying.

I can’t hold back my tears every time I think of this scene. Mom devoted all her life to the family, especially her children, just like a candle sacrificing itself by lighting the way to happiness for others. Mom, when could we have the reunion dinner with you again?

I visited my parents almost every week. Once, Mom was sitting on the bed, doing something. She called me over and asked me to sit next to her. I hadn’t sat so close to Mom for years. I could hear Mom’s breaths. I felt the same feeling as being with Mom when I was a child. Mom talked about what happened in the family recently and asked about my work and life. All of a sudden Mom said, “A button on your shirt is missing. Take your shirt off; let me sew a button for you.”

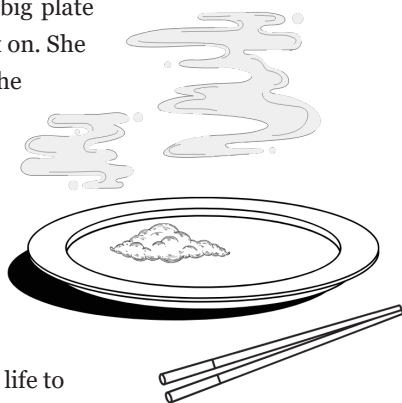
That button had been missing for quite some time; however, nobody said they wanted to sew it for me, and nobody even told me it was missing. My mother’s words flowed throughout my body like a warm current.

I remembered Mom was always busy at home sewing clothes, quilts, mending socks or making shoes for us when we were young.

“Mom, I have grown up. Now, I should take care of you! It is my responsibility to take care of myself. You have taught me how to put thread through a needle, how to begin and finish sewing.”

This is what I wanted to say to my mother. Instead, I said, “Mom, I will sew it myself.”

Mom looked at me. It seemed that she wanted to say something. In my mother’s eyes, I was always a child of hers, no matter how old I was, and



in my mother's heart, it was her responsibility to take care of her children, no matter how old she was. The happiness of her children was my Mom's greatest wish.

Mother's love is from her heart, selfless and generous.
Mother's love is unstoppable, thoughtful and meticulous.
Mother's love is tender and warm; without any words it touches me.
Mother's love begins before you are born and you realize.

Mother's love is beyond your imagination, deep and broad.
Mother's love is unforgettable; in my body it flows.
Mother's love is the greatest love; it cannot be replaced by any other love.
Mother's love will stay with me for my whole life.

Mom, have you ever felt tired? Have you ever felt hungry? Have we ever made you angry, let you down, or made you sad? Mom, are you missing us? We are waiting for you.

During the Spring Festival, I could always smell the familiar fragrance when my mother was in. After my mother left, the Spring Festival lost its unforgettable fragrance. When can we smell that familiar fragrance and eat that unique meal again? The Spring Festival comes year after year; however, it cannot bring back the scent from my Mom!

The saying goes like this: "Only when you have your own children, will you be able to understand the kindness and hard work that your parents have done for you ("养儿方知父母恩")."

But when you want to repay your parents, they are no longer there (欲服侍, 亲不待).



Birthday Party

BY PRATIMA MALLICK

One day I went to a park.

That day was my granddaughter's and two daughters' birthdays.

My son invited his many friends and family.

First my granddaughter cut her birthday cake.

All her friends were clapping, laughing, and enjoying themselves.

Then they began to sing.

I like singing, I especially enjoy the singing of children.

The children were playing, the ladies and the gentlemen were gossiping, sipping on wine while others played cards.

My son arranged a large dinner of Byriani, Chicken rajala, fried chicken, fish kalia and more!

Everyone was full afterwards.

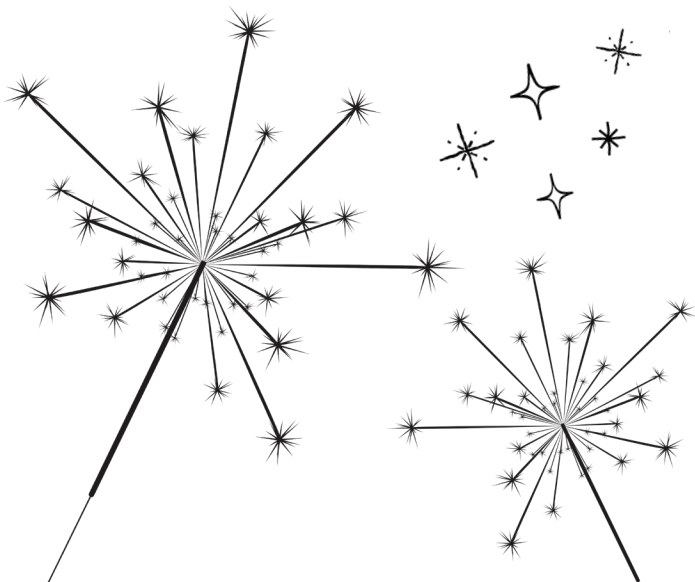
Wishing you a wonderful birthday.

Happy birthday Tupur and Arov.

I hope you have your cake and eat it too.

Both of you are stars.

Sending both my love on your special day.

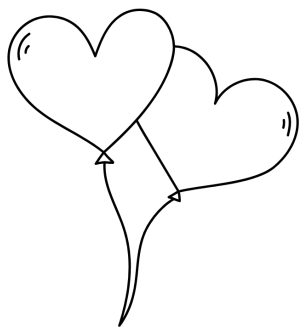




A simple celebration, a gathering of friends and family here
wishing you great happiness and a joy that never ends.
It is always a treat to wish happy birthday to someone so sweet.
I love you more than you shall ever know.
Wishing you a day filled with love, laughter, and cake.
Dear God, please bless my grandson and daughter on their
birthday.
Happy birthday lovely son and daughter.
Birthdays are always special because it helps you to see how far
both of you have come and how far both of you still have to go.
Wishing both a wonderful birthday.
Friends may come and go, but siblings are forever.
I am so blessed to have you both.
God bless you both on your birthday.
God of love and money.
I thank you for my grandson and daughter for the gift of her
life.
Forget the past, look forward to the future for the best things
are yet to come.
Birthday is a very happy day for everyone.
Birthdays come once a year in everyone's life.
Everyone celebrates their birthday with great joy.
On this day friends and relatives come to this park, wishing
them happy birthdays.
On this day the whole park is decorated, and everyone gives
their gifts.

For My Sister That Surprised Me

BY SHAHRBANOO GHAFARI



My dear sister, you surprised me twice.
Once for my sixtieth birthday.
I was in Shiraz, you were in America.
You coordinated with our family, and asked them to surprise me.
One of my sisters invited me to her house.
I arrived at the door and rang the doorbell.
She opened the door.
It was dark everywhere.
I saw a glint.
My youngest sister, my brother, and my daughter and their families were there.
They greeted me by singing happy birthday.
They made a memorable night for me.
I got beautiful gifts and hospitality.

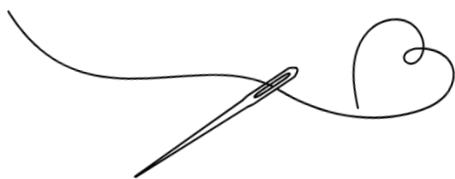
The second time.
It was two years ago.
Coronavirus was not completely over yet.
I was in Calgary.
You had arranged with my children for my seventieth birthday.
You called me and told me that you would come to Calgary to see
me.
I was not happy you were coming because I was worried about
spreading the virus here.
I asked you, "Please don't come."
You didn't care, and you came.
You wanted to be alone with my children, I didn't know why?
You left home under the pretext of seeing the University of Calgary
and took a photo there and sent it to me.
You went to my daughters house and arranged a birthday
celebration.
I went to my daughter's house according to a previous appointment.
I came across a beautiful scene.
The house was decorated with beautiful balloons.
We had a great time together having dinner, dancing, singing, and
receiving beautiful gifts.
I never forgot.
I love you.

FESTIVE SEASON CELEBRATION

BY SUCHITRA MALLICK

Bangladesh is a country of beautiful celebrations and Diwali is the biggest festival in Bangladesh, India, Nepal, as well as all over the world. I love Diwali as a festival, especially the way it is celebrated and its association with my culture and religion. Diwali is known as the festival of lights and the victory of good over evil. As I immigrated to Canada many years ago, I really miss these beautiful celebrations with my close and extended family members. Diwali/Deepavali is a one-day celebration for us, and we grew up seeing our mothers, aunts and grandmothers keeping a fast during the day and break it only after the puja is completed at midnight. We used to celebrate with great enthusiasm, love, and happiness. However, last year, all the childhood memories refreshed when I, with fellow seniors, got a chance to attend Diwali event organized by Community Initiatives for Immigrant Seniors program via Immigrant Services Calgary. I was so fortunate to have the opportunity to attend this free event while participating in singing and dancing performances and enjoying the food and gifts.





HOW I SEW WITH LOVE

BY JIALIN MA

When I was a child, I was a quiet little girl. I loved playing with dolls, dressing them up, and adding lace to their clothes. I had a strong interest in making clothes. I always imagined tailoring clothes for myself and my family to be a very enjoyable process, yet, I never got into it as I grew up.

The first time I sewed clothes was in my 60s, post retirement. I used an old-fashioned Shanghai Feng-Hua brand with a foot pedal, an antique sewing machine from the 60s that my mother owned. Under the guidance of my mother, I threaded the needle, stepped on the pedal, turned the wheel, and pushed the material. After some struggling, I finally tied up a small edge. My mom watched me and checked my work.

“Is it a straight line?”

“This is not a straight line and it doesn’t look good.”

My mom, in her 80s, talked to herself with a smile while wearing reading glasses. I felt ashamed and tried again. I had poor hand and foot coordination. If it was not satisfactory, I would take it apart, then sew it up and try again. Every time thread was removed, it would fall somewhere on me. Soon enough, there were threads all over my clothes. I felt irritated by their “pranks” and complained, “This is really a test for an old lady in her 60s. Why bother? I am torturing myself.”

The first time I made a jacket, I took apart all the threads of an old unworn jacket, and then re-sewed them back together as they were. The product in the end was crooked and uneven. It was a complete failure.

After a period of time and several pieces of clothing being taken apart and sewn together, I gradually became more confident. My first T-shirt was for myself, then I made several pieces in different colors and styles. I made a few T-shirts for my husband, then made long-sleeved and short-sleeved shirts for my mother and mother-in-law. They seemed to be in good mood and spirits in the bright-colored clothes I made for them. In the past five years, I have made more than 60 T-shirts. All my family members received a few.

Qipaos are my favorite garments to sew. Qipao, also known as cheongsam, is the national Chinese dress of women. Qipao is quiet. When I put on, no matter how lively or anxious I am, I calm down. It brings me satisfaction and peace of mind, and makes me full of confidence, charm and temptation. It captures the charm of ancient Chinese culture. Also, Qipao is very difficult to make as it has special procedures such as overall cut, neckline making, striped edge, buttons or plate buckle and lot of them require meticulous manual work. Although it took me more than 10 days to make a traditional Chinese cloth, it took 2 days to complete 7-9 buttons, I enjoyed it very much.

One of my most joyous sewing moments was Chinese New Year in 2022, when my mother and mother-in-law greeted each other via video calls due to Covid-19 restrictions, both wearing red traditional Chinese coats that I tailored for them.

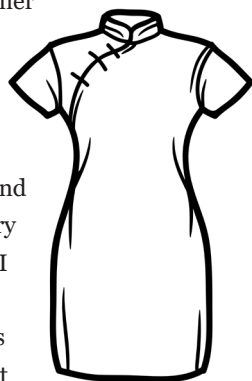
“Happy Chinese New Year, my old sister,” my mother said.

“My sister, you look so beautiful in this red coat today. How about celebrating the Chinese New Year,” my mother-in-law replied.

“Yes, I like this coat very much Jialin just made and mailed to me. It’s buttoned and lined inside, and it’s very comfortable to wear. My neighbor asked me where I bought it,” my mother said.

“I like this Chinese ethnic style very much too. It is 100% cotton soft fabric. Jialin tailor-made for me. Not only does it fit well, it’s also very festive and fashionable. She has made more than 20 pieces this year from top to bottoms, and from inside to outside. I can’t even wear them anymore. I have never worn so many bright clothes in my life,” my mother-in-law replied.

Cheerful and happy smiles appeared on the two old mothers’ amiable



faces, despite being in two different cities and more than 1,100 kilometers away. I took a precious photo of two nearly 90-year-old mothers wearing the red clothes made by me at that moment. My mother-in-law passed away in December 2022. It hurts. My family and I will always miss her: she was quiet strength and gentle and left many good memories for us.

The clothes, although they are worn on the body every day to give warmth, have more meaning when I make them stitch by stitch by hand. I believe that my thoughts and care have gone into every thread and the garment becomes a loving presence that can wrap around the person wearing it. I love to sew clothes.



For My Granddaughter on Her Fourteenth Birthday

BY NAZMUS SALEHIN

I have you, oh my sweet heart
I love you, but how far? I don't know,
I can only say, I love you
Unmeasurable, uncountable.

I remember when you were born.
They laid you in my arms.
A new world opened up to me,
I dreamed of you, you came.

You are mine, I love you
You smile, I laugh
You cry, I burst into tears
You are happy, I feel happy

You are my inspiration to live for life
I will love you forever
I will love you until my last breath
If God allows, I will be loving you in heaven.



FAMILY TIES



Father's Love

BY YAN JIA (HELLEN)

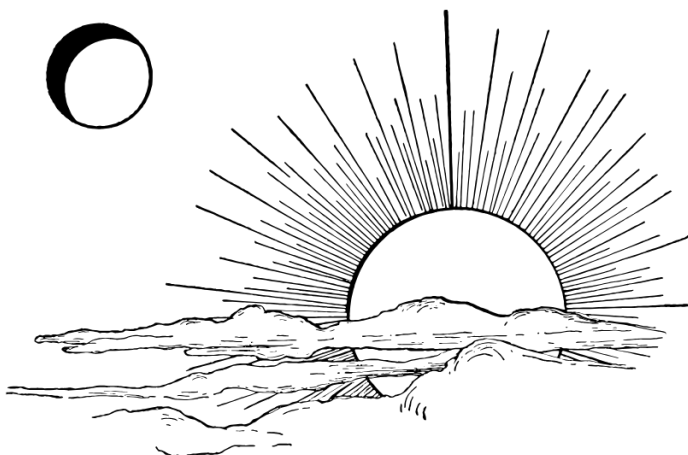
My father has passed away for 13 years,
Left us endless thoughts.
Father was a person with few words,
He spent his life sowing the seeds of love,
Using his love to water the dry heart.

Father's love is like the wings of an eagle,
Creating a peaceful harbor—a warm home for us,
read books, magazines, newspapers ,
Sang songs, played game together with my siblings,
That was the most pleasant time we had had.

My father loved reading and kept a lot of books at home,
three of us, siblings, followed his steps,
We never argued about food or clothing,
But sometimes we would get into arguments about a book,
for who would read it first,

He quietly repelled mosquitoes for us on summer nights,
silently closed the window protecting us from cold on autumn
nights,
secretly covered us with quilts on winter nights,
opening the windows on spring mornings,
Let the warm spring breeze blow on us.

Father went to work early and came home later
However whenever getting off work,
three siblings would cuddle up next to him,
Like little birds chattering about events at school,
Then unconcealable joy appearing on father's face.



My father's love is like the sunshine in the cold winter,
Brought warmth in our minds;
He never yelled at us, even we did something ridiculous;
He always reasoned with us patiently,
Until our catching the true meaning of the facts.

My father's love is as deep as sea,
He encouraged us to do volunteer work in the city library,
He told us to take active part in the after school activities,
He supported us to do chores by ourselves,
Making us more independent and confident.

My father said he loved us, he couldn't bear to leave us,
the love for us supported him through the darkest period of
time,
He never complained about the difficulties of life,
He told us as long as there was love in our minds,
Nothing could stop us from going forward.

My father's silent giving and modesty earned him respect and
love of his colleagues and neighbors.
After his retirement, he resumed his hobby of writing poetry,

shared his poetry with the youth,
He volunteered to teach poetry lovers rhymed poetry.

Father's love is a magical power,
bringing hope to us,
soothing the wounds of us;
encouraging us to explore the unknown world,
To face new challenges.

Father's love is like a bright light in the dark guiding us on the
way home,
Father's love allows us to look at everything in the world with a
equal heart;
Father's love gives us strength to face the hardship;
Father's love tells us to take responsibility for family and
society;
Father's love makes us understand possessing love, we will not
feel lonely.
Father's love will be around us forever.

Love Has No Alternative

BY RAISA ARODZ

So many bright words about love
Piercing, charming, beautiful
But only a mother's love
Stands apart and exclusive

Mother's love for her child means many things:
Care, help, teaching, forgiveness
Understanding, attention, and patience
It is love beyond reason and beyond calculations

Her children are her BFFs
They are the best friends forever
If something happens to her kids
Her love, like a shield, will save and cover

I am a mother, and I have two kids
I know that this kind of love needs a special words:
Mother's love is a great power with bottomless depth
And mother's love is wider than the universe.



Overgrown

BY JULES DE GUZMAN

wet autumn air
school bells
crinkly, sweaty uniforms of white and black
slick concrete
the warm glow of sun lighting burgundy and mustard leaves
leaves forming piles on the sidewalks
in between the cracks where street and lawn meet
sounds of children playing and balls bouncing

my mother late to pick us up
her tired face
after a day of customer service through the phone
they would complain about their internet or phone bill
yell at her and call her names
she would respond looking at the photograph of us tacked on
her cubicle wall
using the same voice she used to talk to my teachers
a voice so soft as if holding back
as if she put on the una corda
the pedal below the piano that softens the tone
slightly muting it
a pedal i never understood the use for
until i put a piano in my own apartment
an apartment mom said reminded her of 1886 East 49th avenue
the house we all grew up in with my Lola and Mama,
a house that is no longer ours and will never be again
a house with a willow tree of over 100 years
it was cut down because it took up too much space
i looked out the large front window crying
everyone just said: it grew to be too much
it was now or later

the ride home from school to 1886 East 49th ave
my mom and her raven black hair
swaying past her shoulders, effortlessly wispy
she would blow dry it with her head upside down
in the blurry, fast mornings getting ready for school
already late, never on time
she always looked like a movie star despite her eyes
constantly red
on her dresser
eye drops and lipstick
sometimes a notebook or a novel she kept receipts in
she wore the same brown lipstick forever
shaped like a black bullet

battered navy blue minivan
stained seats, crumbs between the cracks
grey and black speckles, cracked windows
afternoon sun seeping in
the drive home underneath shedding cherry blossoms
up victoria drive
past the mcdonald's we never dared asking for anything from
past the 24 hour pho places,
the square with the london drugs
where my grandma's mazda hatchback stalled one night
in the parking lot that is so small so no one could get past her
and i just kept eating my ice cream cone from the passenger
seat
signaling to angry drivers with my eyes
"I'm sorry, I can't do anything, I am 10 years old."

past the chinese bakery, the value village
the pharماسave with the post office, the neighborhood pub
the bubble tea place we would go to sometimes
the value village smelled the same forever and ever
like dusty clothes and old plastic appliances
like yellowing paper
sepia photobooks of families we will never know

turn right a street after 49th to get to our alley way
to park the van in front of the garage, not inside it
rusty garage full to the brim
tools, strollers, boxes, bikes
overgrown
i liked the smell, it smelled like old wood
it smelled moist and cool
like the basement of the value village filled with books
it gave me comfort knowing it has been there for way longer
than
i have been here

feeling tired, the relief of changing out of our uniforms
into an old tee shirt and shorts
out of a pilling kilt, undoing the oversized safety pin
laying the white button up dress shirt on the chair
turkey sandwiches with tomato soup for dinner

after dinner
we would all go for a bike ride around the neighborhood
my mother would push the stroller with rio in it,
my youngest brother, about 5?
he has been a baby for 15 years in my mind

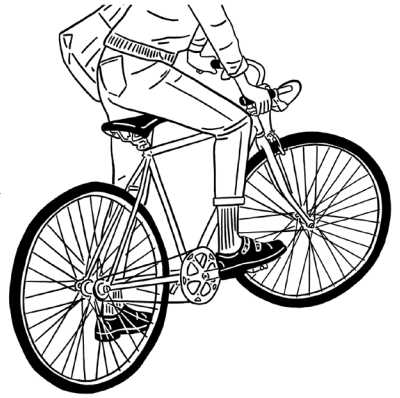
pile up by the rusty garage
canopy of trees
three younger brothers and me, the oldest, leading the way in
either a bike or old rollerblades...
the bike
it was mine but wasn't mine
it was like a lot of my things
passed on from those before me
slightly too large for my legs
i had to put more trust in it

out of the alleyway and down the hill to the park
towards the high school emptied of its students

i never a single soul inside that school
i imagined us entering one day
stepping foot into the pitch black halls
weary of ghosts or monsters that creeped
there
but it never happened

the road down was full of bumps from
tree roots growing underneath roads
snaking through the basements of houses
my brothers zipping behind me
a row of ducks
me in place of the mother duck because my mom stuck to the
back
pushing rio in a stroller
his lips zipped around a juice box, sunglasses covering his bug
eyes
she probably liked to see us all at once
have our bases covered
when we get home, my great grandma would watch tv
she watched tv all day
she watched the news, she watched maury, judge judy
she would rock in her chair by the window,
sometimes gazing outside see the sunset,
to look out at her flower garden that she so carefully took care
of
its fading roses, geraniums, hydrangeas
the illegal burial ground of her old dog, georgie
the stone bird bath, the apple tree
she watered the garden, everything in it
after sun down so they wouldn't get too hot
but with the air starting to cool,
she watered them less and less

we would all go up to her room,
we lived in the basement while her and my grandma lived on
the main floor



she would sit there rocking in her chair, watching the evening
news
three of us with a look in our eyes that said
we want something
“Hi Lola”
“Hellooooo.”

she would slowly stand up from her chair
her slippers shuffling on the dusty hardwood floors
heavy steps towards the other side of the room
giving us hugs on the way

“So...you want a cookie?”

all of our eyes on the dresser
a number of objects:
secretly fancy jewelry
her fancy quilted coat that tied with bows at the top which
she wore to flea markets where she wandered about with her
hands tied behind her as if observing the flowers in her garden

twist top jars that seemed to be a liter large
the smell of dry almond sugar flickering in the air as she undid
them
her wrists were thin and frail
she twisted the lids and unveiled her hidden strength
i knew that she was secretly strong because whenever i hugged
her
i could feel her chest was hard
she squeezed me with a surprising amount of force as if
squeezing me would freeze time
i saw her strength when she cooked
she put her whole body into stirring a pot of chicken soup
she cleaned peoples' houses her whole life in Canada
she kept her muscles from cleaning floors

i remember her always talking about cleaning “under the table”
i thought she meant literally under the table
i realized what “under the table” meant nearly 10 years later

three jars beside each other:
one of almond cookies
one of milk chocolate things
another of just plain cashews

we never asked to touch the cashews

then we would all go about on our own
but when it came time to finally sleep
we would pile into my mom's bed
a bunch of mice in a shoebox
we grew up just sharing her one bed
when we finally had our own rooms we still came back
it felt weird to sleep alone then
as it does now
we could barely move
our eyes glued to the tv screen in front of her bed
fall asleep with the tv still on
the show continuing on
he lull of our snores forming a little song
wake up and do it all again

LIKE A STAR

BY BEN URQUHART

My first memory is playing on the deck with my little brother, Tom. I think I was four. I remember our cabin in Invermere, BC, and running around the nearby community, just exploring. My brother, my cousins and I would play in the nearby trails and found our way around Timber Ridge through trial and error. We'd get covered in dirt from when we'd veer off the paths and slide down the hills, and we'd tear the moss off the nearby slopes simply because we could. That was one of my grandpa's lessons: "Leave the moss alone." As a child, that freedom was incredible: our parents let us explore and trusted that we would be safe and smart. Maybe from a parenting standpoint, it was a little dangerous, but those were some wonderful times in my life. My cousins found a secret cabin we could play in, we discovered all the different ways to get down to the lake, and how to reach the tennis courts faster than descending the wooden stairs. Hint: you just went pell-mell directly down the steep hill and prayed you didn't lose your balance halfway down.

My parents had an old CD player that Tom and I appropriated: we'd sit on the carpet in his room listening to a burnt CD my mom made for my dad. I'd always put "Sweet Child of Mine" on repeat. My brother and I would play with stuffed animals in each others' rooms. Once, he had his stuffed animal (aptly named Tom) fly off in a rocket to go back to his home planet. I was struck with a feeling of loss, like someone close to me just disappeared. I went to my bed and cried for a while. Why was I so emotional? I think it was because I imagined it was actually my brother taking off in that rocket. Tom wandered in a while later, wondering why I stopped playing. I never told him why. As a child, my brother would threaten to run away when he was angry. It would terrify me because I couldn't imagine a world without him. I'd beg him to stay, we'd both be crying, and my parents wouldn't be worried because they knew he would never follow through, which freaked me out even more.

I learned how to ride a bike in my backyard: we had a tiny hill which was really just the ground sloping down from the neighbor's backyard. My mom had me mount my bike at the top, and ride as far through our backyard as

I could. Her name was Lorraine. After about an hour, I could balance well enough to ride the bike, and we all celebrated with popsicles. Tom came to spectate and to 'learn', but I think he just wanted to hang out. My brother and I have had an interesting relationship. We'd do a lot of stuff together, but I'd be mean and screw around with my brother, or roughhouse too much with him. God, I wish I could punch my younger self. Because he was my younger brother, it was my sacred duty to mess with him, and because I was his older brother, he'd follow me everywhere. Then, when we got older, he'd start messing with me, and I'd get pissed off. We had a very antagonistic relationship then. Tom inherited my mom's temper: she was easy to anger and reached fiery heights while enraged, but she'd cool off pretty fast. I inherited my dad's temper: it takes a while to piss us both off, but once you get us beyond curt answers and a frosty demeanor, we get very mad, as in the rest of the day mad, and we kind of go ballistic.

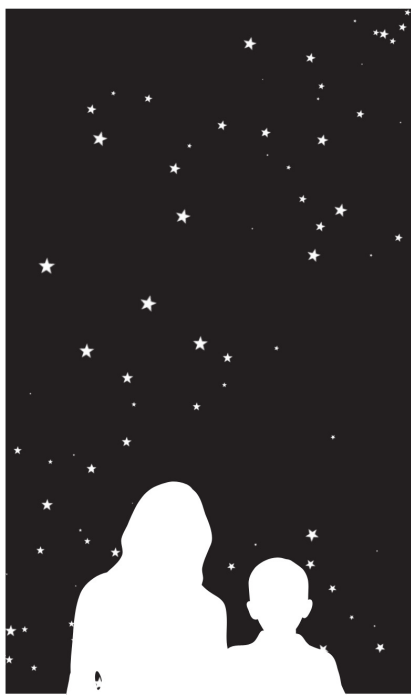
When I first discovered my OCD in 2017, I didn't see my brother for a month because I was preoccupied with adjusting to these new mental issues. After that, things were civil between us. Then in this summer of 2023, I got Tom hired with me at work this summer. Word of advice: carefully consider working with your siblings. I would suggest not working in the same team as them. Sitting in a work truck, just getting furious at each other for the slightest reasons, was not conducive to a great work environment. Despite having more responsibility than ever, it felt like we were kids again. There was one yelling match because he gave me bad directions, and we were calling each other every name in the book. Our poor coworker Evan was just trying to calm us both down and stop the arguing. I really didn't care about that in the moment: all my anger came bubbling out. All those feelings of 'it's not worth it to bring this up', every time I avoided saying something because I didn't want to deal with him sulking, were all spewing out like a volcano. I told him to stop throwing hissy fits and work and to "just fucking quit" if he wasn't going to be professional. Five minutes after we blew up on each other, all I felt was shame, even though I think it was justified. I apologized for being unprofessional, even if I still thought he deserved it. I thought I was completely innocent of any wrongdoing, and I still do, although I'm sure I did things, unknowingly or not, that made work difficult for him. I think he handed in his two weeks' notice that day. The next day, it was like nothing happened. He worked those two final weeks, plus an extra week to make things easier for my boss, then he was done. Things are peaceful between

us again. It's just a little weird because I don't know my brother super well. There are still things that I find out about him every once in a while that make me question how much I know the guy. And I can't help feeling like I failed him, like I wasn't there for his life. I guess that's proof that I love him.

My mom hated video games. I think it was because she viewed them as a waste of time. I know she was really good at them too, which made it even funnier. I gave her my DS, asking her to help me get past a certain point in *Zelda*, and she ended up making her own save file and beating the game. My mom was full of contradictions, which was one of the best parts of her character. Most days she'd be all business, and then one day she'd ask my brother and I if we wanted to call in sick for school and we could go to Heritage Park. We enthusiastically agreed: we were unaware that was an option! She was definitely the stricter parent. When I wanted something, I'd ask my dad, preferably when my mom wasn't around. In hindsight, she probably saw through my obvious strategy. If my brother and I went over our allotted time limit for video games: boom. No video games for a month. Piss her off more? Two months. There was one day Tom and I spent the day at her work office for some reason: I was playing a game on my DS and asked Mom and Tom to be quiet so I could concentrate. She didn't like that, to say the least.

Mom's workaholic nature made her even more fun to hang out with, because I knew when she was spending time with us that it was extra special. I think one of the most bittersweet moments was a trip to Boston – her cancer had come back, this time in her head, so she was missing an eye and lacked energy from her surgery and chemotherapy. But the first night we got there, she chased me onto the hotel bed and jumped up on it after me, and I was screaming and giggling, she was smiling and laughing, and it felt like I was a tiny kid again. Bittersweet, yes, but one of my favourite memories of her: whatever challenges were placed in front of her, she'd bulldoze right through. She made goodbye videos for my brother, my dad, and I. We watched them when she passed, in April of 2014. Years later, when I rewatched mine, I noticed the creation date: October of 2013. She knew she was likely going to die. That broke my heart, but it was so like her: Mom was always pragmatic and prepared, no matter the circumstance. What's that like, I wonder? Knowing you have a year or two left to live?

I think the last time I saw her was at the hospice. On the drive over, I asked my dad when she was coming home. He had to tell me and Tom



she wasn't going to be coming back home. I can't imagine how that felt for him. When we left that day, she was upset. I can't remember why, if she was in pain, or if she didn't want us to leave, or something else. A few days later, she passed. It's not something I've really thought about now, my last memory of my mom, but I don't believe that memory dictates her life. She was a wonderful mother and lived a wonderful life. It should have been longer, but it wasn't. She burned brightly, fiercely, like a star: anyone who came into her orbit was touched by her presence. Her wake was a solemn occasion, but also a celebration of her life.

I had no idea who most of these people were, but our house was crowded. That year, my dad and his friends participated in the 2014 Enbridge Ride to Conquer Cancer, under the team name "LoChanRulez" (Lochan is a portmanteau of my mom's name). They raised \$82,732.09 in her memory. That's what I like to focus on now: not the fact that she's gone, but how many lives she was a part of, and how well she lived. I remember Lorraine Chan all the time, and I hope I can be half the person my mother was.



MY CHILDHOOD WITH PARENTS

BY PRATIMA MALLICK

I was born in 1951. Now when I look back, I do not remember much of those golden days spent with my parents, my seven brothers and my three sisters, but especially with my mother.

My Mother was special in comparison to all my other kin. Her affections were unparalleled. I have not ever felt anything like it since I knew her. During my childhood, I noticed that most of the family believed that we should educate the male child with special care, but that the girls were not so important. Their future would be at home, caring for their husbands and their children. For the girls it was more important to become a good homemaker.

However my generous mother did not support this prejudice. Her aim was to educate all of her children equally, and she was firm in her belief. On this ground my mother took her stand. There was a tutor in our home year round. She made him a special room in our house, and to earn his respect was so special.

Nowadays, I feel so fortunate that I grew up with my mother. I pray to God that everyone could have a mother like I did. My mother used to tell me, “Daughters should be educated too, just like the rest of the family.”

The name of our school was Probortak Kanya Vidyapith. Everyday, a maid would walk us to the school yard and then walk us back home after school. In the early morning my mother would wake us up and usher us to the washroom to get ready for school. She cared very much about our education, and about our cleanliness. Whenever our exams came around my mother would get very serious. She would stay with us late into the night to make sure we did not fall asleep at our desks.

But it wasn't all strictness with my mother. Our house was surrounded by a large boundary wall, and in front of our house was a large playground. We would play together there in the afternoons. We



would play with cousins and siblings, but every family member would join us. They would love to sit outside and watch us as we played our different games.

Now I have children of my own, and they are all grown up into adults themselves. They have careers now. My eldest daughter Susmita, studied political science, and now she is a principal at an elementary school. My Son Sanjay studied environmental studies, and is married now to a beautiful lady. They both met in Toronto while they were studying at York University. They are a beautiful couple. Both of my children make me so proud, and I have my mother to thank for all of it.



THE BITTER TEA

BY LIUBOV TRUZHNIKOVA

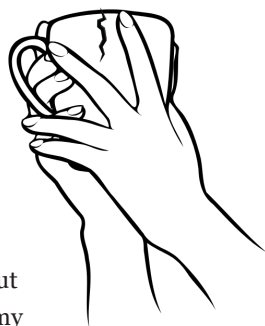
I thought that straightforwardness was a worthy trait in my character, but as I got older, I realized this is not always the case. I understood that honesty and truthfulness strengthen friendships and help me choose the right path in life. Life taught me to change my mind about the straightforwardness of judgements. Sometimes, my conclusions were not acceptable to others, and they may even offend!

I remember a case when I inadvertently offended someone close to me by expressing my opinion directly and honestly. I didn't even try to understand this person. In theory, everything was simple and, in my opinion at the time, correct.

It was during a house evening tea party. Mom and I sat in the cozy dining room and drank tea with honey, jam, and cakes. My Mom was already an old and sick woman. Over tea, we had a leisurely, heartfelt conversation, reminiscing about past years. We laughed at me and my younger brother's childhood pranks. My brother grew up sickly and constantly needed the help of a doctor. If I was a strong and energetic girl, then he was a sickly and calm child. His studies were difficult for him. Our parents did not burden him with either study or work. He did not grow up to be a completely purposeful person.

While drinking tea, I told my mother that it was her own fault that her son and my brother were not ambitious and did not try to achieve good results in his life. Mom answered me so sadly, with tears in her eyes, that I was right. There was pain and sadness in her eyes. Yes, I said what I thought, but how bitterly I offended her. My straightforwardness was inappropriate and brought only bitterness and resentment to my dearest person.

Then, I did not delve into the essence of a mother's love for her son. I expressed the truth without connecting it with the situation in the past life of my family. The bitterness from this act of mine still remains



in my soul. I remember my mother's eyes. They were sad and hopeless. Yes, nothing could be changed. My words struck my mother's heart like a whip.

Many years have passed and I still kick myself for being inappropriately straightforward in my words. I apologize to my mother for my harsh judgement. Now, I try to be more flexible and softer in my judgements so as not to hurt loved ones. Often, sweet aromatic tea with cakes reminds me of the bitterness that I brought to my beloved mother in those distant, young years.



LOVE HAS
MANY FACES



IS LOVE OUR NATURE OR ONLY OUR FANTASY?

BY LIUDMYLA ZINCHENKO

Love is a shock for our mind.
Love is gladness for our body.
Love is excitement for our heart.
Love is relish for our smarts.
Love is a wake up for our spirits.
And for our soul, it is a lullaby too.

If you suddenly see rainbows everywhere, maybe you've met your love. Try to inspect your heart. Why does it beat very fast, why do you want to smile at strangers?

You see around you only cute and funny situations like two squirrels as they run and play around the tree, how perfectly the kitten plays with the sun-bunny, and when the butterfly turns to the flowers; your heart beats more and more quickly and you feel that all of nature is pushing you to feel in love and you give up...

Now you experience that something extremely new comes to your body. You suddenly feel a flutter of butterflies inside your belly starting to move and play and your head circles and you fall down to unknown space and life offers you the adventure named love.

Blindly you begin to see the best personality traits of your close friend, who was very ordinary to you before, but now you understand how smart, humorous, and educated he is. You suddenly see his intelligent eyes and good culture. You want to nestle and feel his smell close to your face, touch his skin and feel his hands on your body...

Now, you have been included in this magical dance with nature, the dance of love. Why did I compare love with dance? Look, when you feel in love, every time in your mind you hear different music. Sometimes it's the low sound of violin with a romantic melody. Sometimes you hear the strong sound of drums and disturbing melody that pretends to know where you

are, in the paradise or on the peak of the mountains or in a cavity like Hell. It gives you understanding: are you a winner, or a loser? Sometimes, it's heavy rock music with very fast changing pictures and many others.

Now, you choose the fastness for dance, but you don't know how sociable he is and how comfortable you will be with him.

Then, you're dancing, and there are no strict rules, but you are following some social regulation and only adding

your genius and ability. Currently, it is very important how sensitive your friend is and if he can perceive what you want and wish from him.

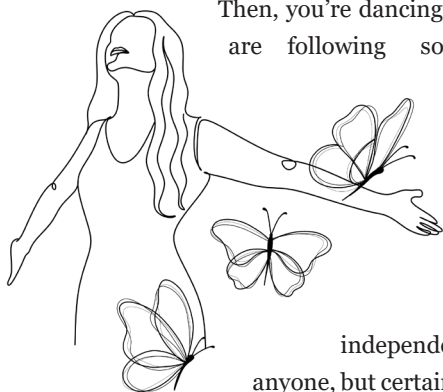
Somebody can't hear the melody and break the idyll, somebody tries to dance their private dance

independently of you and he is not a partner to

anyone, but certain, the worst who can hurt your foot and continues to whirl you, however, you lost a good mood so

completely and need urgent treatment. So, time to change the fastness promptly, like in Love.

To find the right person is a great and heavy process, and we don't have a successful result every time... Dance, my dear, continue to dance. It's our life. While you hear music in your heart and mind, you stay alive.





ODD NUMBERS

BY CAMPTON HANCOCK

I love odd numbers. I love how unassuming they are. Rough around the edges. When I used to do math, odd numbers were the perplexing ones, the difficult ones. I struggled to add and multiply and subtract and divide things that wouldn't split evenly into the boxes in my head. I grew to love the challenge that odd numbers posed; how they shattered into decimal points across the white paper and dashed into fractions across the green slate of the calculator screen.

Even numbers were too easy; too round and too soft. I love things that have an edge: a grit, a toughness, things that are imperfect and splintered, like there is too much to categorize, too much to synthesize in a way that makes good sense. I feel like an odd number, sometimes, pulled in multiple directions only to explode into an array of emotion and imbalance. Odd numbers may be unstable and broken, but perhaps they are instead glorious in their disjointed fireworks display of decimals.





My Dreams Coming True

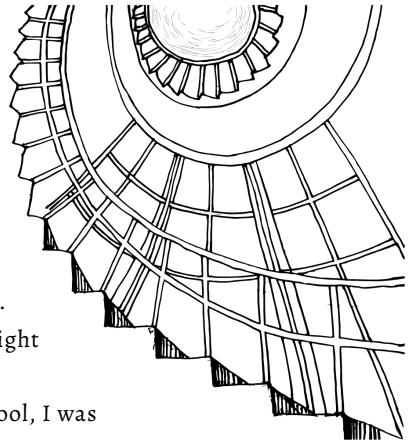
BY JIALIN MA

I have the dreams,
Like air, wind, clouds,
like things that cannot touch, but they are real.
My dream is to play Chinese musical instrument – Guzheng
My dream is to sew clothes to myself and others
My dream is to sing in a big choir
My dream is to play Yoga
My dream is hiking in the mountains
My dream is garden in my backyard
My dream is to contribute my strength to the communities.
I live life in my dreams
I live life in book pages
Oh, my dream is coming to true
My soul is smile, grace, proud, share, value
I am enjoying the happy life. It is my LOVE for myself and others.



Different Love

BY SHAHRBANOO GHAFARI



Love has different meanings for different people and at different times. What may be something I love to do might not appeal to someone else. When I was in my last year of high school, I was preparing for my final exams. I received a marriage proposal. When I decided to accept it, my concerns were about continuing my education and going to university. The competition to get into university is high in my country. So, with my soon-to-be husband, we made the agreement that I would go to university.

One day, I met with a friend of mine. She congratulated me for getting married.

I told her about my concerns over education.

She laughed at me and said, "You are foolish. I look forward to that moment when I get married. Why are you worried? You can travel with your husband, go to restaurants and enjoy your life even more."

So, in that moment I found that my friend and I had different meanings for love.

I was successful at my very difficult entrance exams. It was my love, my passion that made it possible for me.

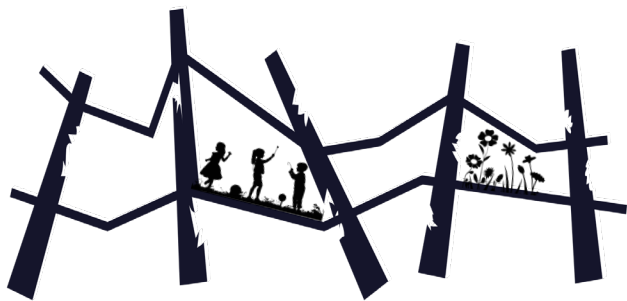
It was not easy, I was responsible for my own life.

There were times when I needed to sleep but I couldn't because of all the responsibilities we had around the house.

Me and my husband worked together and resolved those problems, and I could rest easy.

Looking back, I know that I am satisfied.

I followed my love for education.



LOVE

BY MANSOUREH KHODAVERDIAN

If you ask me “What is love?” I can’t define it with some words or some sentences. I think love resembles the ocean: Sometimes calm and beautiful, with small waves, and sometimes dangerous and deadly, roaring to destroy everything in its path. In the days gone by when you heard the word love, you might think of mythical stories like Romeo and Juliet. Now, there is no time for such stories. Now we must open our eyes and see the real love stories around us.

When I think about love, I see a woman who lives in a nursing home. She has no one to visit her. When she sees someone, she goes towards him and she shows a crumpled paper that has a telephone number written on it and she says “Please call my son and tell him to send me the pictures of his children.”

The day after, she goes to the main office and asks whether there is a letter for her. The answer is just “No”. She goes back to her room and waits for tomorrow. It is said that sometimes she doesn’t eat her food. She puts her food in her drawer and says, “My son loves this. I will save it for him. He will come tomorrow.”

The nurses say that they don’t know whether she has a son or not. But she loves her son and waits for him...

When I think about love, I see a man whose wife has passed away. He has a four year old daughter. As he has nobody to take care of her, he takes the little one to work with him. One day while he is working, the little girl says to him, “Daddy I am tired, let’s go home.”

Her father answers, “Dear I have to work to get money. I want to buy you the doll that you like.”

The little girl says, “Dad I don’t want the doll. Actually the dolls are ugly, let’s go home. “

On the way home her Dad buys a lollipop for his little one. The little girl is happy. Her father sits beside her and holds the small hands of his daughter with his two large rough ones. They look at each other and laugh. What a beautiful laugh!

This scene was very popular and was shared around the world. It shows the real meaning of love.

Now I think of love and go somewhere else, a place with super luxury houses so big that the people there rarely see their neighbours. These houses are decorated with the most expensive accessories and high end cars sit in the driveways. A young girl comes out of the building, wearing branded clothing. She goes to the parking lot and chooses the best car to match her dress. She jumps in and drives fast in order to overtake two other luxury cars. Suddenly she hits a pedestrian. She gets out of her car and checks only her car for damage. Some angry people gather and say “What are you doing? You have killed the poor man.”

She answers, “It is none of your business. I will pay his blood money.”

No one knows what happened after that, because her father was wealthy and an important person. This girl is in love only with luxury and there is so much distance between her and other people, she will never know any kind of real life.

We now understand why the ocean sometimes is kind and the other times roaring and deadly: Because love and hate are face to face. They fight against each other. This is why the ocean is roaring. She might destroy the world with her wrath.

Now, I go somewhere else to see another scene, where you can watch the fight between love and hate.

I see a group of young beautiful girls gather around a fire. As they dance around the fire, they want to take off their scarves and put them on fire one by one. A lot of people come, they are attracted by the beautiful light of the fire.

Suddenly, they hear the sound of a bullet and very soon many bullets echo in the air. The people are afraid and everyone tries to run away. The invaders don’t have any special target, they shoot at will. Some people are wounded and others are killed. The only “sin” of these girls is dancing and taking off their scarves. They just want to be free. They are against savagery. The invaders were some men with guns hired by some petrified people.

Now I see more distant places, where innocent people are being bombarded. Why? Who knows? It may be for religion or nationality, territory, or some other differences between the countries in the world. But I Believe it is because of selfishness. I wonder whether those hired men who easily kill innocent people have family? When they go to their home, do they hug their children? When they kiss their children, do they think about those children whom they killed? Do they think about the children who've lost their parents? No, they are blind. Money has blinded them.

On the other hand, there are other people who want to create chaos in the world. They are the weapon smugglers. They make chaos to sell their weapons. Their children and their families live in safe places, so they don't fear war. When the battlefield is bigger, they become more rich. If they have love, it is only love for money.

There is an important organization in the world. It is called "Human Rights Organization."

Some elected people sometimes go to this organization to talk about the difficulties in the world. Some of them speak about the issues of the world. Some of them even don't listen to the other's speech. At the end, they make a statement and leave the meeting. What is the result of these gatherings? Nothing. Again you see poverty, slavery, cruelty, savagery in the world and the weapon smugglers easily sell their goods.

What if the weapons factories could all change
to musical instruments factories?
Life could be beautiful.
No war in the world.
The people would sing songs together.
They would dance in the streets together.
They would divide their happiness with each other.
All the fathers could buy dolls for their children.


People would look at each other and laugh together.
They would respect each other.
They would love each other.
And the world would be beautiful.
But alas, what a pity.

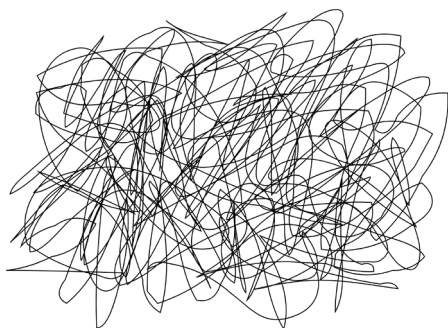


Loveless

BY JULES DE GUZMAN

i wake on the wrong side of the concrete
after a night of sleeping alone
tension and body aches pile below the skin
loud voices grow harder to ignore
so many things go to waste
dark nights with no glow, not even stars
they make everything feel unreal
when you're alone, it's hard to feel like a person
footsteps make metals sounds
on plywood floors ready for splinters
everything is plastic
flowers reek like street garbage
cold winds, waste
forever and ever





DESTRUCTION OR CREATION?

BY ZAHRA ABBASI

How can I describe a thing that I cannot understand? What is love? Some scientists guess that it is a release of hormones, some people think that love is the complex chemistry process of our whole body, and someone decided that it is an electrical impulse inside our brain. But all these assumptions are innocent.

So, that is love? The exaltation of our soul approximation to spirituality or destruction of our individuality and changing ourselves to fit others' character?

Love is a spiritual object and goes from our heart into the universe by our mind. How often do we understand that the object of our love is actually unworthy, even of attention from us, but our hearts again and again repeat the same, "I love you!"

We got this prize from our Great Creator because "God is love," the Bible says. God can see our mind, and despite humanity's greed and cruelty, he continues to have sympathy and compassion and love for mankind. God teaches us to "Love everyone beside you and love your enemy," but for us this is impossible! Humans usually can't love themselves and, all the more so, strangers.

All of the time we are trying to use our feelings named love and it is always very different depending on the object of our love. We have strong love for our children filled with attention and concern, for our grandchildren

with protection and care. Sometimes this kind of love varies, but we can't control the intensity of feeling. We experience love for our partner with romance and sex and this is absolutely another kind of love. And of course, we love our friends with devotion and loyalty, so this is again love.

Some of us have love for our country, native land, and this is called patriotism, nationality, and it is a very strong love and pride at the same time.

Sometimes people have affection for their pets—usually lonely people—and their feelings occupy their hearts fully, and this is again love. People need to feel this strange sense of love to feel happy.

Some materially minded people have love for their small-world surroundings and love it to death, and they can't lose this habit because it would be like losing their physical life. For them it really is love, but the pathological kind, in my opinion.

What about religion? God gave us religion to help us find love, to unite and live an ideal life, but people didn't understand the main idea. Now religions separate humans and spread much hate, not love. Humans looking for hate make us unsociable, disconnected, but only love can give us bliss.

Humanity has the very costly, valuable gift of love but can't bring it to society, even for oneself. Yet, we are on the right path, and in the end the result will be perfect, like peace on earth.



Colours of Life

BY LIUBOV TRUZHNIKOVA

Our whole life is like day and night
Passes through joy and sorrow.
We're watching a black-and-white movie
In our living space.

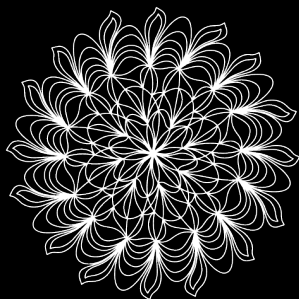
We love something and we don't like
But we must survive these
The joys of victorious years
And the pain of loss
And every thing in the world.

Hope, Faith, and Love
Are always in white
But separation, shame, and pain
Only available in black.

The birth of my children,
Their first cry and the joy of meeting
Have a bright white colour,
That remains forever.

Loved ones go there
From where there is definitely no return
And it's very black
Such as the color of great loss.

Perhaps someone will say:
"No, all life is made up of different colours.
And red-yellow tones there are symbols of our victory."
Yes, I agree, white colour has a full
Spectrum of colours.



It contains red colour – the colour of love.
Orange – like a ray of sun.
Just as gentle and bright.
Yellow – the colour of autumn ripe pears
And gold of fallen leaves.

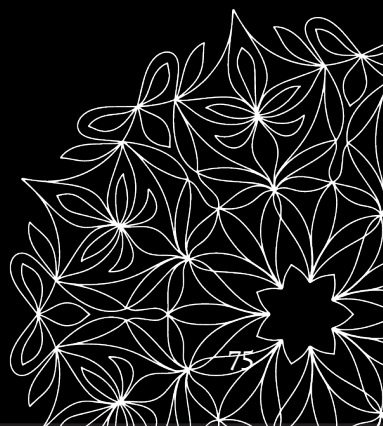
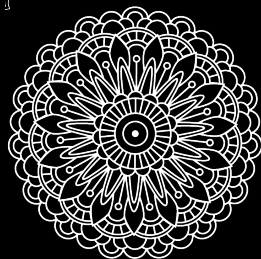
Green is the colour of life and spring,
Which begins for happiness
We wake up forgetting about the winter cold.

Blue – the colour of the sky and dreams,
What comes to our minds.
Looking into the abyss of heights,
We feel the taste of mortal Life.

Purple is the colour of sunset and peace.
When the sun sets over the horizon,
We look forward to a sweet dream.

And black is a strict and simple colour.
It takes our loved ones,
Worries souls and hearts.
It does not sympathize or mourn the loss.
Only leaves emptiness and pain in the body.

Nothing is eternal under the Moon
But let's be happy with the colours of life,
Which the Great God gave us
From birth to funeral feast!



A WORLD FULL OF LOVE

BY LILI ZHANG

Love to me means consideration of the interests of other people, and means happiness without fear, disappointment, hate and hurting each other. Are we born with love or hate? We argued about this.

Someone said, "We are born with love because we do not want to hurt other people when we are born, and we have nobody to hate."

Someone said: "We are born with hate because we do not want other persons to take away something which is good for us."

Love comes from giving without intention for receiving. Love will flow out of your heart when you take consideration of the interest of others, especially when they are weak or in difficulties. Love will pass on from one heart to another, hatching more love.

Confucius said, "Don't do to others what you don't want others to do to you." Where there is no hurting, there is no hate.

After you have received love from your mother, father, teachers, and other people in your life, and you have seen a lot of fighting against each other for many years, you will realize how valuable love is and understand: without love, we cannot live.

Love is like the sun shining over the world. When the hatred melts away in the light of love, the world will be brighter. When the world is full of love, the world will become lovelier and more enjoyable. Is it a dream? No, it's not!



A WORLD IN
WONDER





HEIGHT OF A BIRD'S FLIGHT

BY IRINA ZHUKOVA

Since my first visit to Canada, I have loved traveling in the rocky mountains around Calgary. As a person of the plains, I was impressed by the exotic beauty of these places. I really liked the mountains, so different from each other in different places, and lakes with their own expressive faces. You will never mistake the glaciers of Icefield Parkway for the glaciers of Lake Louise, the mountain ranges soaring over Canmore for the ten peaks of Morain Lake, or the icy lake Edith Cavell for the incredibly coloured Peyto Lake. Therefore, my biggest hobby in Canada became traveling and hiking in the mountains. During my hikes, I met people who were just as in love with the mountains as I was. I made friends with some of them, since we liked to hike together.

One day my new friends invited me to hike Little Beehive mountain to see Lake Louise from the height of a bird's flight. I'd never been there before. It was difficult, but in an amazing way. At times we had to climb up a steep rocky path. Sometimes the stones fell under our feet. Fortunately, the weather was fine. The bright sun made it possible to see the surroundings for miles around.

We had short stops at Mirror Lake and Agnes Lake and we could enjoy the reflection of the mountains, which seemed to admire themselves in the mirrors. We marvelled at the beauty and grandeur of the mountains, glaciers, and rocks that surrounded us on our way.

Finally we reached our goal—the top of the Beehive. It seemed like we could touch the neighbouring peaks. All the Rocky Mountains were at our feet. We took a lot of photos to share with our friends and family. We wanted to capture and take with us every detail of the stunning panorama that opened up to us – the blue ice of the glaciers, the harsh beauty of the rocks, a small flower that grew with such difficulty among the stones. Below, we saw the green ribbon of the Bow River. The train moving along the railway looked like a toy to us. It seemed that Lake Louise could fit in our palms.

There were thermos flasks of coffee in our backpacks. We came up with the idea to celebrate our ascent with a cup of coffee in this amazing place. Of course, it was coffee from a thermos, but we had never drank such delicious coffee.



The Duckling and the Raindrops

BY ZAHRA ABBASI

I remember when I was a little child,
my imagination would always run wild.

There was, in our yard, a tiny pond.
In it, was a duckling. Of which, I was fond.

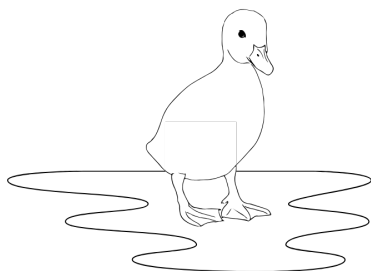
It was tiny, beautiful, sweet
When it cried, it sounded tweet

For it, the pond was the whole world.
In it, he would play be it hot or cold.

I loved watching it play for hours on end
To me, it was a gift that God had sent

When it rained, the pond was full of bubble
For the little duck and I, our joy redoubled.

Alas! The little angel grew and flew away
I remained alone, waiting for its return in May!



WET GRASS

BY RYAN NORRIS

I remember being afraid. I remember the sky, the clouds that covered the dark night and the stars. I remember my heart beat, pounding solidly against the inner cavity of my chest. You were mad at me, and you had every right to be. I had yanked your heart back and forth, telling you yes then turning around and saying no once my head was no longer clouded by hormones and rose colored glasses. I couldn't keep my head straight around you. You were beautiful, inside and out, you were everything I knew I wanted, and everything I felt I needed, and it scared me. How could I have found it so young, how could I have fallen into the trap I swore I never would. I didn't want to be in love with you, I didn't want you to be so perfect, but you were, and it was terrifying.

I remember driving in Joe's beat up old Volkswagen golf. He loved stick shift, it was his favorite way to drive. I remember the deep blue color of the exterior, the same color I imagined the ocean looked when the sun's rays could barely reach it. The interior was the gray upholstered color that screamed early two thousands. But it was comfortable. It was slightly dirty, dirty enough to give you the sense of cheerio crumbs in the cracks of the backseat without actually finding any. I hadn't seen Joe in over a year, I hadn't expected to for at least another one. But life threw a curve ball at all of us back then. Nothing went the way I had thought it would. Nothing was going the way I had planned just two weeks before. I remember telling Joe I'd met a girl. He knew you, had met you a couple times before. He thought you were cool, but he didn't know you. He didn't know you were everything I wanted. He didn't know you like I did. We had only gone on one date so far. I remember telling him that that was it, either we'd maybe go on one more date, or we would get married. I remember knowing back then that you were serious. I knew you were the one.

I remember white shirts and ties, the same outfit every day. I remember the girl I met with the blonde curls. She was cute, she was funny, but I didn't know her. I never would get to know her, not well enough. She wasn't from the place I called home, so when I eventually went back I knew I'd never see

her again, but I really hoped I would. When I left so abruptly, I didn't get to say whatever kind of goodbye I would have been able to even back then.

We talked for a little while after that, the girl with the blonde curls and me. But then I met you. Straight brown hair with some blonde streaks. I got to know you more in a week than I'd know her in 6 months, yet I still knew nothing about you.

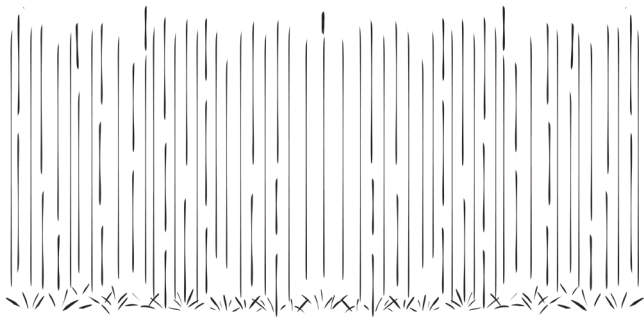
You scared me. You terrified me, because I knew you were my everything. You were my future. The path I was on was paved directly to your doorstep, to that night in the rain. I had said some stupid things, and you were done with me. I remember the feeling I had as I drove home, knowing that my future was falling away behind me, knowing I had let you go, knowing that I had messed it up. I had taken something beautiful, something perfect, and I'd dropped it. I still don't know if it was accidental either. I remember the shattered feeling I had. I felt broken, I felt empty, and only you could fill that void.

I remember driving back, it was already so late and I wasn't sure you'd answer the door. I knew I wouldn't if I were you, but I hoped you might be more merciful than me, more merciful than I really deserved. I remember stopping my car in the middle of the road as I was leaving my house. I remember jumping out and picking the flowers from the community flower pot, the one beside the sign meant to show those who drove past it our upper middle class suburban white privilege. I remember looking for purple, because that's your favorite color. After committing grand theft botany, I drove like it was an actual crime. I drove so fast, knowing if I didn't get to you soon then it was over.

I remember the countdown in my mind, tick ticking like a commercial break on the television show 24. Beep, beep. Once you went to sleep that night you were gone forever. Beep, beep. Or at least for as long as it took me to figure out I had been wrong, and then probably a little bit longer. Beep. I remember the fear. Beep.

I remember having my phone on my knee, sending you a message every few minutes while my other foot sat heavy on the accelerator. I remember asking if you had gone to sleep, you said no. I remember parking my car in the little parking lot beside your apartment building, then running through the rain to the front door. I remember texting you, "Come outside, please."

You didn't respond, but I watched the little letters change from delivered to read. I put my phone in my pocket and I prayed. I prayed that God would



let you know I meant it. I remember pouring my heart out in those few seconds, saying so much in so little time. I remember looking through the glass doors, to the corner I hoped you would come around.

I remember being afraid. I remember the sky, the dark clouds now turned to rain pouring out across the pavement. I remember the beating of my heart in the cavity behind my chest. I remember the water that soaked my hair, rolling down and over my face. It was almost cold enough to see my own breath despite the fact it was early summer and it was already getting warm. I remember waiting.

Then you came around the corner. You didn't look at me until you opened the door. This was the moment I feared. This was the moment, the pinnacle of my future. I remember standing at that moment at a crossroads. I didn't know which path I could go down. Your face would tell me. You would tell me. You would be my compass, you would show me the way.

You smiled when you finally looked up at me. I remember it wasn't the kind of smile that meant the overwhelming joy you get when you see something you have wanted your entire life. It was the smile of someone who couldn't believe the stubbornness of the idiot standing in front of them. It was the smile of someone who sees something they love, in the hands of someone they want, but that they aren't sure they can trust.

I remember the words I said, the words of commitment, decision, finality. I had made my decision, finally, and I wanted you. I remember the trepidation, I remember the hesitation, and I remember the dam breaking. The overwhelmingness of emotion that spilled from behind the barriers of practicality and safety. I remember the way you kissed me. You kissed me with passion. You kissed me with fear. You kissed me the way I wanted to be kissed. You kissed me with all of the emotions you felt for me, anger,

annoyance, anxiety, longing, hope, relief, and the beginning's of love.

I remember the rain that fell around us like a curtain, covering our bodies as we lay on the grass of that small hill. I remember your laughter, your curves, the way your body pressed into mine. I remember the wet grass that tickled my skin, the warmth of our two bodies, the passion. I remember the fresh feelings that would one day become love.



Big Hill Springs

BY ALLEY BILLINGS

Big Hill Springs
Your very own lush forest
Hidden behind city dust
Rippling water flows through
Big Hill Springs

I've only been once but
That was enough
The best date to date
In a green ferry ring-like grove
Big Hill Springs

Chocolate covered strawberries
Move between lips
The rush of water covers pounding hearts
An aphrodisiac
Behind the bushes and shrubs

Big Hill Springs
New excitement brims
Erected by romance
Lips brush against the tip
Of new love and lust

Bursting in the hot sun
Naked skin dances
Quenched in a rush
Cooled by the streams of
Big Hill Springs

London, Foggy City

BY SHAHRBANOO GHAFARI

We were there in Westminster city, beside the River Thames.

Everyday, I witnessed the beautiful sunrise and sunset by the river.

One early morning, with my family, we decided to go for a walk and have brunch.

We got our jackets on and left the house.

We passed the street to Chelsea Bridge, and entered Battersea Park.

We walked along the river, while beautiful sunlight reflected off the water.

In the park birds were singing, the colorful leaves were falling from the trees, covering the ground.

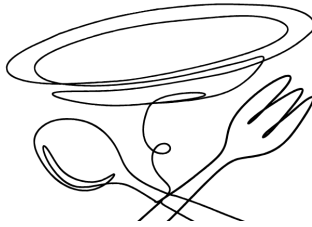
The autumn weather was pleasant.

The Baby, my granddaughter, was with us.

She was five months old.



Everywhere was covered with colorful and beautiful fall leaves, the perfect backdrop to her smiling face.
We talked about all the different kinds of beautiful trees.
Our stomachs told us it was time to sit and eat.
There was a local cafe hidden inside the park.
Many people sat, ordering coffee.
Others, too busy to stop, got theirs to go.
We were hungry, so we ordered brunch.
We found a cozy nook and waited for our order.
I stared at my little grandchild and thought about her future.
I hope she has a bright future.
Can she manage her life in this world, this society?
In my dreams I see her growing into a beautiful girl with a fulfilling life.
I was lost in my dreams when our order arrived.
I hope when her future arrives, she is caught up in her own dreams.



CULTURAL SHOCK

BY ZAHRA ABBASI

Have you ever had a food with a surprise taste? I am going to share my experience about culture shock. The difference in food can cause culture shock. I have an experience about a specific kind of food that shocked me. Two weeks after I came to Canada my friend and I went to a restaurant in Downton for the first time. I chose a kind of chicken on the menu; it was called General Tso's chicken. I ordered that for lunch, but I was surprised that it was sweet. I was shocked because I saw some people from different cultures eating sweetened chicken. I had never eaten sweet chicken. It felt like I was having dessert, but I liked it. After that, sometimes I order it. Trying food from different cultures is a good way to understand other people who have come from different countries. If we want to have many friends from other countries, we should understand their different tastes of food.





PLEASURE TRIP

BY PRATIMA MALLICK

Last year, 50 of our friends, my husband, and I went to India on a big bus. The Commissioner of our country arranged this pleasure trip. The bus started from Bangladesh on the 25th of September, 2022. The bus ran straight through the night until at last we reached Damdam in the early morning. We got off the bus and headed to the railway station. There, one full compartment was booked just for us! After a lovely breakfast, we sang, laughed and gossiped together while the train rolled along its tracks. At last we reached the Jalpaiguri railway station, where five pre-arranged Jeeps sat waiting for our arrival.

Now Darjeeling is a hilly place. The hills rise from the Terai and Dooars plains of Bengal and reach altitudes upwards of 12 000 ft. Kanchenjunga is always covered by snow. It is a small town in the west Bengal state in the Himalayan foothills. It was founded by the British East India Company. Darjeeling is famous throughout the world for the tea that it grows, and the breathtaking views of the Kanchanga mountain range, and its rich cultural heritage. There is even a famous toy train that has been declared by the U.N. a Heritage site.

We slept deeply that first night after all the many hours of travel. Despite that, we all rose early in the morning to go and watch the first rays of sun peeking over top of Tiger Hill. There, thousands of tourists were already

gathered to watch the sunrise. The summit of Ghoom is the highest point of Tiger Hill, famous for its beautiful views of Mount Everest and Mount Kanchenjunga. We waited patiently atop the hill for the sun to rise. First its deep red rays peeked over, giving way to beautiful streaks of golden yellow. They spread across the sky until finally you could see the entirety of the bright red sun hanging in the sky. Its beauty was beyond description. People began cheering and clapping as the sun rose, some devotees even saluted the sun. Thousands of cameras sat waiting to capture the moment the sun's rays fully illuminated the peaks of Everest and Kanchenjunga.

After two days we left Darjeeling for Nepal. On the way we visited Meghalaya, Shillong, part of Assam, Cherapunj. At last we reached Nepal late at night. In the morning we went out sightseeing. We marveled at the broken buildings and roads that had been damaged by a massive earthquake. We were very upset to see the destruction it had caused.

The next day we visited the royal palace of the King of Nepal. Nepal is home to Mount Everest, the highest mountain peak in the world. The Nepali Himalayas stretch for over 800km, and include eight different peaks that all rise over 8000 meters high. Nepal is also the birthplace of Goutam-Budda Dumbini.

During our stay in Nepal we visited Pokhara, of the Garden City of Eight Lakes. We were astonished to see the lake on the top of the hill. We all marveled at it, wondering, "How could it have been formed?" Our wonder and enjoyment was full to the brim throughout our journey, it is impossible to describe.





THE LEAVES IN AUTUMN

BY MANSOUREH KHODAVERDIAN

Passing on the road, I saw a gorgeous scene. There were a lot of leaves on the ground. The wind would move the leaves from here to there. I was passing carelessly among the leaves. The beautiful colours, red, yellow, violet leaves were twisted together with the wind of the autumn.

I was kicking the leaves and wanted to sing a song , but I heard a very weak noise. I listened carefully. It was the moaning of a leaf. She talked to me.

“Watch out, some of our friends are taking their last breaths. The beautiful sound you hear is the sound of moaning of the leaves as the wind of the fall separates them from the branches. Do you remember us? We were those green leaves that you saw in spring. You waited for us to grow up. When we were fresh, the young lovers used to sit under our shadow, whispering romantic words to one another and we would listen to them. Sometimes they picked the flowers that we would take care of and give them to their beloved ones. We were happy and would keep their secrets.

Sometimes old people would come and sit under our shadow. They usually talked about their memories. they would talk about their children and their families. About the happy moments and difficult times they had in their lives. And also about their loves when they were young. And we listened to them. And we would keep their secrets as well.

We also love the children. When they play under our shadows we are happy to watch their mischief and when they fall down wounded , we would sympathize with them.

Now we are attacked by the wind. And you just see the beautiful colours and hear the beautiful song of rustling. We love you and we are happy to see you watching the beauty of autumn. But when you are passing over us, just think of the time when we were young and fresh. I am sure our next generation will love you as well because it is our nature to love others.”

My writing is derived from a beautiful song by the classic singer Marzieh.

On my way, I saw a leaf separated from the branch,
Confused in the way of wind
I asked it “Why are you running away from the garden?”
The depressed leaf answered:
“I tell you why I am wondering
I was in love with a flower
I raised it in my arm
I was crazy to take care of it
But I didn’t see loyalty from her
She betrayed me and ran away
Because she was proud of her beauty
She accompanied with thorny desert
Now ,I am alone with a tired body
Wondering in the wind of the fall
I curse her to be crazy and helpless like me.
I curse her.”



A Day in Autumn

BY GRACE XING

A beautiful day in the morning of Autumn.
Walking on a path from my house through the green
undulating golf course.

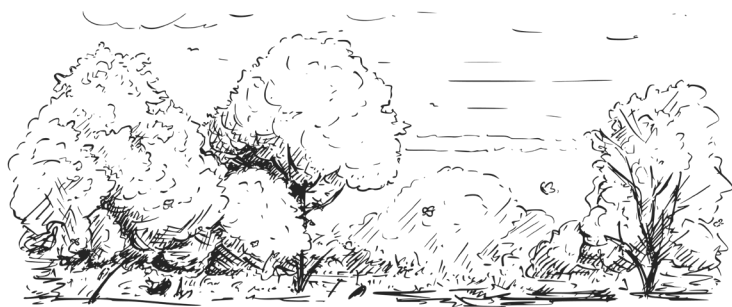
A middle-aged lady wearing red jacket walking the white and
grey two dogs.
Dogs tails swinging, running and following the lady.
A couple, face to face, hand in hand walking, talking, and
smiling toward me.
One handsome stronger man on a bicycle drives past me as fast
as a racehorse flying!
Two young women run one after another in uniform motion.

The blue sky and white clouds reflect in the lake at the golf
course.
The birds around the lake walking, eating, playing, flying up
and down.
Splashing and spreading the water sparking.
Golf players are very busy, standing, holding golf clubs
swinging.
Hitting the ball over to far away, walking, bending over to pick
up the ball.

The colorful leaves swaying before my eyes!
Gold yellow, reddish yellow, pink-red, bright orange with red...
Some still green, some yellow green, and others like pink
flamingos.
The rich red leaves like cherry color, burgundy, and fuchsia.
The dark brown leaves look like kinds of chocolates!


All colors seem to say we are already here to paint plants
everywhere on earth!
Such as trees, lakes, creeks, valleys, hills side, and villages.
Beside walking path, some small wild roses still bloom!
They smile at me in greeting!
Just as some lovely kids stand over there.

I feel of if walking inside a perfect oil painting.
Whose hand holds the brush?
You? the writer? the reader? Nature? the children?
All of the above?
Nature!
Nature holds the brush!



MOSCOW DOES NOT BELIEVE IN TEARS

BY IRINA ZHUKOVA

ne day, I stepped from one part of my life into another. I remember this important day in my life when I left my native Chisinau and moved to Moscow, where I was going to live. I stepped out of life in a nice cozy little sunny city into another – a huge, harsh one that knows no leniency.

I had been to Moscow more than once before. It was interesting for me to visit famous historical and architectural sights and museums. But I never dreamed of living in Moscow. I was not attracted to the lights of the big city.

My homeland is Moldova, a small country between the Carpathian mountains and the Black Sea plains. There are picturesque hills, beautiful southern forests, and boundless steppes. There is a lot of heat and sun here, but this heat and sun doesn't dry up and burn everything. Instead, it gives even more energy for growth and flowering, and fills fruits and grapes with sweetness and juice. There are a lot of orchards and vineyards. Moldova is often called a Blooming Garden; and indeed, everything is blooming and fragrant here.

Orchards bloom in spring, and the aroma of blossoming apples, apricots, and cherries trees saturates the air around. In the summer, plantations of roses, lavender, and sage bloom on the hills. It is stunningly beautiful, like in the paintings of great artists. You can enjoy not only the beauty, but the aromas too. In autumn, it is the smell of ripe fruit and young wine.

My hometown is Chisinau. I was born and grew up among little gardens growing at almost every small home in the city, and among the huge trees in the old parks. I was born here, my childhood passed here, my school years passed here, and my first friends appeared here.

And now I'm moving to Moscow!

Then, I didn't know how hard and cold Moscow would greet me. Then, everything was a bit like a fairytale for me. I just graduated from university. A prince charming had appeared in my life, my future husband, so we got married and I was moving to live with him in a big beautiful city.

It was a beautiful Moldavian autumn, warm and sunny. I waited for the

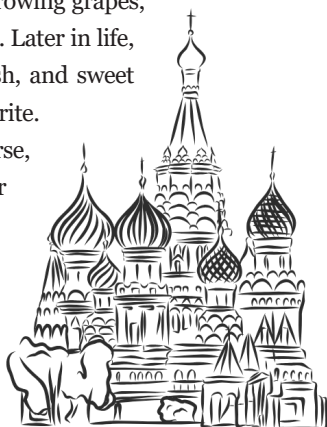
train that was supposed to take me to Moscow. My closest and dearest people came to seem off to my new life at the railway station. There were friends , my dear friends of childhood and youth. My mom, sister, and whole my family were with me. It was a little sad, but there was another life ahead, life in a big city, and it seemed to me that an interesting, eventful life was waiting for me. The old building of the railway station seemed especially white under the rays of the autumn sun. A huge, old grape vine wrapped around the facade of the building . Bunches of grapes were red and purple, and the leaves were partly green, partly yellow.

The next day, my train arrived in Moscow, and the first color I saw was white. There was white everywhere – on the streets, on the trees, on the roofs of buildings. It was snow. This white colour was not the same as the white on the houses of Chisinau, which seemed so festive and delicate, which so decorated the warm, southern city. It was a cold, hard colour under a low gray sky. It was a cold and harsh city in which no one knew me, and I didn't know anyone. I was sad and uncomfortable and alone in a huge snow-covered city. I remembered the Russian folk proverb: “Moscow does not believe in tears.”

So my new life began. I had to live in this city, prove to myself that I could be independent and build my own destiny.

Of course, I visited my native Chisinau many times later. My mom lived there, and I tried to visit her every summer. And later, when my daughter was born, we went back to Moldova together. We took long walks together in the beautiful old parks. I often met with my old friends. We liked to sit in small cozy cafes right on the street in the shade of spreading maples and elms and taste delicious Moldovan wine – Moldova is very proud of its winemaking. Moldavian hills and the sun create excellent conditions for growing grapes, from which wonderful Moldavian wines are made. Later in life, I had a chance to taste tart French, thick Spanish, and sweet Italian wines, but Moldavian wine is still my favourite.

Meanwhile, my Moscow life was going. Of course, there were many difficult things in this new life for me. Finding yourself in a megalopolis without support and without roots is very difficult. First, I had to look for a job. It was very difficult when I didn't even know the city, when there were no such information technologies as now. I literally had to go from company to company



to find out if they needed employees of my profession, but there was a loved one nearby, my husband. He was always ready to support me, although he was not a native Muscovite himself. He went there to study at one of the famous Moscow institutes. He lived in an institute dormitory. After graduation, he got a job in Moscow.

Sometime later unexpectedly for me, I made a lot of new friends. When my daughter was born and I started walking with this tiny baby in a stroller, I met young moms like myself. We had common interests – what to feed our babies, and how to treat their colds. Our children grew up, went to school and we continued to be friends with these families.

Over time, I made new friends and found an interesting job. I was getting used to the big city. I liked Muscovites always hurrying somewhere, I liked the hum and noise of the big city. It was like a beehive, full of life where everyone is busy with something and everyone has their own goal. Most importantly for me, I had my family – my husband and my daughter.

Now, I have my favourite corners in the city. I especially love the oldest part of the city – the narrow, crooked streets around the Moscow Kremlin. It's like being transported in a time machine to the 16th, 17th, and 18th centuries. Moscow is not just a big city. It is a city with an ancient history and unusual architecture. Styles and epochs, antiquity and modernity are mixed here. Wide avenues and squares are adjacent to small crooked streets. Here, you can see the church built in the 13th century, the mansion of a noble Moscow gentleman of the 18th century, and a building in the style of constructivism from the thirties of the twentieth century. Here, the royal palaces are side-by-side with monasteries, which look like fortresses, and the incredible skyscrapers of the business center.

Moscow is a city that never sleeps. Only business life is quieting down in the evening, when theatres, cafes and restaurants are opening their doors. The museums, cinemas, parks, and squares are always full of people. On holidays and weekends, the city is full of people who have come from other parts of Russia to walk around Moscow, visit exhibitions, go on excursions, attend museums, and just walk around the city, where everything breathes history and modernity at the same time.

A city that seemed hostile to me 40 years ago became a loved one. There were many difficult things here, but there were also many good things; maybe the most important and happiest years of my life passed in Moscow.





LIFE, I LOVE YOU!

BY LIUBOV TRUNZHIKOVA

Love of life is the force that makes us understand the meaning of our existence. Like a true mother, life teaches, educates, pleases, guides, and protects us.

There are different situations in a person's life: happy and joyful events inspire us; troubles depress and upset us. I enjoy everything that happens around me, and Life, in turn, gives me love and inspiration.

Early in the morning, especially, I express joy and happiness when all of nature awakens from a night's sleep. The sky is brightening. The cool morning breeze whispers: "Liubov, wake up! It's time to celebrate the New Day."

The sun wakes me up. Its rays sparkle in the drops of dew on the leaves of trees and flowers. The early rays of the sun warm and caress me. The blue sky calls my heart up. Birds sing their morning song. The air is clean and transparent. I breathe it in and rejoice. I live!

I experienced particular delight when I visited Lake Issyk-Kul in Kyrgyzstan two years ago. Kyrgyzstan is a country located in Central Asia in the region of high and majestic mountains. Between the two ridges of the Tien Shan mountains, Kumgey Ala Too and Terskey Ala Too, at an altitude of 1,700 meters above sea level, the high mountain Lake Issyk-Kul is located. Translated from Kyrgyz language, "Issy-Kul" is "Hot Lake." Popularly, it is also called "The Pearl of the Tien Shan" and "The Eye of God."

The peaks of the mountains surrounding the lake are covered with white caps of eternal snow. The slopes are covered with coniferous and deciduous forests, alpine meadows, and flowers. Mountain rivers sing and gurgle as

they carry their waters into Lake Issyk-Kul. Eagles and falcons soar above. Fish splash in the waters of the river and the lake – oswan, chebak, whitefish, trout, and pike perch. The animal world is amazingly diverse, but the crown jewel of all this splendor is the snow leopard! He is extraordinarily handsome, strong, graceful, brave, and smart. He is the Lord of the Mountains.

Among this beauty, the miracle of nature Lake Issyk-Kul spreads its waters. It's huge and deep like the sea. Not a single river flows from the lake, yet 365 rivers feed its salty water; water that is clear, as clear as a baby's tear.

Kyrgyz folk legend says that Lake Issyk-Kul was formed from the tears of a beautiful girl. Her parents wanted to force her to marry an old, but very rich man, but the girl dearly loved the young and brave horseman. The poor horseman could give nothing to the beauty except his love and loyalty. The beauty cried bitterly and begged her parents not to give her to the old man. The girl's father and mother were adamant in their decision. Having cried all her tears, the girl rushed from the steep shore of the lake into the watery abyss. The water of the lake swallowed her up.

The old man did not get the girl, and the girl's hot heart remained faithful to the beloved horseman. The water of the lake is salty from the girl's tears and hot from the girl's heart. The mountain ranges surrounding the lake, like giant horsemen, protect the peace of the drowned girl and salute her ardent love and loyalty.

The climate of the water area of the lake is soft and comfortable. The salty lake water does not freeze in winter. On hot summer days, tourists from all countries of the world receive coolness, relaxation, and treatment in the oasis. They swim, sunbathe, and heal in the lake water.

This trip to Kyrgyzstan is a great gift from life. I could see the beauty of Lake Issyk-Kul, plunge into the history of the Kyrgyz people, enjoy national folklore and traditions of the Kyrgyz nomads, taste national dishes – beshbarmak, boorsok, and kumis.

My life has given me the opportunity to greet a new day, breathe deeply, love the world around me, enjoy the beauty of nature, travel to distant countries, and visit magnificent places on our planet earth such as Lake Issyk-Kul. I thank and love you, my life! Life, thank you for your love for me—our mutual love gives me strength, joy, and satisfaction in our beautiful world!



Thank you for reading

Love, Across Borders

A Collection of Creative Non-Fiction by
Immigrant Seniors and Mount Royal University Students

2024



