



migration  
stories

A Community Anthology, 2017



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A Community Anthology, 2017

Drawn from the community at and around the University of Chicago

Edited by Rachel Cohen and Rachel DeWoskin



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## Introduction

The Migration Stories Project began in November of 2016. The two of us were sitting on a living room couch, watching, through the window, our children and other peoples' children playing on an athletic field across the street, and trying to look forward with good hope. All those children, or their families, had come from other places, as we had come from other places, and as our families had. We felt afresh the injustice of pretending otherwise, and the desire to give our shared public language a different sound. Over and over in our working lives, we have seen how reading and writing and listening to stories has given dimension and nuance to a view of the past, has helped to transform what the future can be. We thought by collecting stories about migration, and giving people new chances to tell them, listen to them, and read them, we

might, little by little, do something to begin to open a broader view.

Over the last year, in presenting public readings, putting up posters with migration stories across campus and through Hyde Park and Kenwood, talking with dozens of young people and with librarians, counselors, teachers, faculty, and staff administrators at the University of Chicago, the Laboratory Schools, Kenwood Academy, the U Chicago Charter Schools, and Mt. Carmel High School, we have been heartened by the stories that people have to tell, stories of depth and complexity that document our movements, reflect on them, and transform them into new art.

We have come to think of the Migration Stories Project as a living archive. From the outset, we wanted



the project to focus not on a group of people who are called “immigrants,” but on migration, that human activity, motion, across water, land and air, that is natural to us and that comes to every life in different forms. The stories themselves are a part of these movements; they themselves move from one place to another, one person’s memory to another’s. Collected here are twenty-nine pieces – fiction, poetry, essays, documentary work, oral history, photography, self-portraits and portraits of others – that we have been proud to receive for this community anthology. Created by people of all ages and backgrounds and histories, who take many different roles in our institutions and neighborhoods, the contents of this anthology make a kind of portrait of their own. Here are stories that a large and various community is telling itself at this moment in history, about where we have been and where we have landed.

The project would not have happened without the kind support and hard work of many people. We have detailed their contributions in the acknowledgements at the end, but here we would like to give a few brief thanks. First and foremost, to the contributors themselves, for their generosity in sharing their work and their stories. In the Creative Writing Program, to Jessi Haley and Starsha Gill, and our supportive colleagues. At Student Support Services at the Center for Identity + Inclusion, to Ronnie Rios and Ileri Rivas. At the Laboratory Schools, to Susan Augustine and Hannah Roche. At

the University of Chicago Library to Sarah G. Wenzel. And, gratefully, to Vidura Jang Bahadur, who designed this small book.

We hope the stories here move you, as they do us, to write new stories and to read them. That is how a living archive goes on with its life.

**Rachel Cohen & Rachel DeWoskin**  
Faculty, Creative Writing Program,  
University of Chicago  
2017



I sat awake just beneath the gunwale with the sea spraying  
the crown of my head, and I listened to the boat's  
engine sputtering us towards Malaysia and farther and  
farther away from home. It was the sound of us leaving  
everything behind.

Vu Tran

from *Dragonfish*



## Watching Children



## Souls and Shadows

fiction, by Elinam Agbo

I am a thirty-five-year-old mother of two. They were born, four years apart, at Agona Swedru Central Hospital. The boy is gone. The girl is with me, for now.

I was born at the midwifery in a merchant village along the Volta River. I was raised in Battor and Keta. Battor is the hometown I have not seen in over a decade. These are the images the Shadow shows me, now that it has nearly fused with my body, trailing close behind like a vengeful spirit. The closer it gets, the colder I become, and the memories – the flashes – retreat farther into the storm from which they emerged. Sometimes I wonder about the woman who lived in these reflections. Who was she? What were her thoughts? What were her dreams?

There is one habit I still recall to have

been mine. I used to track the days like clockwork, waving goodbye to the year at its end, but now all the days have begun to bleed together into a colorless stream. I don't know when one year ends and another begins.

I used to stack my students' papers neatly on the living room desk. When her brother was snoring and the girl could not sleep, she would pull up a chair to keep me company, and I would let her stay with me, long into the night when only nocturnal birds were awake to peek through our windows.

"How can I help you?" she would say, and I would pull out my key to the multiple-choice questions from under the stack of nearly illegible essays. She would dictate the answers for me, her voice measured like the

hands of a clock.

She liked to be needed. That was something we had in common.

I don't know exactly how the years have changed for her, only that they have changed her. Now we have this invisible glass between us. I have banged and banged and it doesn't budge, doesn't even acknowledge the disturbance. Is it the Shadow getting in the way, or am I myself the impediment? I cannot tell. I cannot do my job properly anymore. I cannot be the teacher I was before, not with my third-world degree, not with my heavy tongue speaking this other English she is always trying to fix, not when my daughter's mouth – so full of new expressions – tells me how little I have to offer.

Now there is this glass between us.

I would have liked to be warned, I say from the other side of the glass to a daughter who is trying to listen, trying to adapt to my frozen self, even as she sheds a layer of her own skin each day.

Tell me I will wither, the Shadow echoes. Tell me time will stop and I will wish for it to rush immediately to the end. Tell me I will need to wear new names like mismatched clothes. Tell me this is how it feels for a body to reject itself – like this, here, this cold Shadow, this cold Nothing. Tell me the truth, before it's too late.

“What do you need, Ma?” the girl cries. She has taken my place, banging on the aloof glass wall. I

don't know if I answer. I cannot hear myself anymore.

I hear a voice singing, from my side of the glass:

My grandmother used to say: your mouth is so full now. Who owns this mouth that remembers the meaning but not the word?

I want to tell her my name means refuge, my name means hiding place. Home equals house plus inside. Home means 'inside house.'

But there is this glass between us.

The girl is shaking her head more vigorously, like she is arguing with the glass and losing. Now she has begun to wrestle with the Shadow. She fights the passive thing, and I see Jacob and the angel. Something familiar. Fear of a return. Fear of a return home. Fear of inside house. Why am I afraid of the place I was made? Why am I stuck where I am unmade?

My grandmother used to say: we are hard people. We were taught to hope. Hope until you run out of life. Hope, even if you must believe a lie. Lies are not so bad if they keep you alive, are they?

My grandmother used to say, tell the truth when you can.

How simple to say, honestly, “there is no land of milk and honey except in your head.” Simple is not easy but at least it would have been over quickly.

I see the girl with a blue-inked pen,  
writing longhand, a letter addressed  
in that neat scrawl I used to teach  
her. I cannot tell where she sits in  
time.

I feel her skin shifting like it is my  
own.

I fear the layers will peel until there  
is only the white of her bones. She  
says she is not fitting in. She says  
she must continue to change until  
she cannot be separated from the  
snow, from the sharp thistles and the  
cold trees. Someday, she hopes, the  
change will reach an end. 'Someday'  
is never, but I am mute now and  
cannot tell her.

Home is inside house, I want to shout  
through all the time passing through  
our glass wall. I want to shout until  
she hears me: Do you understand,  
my child? How can I help you?

I am a thirty-five-year-old mother of  
two. They were born, four years –



## Snapshots of our Journey

by Tadeo Weiner- Davis

La Paz, Bolivia to Esperanza, Argentina to Kansas City to Palo Alto to Chicago to Washington, D.C. to Kansas City to Chicago

\*\*\*

Má: *Acuérdense*, if they ask, we're going to Disneyland.

M: We're going to Disneyland?!

T: No, dummy. We just tell them that.

B: Yea, we tell them that.

Customs Agent: Where are you headed?

Everyone: Disneyland!

\*\*\*

His mother, my grandmother, said her last goodbye over the phone. She spoke no more after that. In the following days, he did not ask *má* if he should go back for her funeral. He did not ask us if we would miss him. But, he knew that he would not be able to return; at least not easily, not like before. Still, he went back. He left us.

\*\*\*

In Bolivia, we had a dog and a cat. Here, we have hamsters.

In Bolivia, we had a big house. Here, only cramped apartments.

In Bolivia, *má* worked only one job; that one she liked as an aerobics instructor.

Here, she works three; KFC, Wendy's,

and selling Avon products.

In Bolivia, I was the oldest of us three.  
Here, I became a big brother.

\*\*\*

So, if I don't get *papeles* by the time I go to Stanford, then I won't get any financial aid and I'll have to take out private loans and work extra hours, so if I don't get *papeles* I shouldn't even go away for college, maybe I shouldn't go to college at all, because if I don't get *papeles* nobody will hire me when I graduate, if I graduate, so it'd be better if I start working now and start moving up the ranks instead of wasting time, that way I can help *má* with money and things around the house. Why shouldn't I deal, again?

\*\*\*

Nono: (inaudible)

Nona: Could you hear him? He's very weak now.

T: No, I couldn't. What did he say? Please tell me what he said.

Nona: He said, try to forgive your dad.

\*\*\*

The world was so small when I first came over.

Home, school, the supermarket.

The world is getting bigger, now.

And I feel it perching on my shoulders.

Trump, Trump, Trump.

## Pitangas

by Felipe Bomeny

At the height of summer, the backyard hedge was enflamed with pitangas. The fruits resembled dwarfed pumpkins, misplaced in the tropics; fluted flesh trapped tart juice just like the Fruit Gushers my mother refused to buy. They ranged from orange to crimson – the bright red ones tasted the best. And so, before the saplings in the backyard yielded hauls of mangos and constellations of starfruit, I would cradle handfuls of pitangas in my hands. Their delicate skin burst: and I remembered being seven years old, my oversized white T-shirt irrevocably stained with pitanga juice like bloodred watercolors.

Of the second grade, I only remember blurs: interrupting a classmate's presentation after she identified São Paulo as the capital of Brazil; the cruel, collective laughter of the

classroom when another classmate peed himself; the recurring parent-teacher conferences where my difficulties settling in were discussed; the practice FCAT Writes essays that prompted the teacher to predict a future of writing for me; the afternoons when a parent would come in and read out loud in usually accented English. The most striking impression was a simple classroom exercise in which students named their favorite fruit, one-by-one. They started: bananas, apples, bananas, oranges, strawberries, green apples, blue raspberries, oranges, strawberries. Finally, it's my turn.

"Pitanga," I blurt out, beaming.

"What?" the teacher said, her eyebrows scrunched.

"Pitanga," I repeat. The teacher's

look is still frozen in puzzlement. I begin a stammered explanation: “It’s kind of like a cherry, except – ”

“Why don’t you just say cherry, then?” she suggests. I concede, blushing as red as a pitanga. The class continues: bananas, apples, strawberries, apples, oranges...

The weekend after the fruit-naming exercise, I returned to the backyard and examined the pitangas furiously. How could the teacher not recognize them? They were ubiquitous in South Florida: pitangas grew on neighbors’ hedges, by the entrance to our neighborhood, outside houses on the bus ride to school.

Outside, my father was commanding the grill for our customary Sunday churrasco. Picanha and chicken hearts sat on coal. Dad (Papai, in Portuguese) reclined on a patio chair, under the shade of the massive, gnarled tree—before it finally succumbed to pesticides and hurricane scars, years later.

“What’s pitanga in English?” I finally asked.

My dad recreated the second grade teacher’s confused reaction, visible even behind sunglasses.

“Luciana, do you know?” he asked my mom, shaking his head.

She frowned: “We just know it as pitanga. Why?”

I told her I was curious, that’s all. But my indignation remained: if pitanga

was its only name, how come I had to revise my answer to cherries? Later, a Google search would yield its English moniker: Surinam cherry—a cherry after all. The other fruits in the backyard soon adopted Anglicized names: the prickly graviola became soursop; the pinha, with its dragon’s egg exterior, was Americanized into the more benign sugar apple. Mangos and lychees remained as the only cognates in the garden that Mom tended faithfully.

“Why don’t Americans know pitangas?” I asked them. “They’re everywhere!”

Dad took a thoughtful sip of beer.

“Americans,” he began, “think that they’re poisonous. Like an invasive species,” he explained.

“If only they knew how good they tasted,” he said, eating one.

“Oh,” I said, feeling my cheeks flush, hot and indignant. The sun was bright and the air humid. It had been two years since my visa expired; it had been two years since I, too, became an invasive species.

## Experience as the first generation

by Sonny Lee

“Fresh Off the Boat” first hit the screens in the beginning of 2015. I liked the teaser on Facebook and told all my friends about it. I was thrilled. Before this, I had never seen so many Asian faces in an American TV show. But from the first episode, I could tell that Eddie, the main character, was just like me. My parents immigrated from East Asia 30 years ago, specifically from Hong Kong and Tianjin, just like Eddie Huang’s parents. My mom and dad opened up their own restaurant in hopes of achieving the “American Dream,” just like Eddie’s parents. Eddie and his Taiwanese family were outsiders in an all-white suburb, while my family and I live in the quiet neighborhood of Bridgeport with a lot of white people populating it, close enough. Lastly, Eddie was ridiculed and made fun of in school for his Chinese lunches, just like I

was. The story was boring, nothing I hadn’t seen before. So I stopped watching replays of my life on TV and continued actually living it.

Fast forward about a year and I wanted to watch the show again, except this time I wanted to see what my parents thought of it. As the show began to roll its canned laughter and gag jokes, my parents laughed along and watched like they would any other show. But then, Eddie complains to his mother that all she ever cares about is money. The mother, played by Constance Wu, responds, “go find a homeless man and ask him whether he thinks money matters or not, and see what he says.” My father pointed out that this line was true in many ways. He has always told me, “Go to school, get into a good college and make money,” I’ve heard this line played

over and over again like a broken record. I hated when my parents used to tell me this, but with time, I understood that it was something I needed to remember.

“Money isn’t everything,” my father explained, “but without money, you can’t get anything.”

For years my father embedded an important line in me.

“Never be like me,” he said.

He doesn’t want me opening a restaurant business like his own, running around at his age all day and night making food deliveries for a couple bucks. I wasn’t thinking of it anyways. I witness and live some of the pains that come along with running a restaurant. Achy legs after a day of running back and forth answering phones, packing food and filling up rice warmers. Hands that smell like different Chinese dishes from packing them into their comfortable brown paper bags all day.

I never really liked the idea of my parents owning a restaurant, mainly because it meant seeing them in a work setting and not seeing them enough in the family setting. The only skills that I’ve honed in my years of being raised in restaurants are the ability to sweep a floor clean, calming impatient customers, closing take-out boxes like a pro and most importantly, being able to pack and bag five orders at a time without any mistakes.

Though 11 year-old me and 11 year-old Eddie share many similarities through our background stories, there are some big differences that I’ve discovered over the course of a year. Sure, I threw away my Chinese lunches a couple times when I was 11 so that the other kids wouldn’t look at me differently. I made my parents buy Hotpockets, so I’d have a “white people” lunch, just like Eddie did. And at the age of 11, I always thought that my parents couldn’t understand what was going through my mind. I always distanced myself from my parents, just like Eddie.

However, now I’ve matured enough to understand that conforming to these “American” lunches was boring, and separating myself from my own culture put distance between me and my family, which is not what I wanted. My parents didn’t work this hard so that I would lose sight of my own heritage. And sure, my skills in packing food are a cut above the average Joe, but I’ve learned more than that. My focus, work ethic and attention to detail can only be attributed to the dinner rush hours between 6 and 9.

Characters like Eddie Huang are important for young tv audiences and especially anybody who has ever felt like an outsider. They’re more than a representation of a foreigner, more than an underdog, they’re a symbol that things are going to get better. They prove that being yourself is more important than sacrificing character to fit into a cutout.

Although Eddie and I may be different in our own ways than the status quo, we both eventually found our groups and fit into our own cutouts and standards. So in that sense, we really aren't that fresh off the boat.



Document



## At Softex

by Gautama Mehta

More than a thousand people, most of them Syrian, were housed in a refugee camp called Softex. Softex was an abandoned paper-towel factory on the outskirts of the Greek city of Thessaloniki. Surrounding it was a vast industrial landscape of warehouses, truck stops, and junkyards. The narrow road adjoining the camp had no sidewalk, and was traversed by enormous trucks at speeds that rendered crossing perilous. But a boy aged fourteen or so named Amar rode his bicycle down this road in wide circles, grinning madly at a group of volunteers while defiantly refusing to get out of the trucks' way, leaving our field of vision only to presently reappear from the other direction, each time inexplicably astride a different bike.

I was volunteering for an organization

called InterVolve, whose ostensible mandate was to distribute "non-food items," which is human-rights jargon signifying, in this case, primarily diapers, shampoo, soap, razors, and laundry detergent, and, very rarely, clothes. They stocked a shipping container with these supplies and gave them out to the camp's residents each morning. They were in something of a turf war with Save the Children over baby formula.

One Friday the volunteers bought tubes of red, green, yellow and blue acrylic paint and gave it to the kids to decorate one of the long outer walls of the shipping container. They'd gotten some men from the camp to paint it white beforehand; this had taken all morning. They didn't have brushes for the kids, so they made them put on latex gloves and told them to paint with their

hands. They were hoping for a huge mural of child-sized handprints but worried that the kids would just throw the paint at each other rather than beautify the container wall. This didn't happen. At first the kids dutifully made handprints, but soon they began to really paint, swirling and smearing the colors around until they blended into a thick, earthy, layered greenish red. Finally, after the kids finished painting and got bored of blowing up the latex gloves into balloons, and after some of their parents expressed their annoyance at the volunteers because the kids' clothes had paint all over them, and most of them didn't have other clothes to change into, everyone left and the container wall looked like a gigantic Gerhard Richter abstract, standing low and incongruous against the desolate landscape of the refugee camp, which was miserably hot in late June (and, it being Ramadan, a substantial portion of the camp was fasting until sundown, abstaining from even water). Around the container there was now paint scattered here and there on the layer of hard gravel stones which covered the whole ground of the camp.

Sarah, a Palestinian-American volunteer, had befriended a little girl, perhaps two or three years old, named Sham. Sham almost never spoke. She would sit in Sarah's lap in the container for hours, almost always expressionless, hardly ever responding to anything anyone said to her. But every day she would come to the container of her own accord to sit with Sarah, who held her and spoke gently to her in Arabic.

Once Sarah took her to the outside of the container and asked what she thought the painting depicted. Sham identified a section of the mural, which had no apparently representational features, as "Daesh"—the Arabic acronym for the Islamic State.

When she finally began talking to Sarah one day, it was about her new shoes, which were red and glittery. Sarah was delighted and began asking her, in Arabic, what color various objects were. Sham played along, shyly, but kept confusing the words for red and blue. Mohamad, a 24-year-old Syrian refugee who volunteered for Intervolve, began playfully scolding her for getting the colors wrong, and another Syrian man joined in, and Sham became silent again. Sarah was furious, and told Mohamad he was a bully. He didn't take her seriously but stopped making fun of Sham anyway.

Another volunteer got Sham engaged in a game where they alternated stacking their hands on top of each other, with the hand at the bottom of the pile going to the top as fast as possible. Sham's older sister joined in and Sham actually started smiling and laughing—a rare event. But then Mohamad dropped a stool and it made a loud noise and Sham got scared and distracted and stopped playing.

Two weeks later it was the day before Eid al-Fitr, the end of Ramadan. Intervolve's plan was to give one set of clothes to each child in the camp under the age of thirteen

as a holiday present. We spent all morning sorting the children's clothes and then bagging them for each individual tent. As we drove into Softex, a huge column of black smoke became visible from behind the old factory building. We drove around the back to discover that a tent was on fire. A soldier advised the volunteers to leave the area, and we did. Later, the volunteer coordinator got a phone call saying a woman had been stabbed. When we went back to the camp there were large groups of men walking around brandishing sticks. Mohammed, an eleven-year-old boy whom I played chess with every morning, told me there had been a fight between Arabs and Kurds. I made him promise to stay safe and away from the fight but I later saw him walking with a group of solemn, angry Arab men in the direction of what seemed to be its center. Other volunteers saw groups of men holding their hands behind their backs as they walked, indicating that they were holding knives. A few Kurdish women fled the camp in taxis. Someone said the fight had initially been over a stolen cell phone. Someone said a second person had been stabbed. For the most part the camp's residents didn't say much about what was going on; when asked, they just repeated the word "problem" in English. Police arrived but stood by and did nothing, by all accounts following their usual practice. Two reporters from a local news station pulled up in a car and walked in the direction of the camp with camera equipment as I was leaving. InterVolve had pulled all its volunteers out of the camp. The

distribution of the kids' clothes was postponed till the next day.

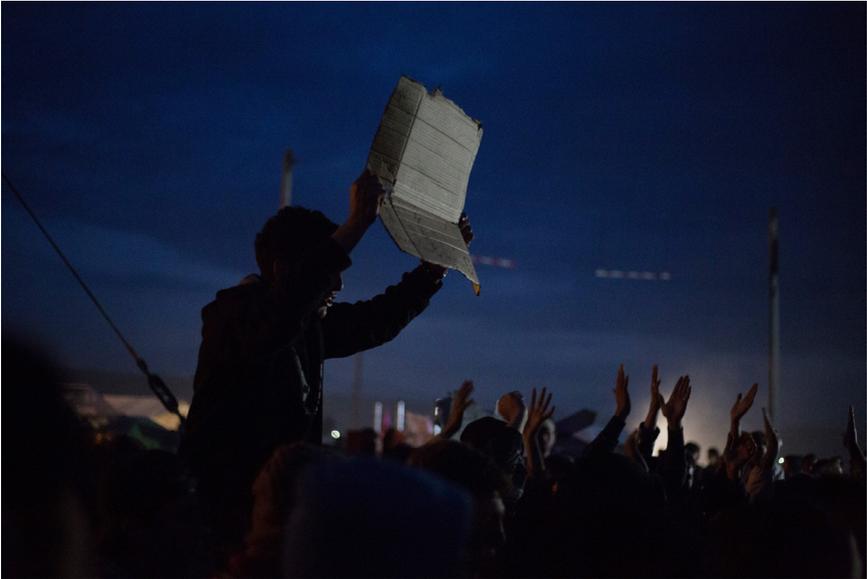


## **Refugee Crisis in Greece**

by Erik Mueller

The following photographs were taken in March and April of 2016 at informal refugee camps in Idomeni and Piraeus, Greece. I was in Greece seeking to document the crisis as an independent photojournalist.

Idomeni is a small village in northern Greece that lies adjacent to the border with Macedonia. Refugees and migrants settled there by the thousands while attempting to get further into Europe. Piraeus is a port city located near Athens. It was the first site in mainland Greece where many refugees arrived before heading further north. Thousands of refugees and migrants settled there after the Macedonian border was closed.



March 18, 2016 – Idomeni, Refugees gathered to protest the border closing and the refugee agreement between the EU and Turkey. Many understood the agreement as meaning that they would be sent back to Turkey.



April 5, 2016 - Piraeus, Greece - Refugee and migrant women and children walk behind an area where aid workers are distributing meals.



March 18, 2016 – Piraeus, Greece -Two Pakistani migrants camped along Idomeni's railroad tracks tend to their morning fire.



April 25, 2016 – Piraeus, Greece - Renda is a Syrian refugee from Idlib, Syria. She worked as a nurse prior to her retirement. She & her son, Moustafa, fled from Idlib and traveled to Greece via Turkey. The two were living in a tent in the port of Piraeus when this photograph was taken.



April 18, 2016 - Piraeus, Greece – A man tries to present a police officer with his asylum paperwork in order to be resettled in a newly constructed refugee camp in Skaramagas, Greece.



April 11, 2016 – Piraeus, Greece - A refugee child in the skeleton of a cargo trailer at a refugee camp in the port of Piraeus, Greece



April 19, 2016 – Piraeus, Greece - The remaining refugees & migrants living in an informal refugee camp at terminal E2 in the port of Piraeus, Greece were forced to relocate. Many settled under a bridge in the port, others settled near a warehouse where many refugees have been living. Some moved to E1, the last terminal hosting refugees.



April 19, 2016 - Piraeus, Greece – Tents set up next to an abandoned warehouse in an informal refugee camp in the port of Piraeus.



## Looking Back



## Parthood Relations

by Laura Letinsky

Sophie came across the water, in one of the cheapest berths, loaded with as much wool, food, and gold as she had and as she could carry. Leaving her three sisters and mother, she landed on the east coast of Canada, taking the train to an aunt of distant relation who agreed to soften her landing here, where food and work were rumored to be in abundance. Quick with her hands, she learned to sew, less by formula and more by intuition and necessity. She was hired at a dress store, altering ladies fancy --by those standards-- dress wear and making extra by sewing for neighbors by night. Sixteen years old and away from her family for the first time, she became smitten by a dapper white shirt, suit-wearing balalaika player, Sam, who was similarly struck by her now filled-out curves. He'd recently arrived with his brother and mother, following nine

years in his father's wake.

A postage size house and yard one beside another bordered by the scantest of fences each planted with peas raspberries carrots onions poppies crab-apples and forget-me-knots she told me were called Laura's blue eyes, two children, a nervous breakdown, small blue box holding pennies for Israeli, cheapest cuts of meat marinated, boiled, baked, stewed, pickled and delicious, plastic bags washed and hung to dry on the line, bacon snuck at the urgings of her Ukrainian friend, her sisters and mother visited for the first and last time after over thirty years away, a leg lost to obesity-induced diabetes from trying to feed the hunger that never left her, her only son's death by accident further ebbing away at her mind and body until she passed, leaving Sam who had turned out to

be the cloud to her sun, him dying  
ten years later.

\*\*\*

Winnipeg, Canada, is in the middle  
of North America, subject to a harsh  
seasonal climate that varies from  
lows of -40 degrees C to 30 degrees,  
surrounded by seas of grain that set  
off the ferocious blue of the sky.

The two rivers that meet here made  
it an important trade, transport, and  
farming site for indigenous peoples,  
and later, traders from France and  
Britain, some growing wealthy  
and settling, followed by waves of  
immigrants beginning as early as the  
1890's from Eastern Europe, later the  
Philippines, China, India, Pakistan,  
Rwanda, Nigeria, and more.

The mosaic is Canada's metaphor for  
immigration, the whole composed  
of and made complete by its parts.



Sophie (far right), with her sisters and mother, January, 1960







## The Cost Of The Dream

by Alexa Patrick- Rodriguez

*Sigfredo Rodriguez, my grandfather, was born in Puerto Rico where he was one of 8 children. He moved to the United States when he was eight years old and has since made a life for himself in Northwest Indiana.*

When I was little in Puerto Rico my sister and I would run around barefooted, shorts, no shirt, by the river. We would put our hands under the rocks and look for crayfish, which we would put in a can and take 'em home. Later, we would boil and eat 'em. One day my mother saw a crawfish hauling a little turd by its mouth and after that we didn't eat them anymore. I was 8 years old when we moved here. I had no idea what a big change it was. I remember people saying, "Oh so you're going to the United States," but I had no idea what that meant. My father came over first to be a

migrant worker and he ultimately ended up in East Chicago, Indiana. He sent home letters telling us about how beautiful it was in America, but now I don't understand how anybody could call the east side beautiful compared to Puerto Rico. He would send us money until one day we wound up on a propeller driven plane. It took me from my warm society to one so cold. The first morning we were here my parents woke us up. It was the first time we ever saw snow, we yelled, "Oh look at that!". We lived in an apartment that had 2 bedrooms. We had something like 4 siblings. It was crowded. In the living room was like a big coal stove to heat up the apartment. At times the heat was just in the center of the apartment. Sometimes when it got really really cold, everybody would just bring their bedding in the living room and that's where we slept

sometimes when it was freezing. We were happy, not very rich, but not that poor.

We didn't know any English because the teacher in Puerto Rico tried to teach it to us, but they didn't even speak it themselves so they pronounced everything wrong. I was sent to an English school where they gave us a little test to see what grade to put us in. I was put in the second grade, which I didn't like. I was assigned to another student who was supposed to teach me the language, but we just went up to a small library to rascal. I didn't speak for the longest time; I was not confident. In fourth grade they taught us how to use a dictionary. I didn't know the alphabet so I had no concept of how people were finding the words and I was too afraid to ask. It didn't go well for me that year so they held me back. That was a very humiliating experience. I made up for it the next year in summer school and opened my mouth to participate.

By the time high school came around I was a pretty smart kid and I knew that. I was placed in the 6a1 group, which was the highest level. It was fun until eighth grade when I had to transfer to a new school because of President Johnson's Urban Renewal Project. There weren't too many other Latino people at this school. The other students were way better off financially than myself. At that point, I was one of seven children in my family. I would put on my best clothes on Monday and wear the same outfit all week: same socks,

same shoes. I had holes in my socks. The better-dressed kids would point out the holes in my socks, I felt so excluded. The day after I graduated high school I went to work at the Steel Mills. They put me on the night shift and by morning I had blisters all over my hands, I think they did that on purpose. High school didn't prepare me for anything. The same day I started working I received a letter saying I had been drafted for the military.

After a couple months of training I was sent to Pleiku, Vietnam, which is in the highlands, in the middle of monsoon season. As we got off the plane, there was another single file line walking on to it. They would yell "Short!" which referred to the fact that we had to stay for twelve months while they were only there for four. There was a constant smell of burning manure. The ground was damp and wet so everybody was slipping. A lot of people were walking around with broken legs; it was an initiation.

When I got back to Chicago, I went back to work at the Steel Mills. After a while I was fed up with the manual labor. One day I just wasn't myself. Somehow the crane lowered its hook and hit me on the head. I had a helmet on but I was furious. I walked off the job and went over to Calumet College where I sat by the door. I was intimidated; I thought I needed more algebra or advanced mathematics. I backed off and went home. It was a bad decision and now I know better.

I saw an ad for a community college in Chicago so I went and got an associate degree in business administration. I took a test. I must've done fine because I got a call from the Social Security Administration for an interview. I bought a new suit. I shaved. They offered me a job. I never had enough time, it was continuous work. If you didn't put that input in today, it meant the individual would be calling you up wondering where their check was that they needed to live off of. We still had a lot of fun, a lot of young people. Time went so fast. That's where I met my wife.

I've been back to Puerto Rico. All the people I knew as a child are doing well. I wonder how my life would be different if my father would've said no to the American Dream. My mother was a beautiful woman, very vivacious, but she packed up her belongings and left the island. For her, the American Dream was a nightmare. She was stuck in a two bedroom apartment in a cold, grey city. She cared most about family. She had the opportunity to go back, but her whole family was here. My parents never really understood society. Our neighborhood was in the shadow of a lead factory. Our old house had old paint and old plaster. We weren't aware of all these little traps. This cost my parents their lives. The American Dream killed them. If you were to draw a line on a sheet of paper and label the good and the bad, I don't think the good would win. I don't know if the American Dream was the right decision. I don't think it was actually.



## Children's Books

fiction, by Kellie Lu

And “Fuck,” in Ara’s myopic haze from the floor, the ringing of the phone was that much clearer to her.

“Here, hold this for a second,” giving her cup to her friend.

“I can’t look for your glasses if I’m holding this.”

“Then put it on the table, or something.” Without even looking at the caller ID, she slid her finger across the screen.

“Hello?”

A girl’s voice. “Hey, can I tell you something?”

Ara nodded into the phone, trying to recall the voice.

“I’m going to tell you anyway. I had

a dream last night, about books.”

Books.

Some basic bitch. Tote bag instead of a backpack, eyes ringed all dark with mascara and liner, white Adidas shoes and black leggings. The two girls went through the basics: name, year, where were you from, major. The other girl mentioned that she was minoring in creative writing.

“Really? What genre?”

“Oh, you know. Short stories...”

Even that was basic.

“...And a little fantasy...”

But it was only young adult fantasy, girls who discovered some supernatural powers around them.

Utterly uninspiring.

“...What about you? You like books?”

Ara couldn't remember the name of the girl, who continued: “I'm drunk, I'm sorry.”

Ara nodded again. “Me, too. Crossed.” She thought she saw her glasses, but it turned out to be a plastic fork.

“But I thought maybe you'd get it because you like books, too.”

With the vodka inside her, she didn't mind the understatement. She envisioned this girl, drunk somewhere, calling her in the dark. “Sure, go ahead.”

“In my dream, I had a discussion class, except it was in my old apartment in the Bronx. You've lived in Chicago your whole life, right? I'm from New York, or I used to be, and now I'm here. And so I turned around and said to this girl next to me, ‘This was my old apartment!’

“I was so surprised that my old place could even fit a discussion. And you know how, like, in dreams, you'll be like, ‘oh, it was me, but in my dream I was a bird, but it was still me?’ This wasn't like that at all. This was my real apartment, exactly as I remember it; if I close my eyes now, I – I – see it, like that, the same way and that's the way it was in my dream.”

An apartment in the Bronx. Like Ara had always wanted, a small nook somewhere. Wake up and look

out over the fire escapes, take the subway to the city and write. Were those her glasses?

“And so I turned, and there was my old bookshelf, right there. From real life. Like, you don't even know. That tan plywood bookshelf, that was the biggest thing in our whole goddamn apartment. My mom's bed was in the living room because that bookshelf, my bed, and my desk took up the whole bedroom. There were cabinets on the very bottom and they squeaked and were so hard to open because the weight of the books bent the shelf, that's what my mom told me. And I looked at it in my dream and on it I saw my books.

“Real books. You don't even know, afterwards when I woke up I just started repeating them over and over again in my memory. *Children's Anthology of Fairy Tales*. Two books, one was yellow with silver-lined pages, and the other was blue with gold. There were morals at the end of each story and pictures throughout. Then this beautiful illustrated, hardcover set of adapted versions of great books, *Anne of Green Gables* and *Huck Finn* and *Wind in the Willows* and shit. They weren't even the real ones, they were the adapted version for kids. But my mom bought them for me at a book fair in my school because I wanted them and I didn't know anything and had gotten good grades in school.

“And then there was the dictionary my mom uses, small, paperback, lines across the spine all over. Plus a cookbook she had all dog-eared,

something she told me never to do.”

Ara smiled. She could see the books before her, in colors and shapes on the shelf, heavy and cool with a smell buried in each spine. She could cut herself on the edges of the pages in the dry winter air.

“I read those books of mine end-to-end and in my dream they were on the shelf along with my mom’s. You know what happened to them? When I moved? When I got to our new house here, I was so fucking excited. It took me five months. Five *months* to ask her, ‘Hey, Mom, where are my books?’ And we looked for them, and you know what she said? She said, ‘I think those were the boxes that got lost.’

“So in my dream, they were there, and they were aching and the bookshelf was furious—it had eyebrows and everything, huge.” A small sob—a laugh? “And it wanted to know why I’d left them behind. And I promised them, now that I was here, I would steal them back. Little by little, because I couldn’t fit them all in my bag at once. I was going to come back every day.

“We have all this *shit*. You don’t even know. We live in his house, use his money for makeup and clothes, his kid gave us ugly jewelry. He even got us a new car. I didn’t know what to *do* in them. It’s been years and I still don’t know, but my mom’s happy. And he has this bookshelf. Dark wood, huge and fat over the wall, filled with these old-ass *tomes*, dark red or brown with gold stamping

about history, volume I, II, whatever.”

Ara, too, felt the rage, knew the feeling of the fairy tales cradled in her lap, the weight of them, the sound of their flipping pages and the glossiness under her fingertips in the rosy dawn of her childhood. She hated this man.

Some quiet crying on the other side. “I don’t even know how I thought of them again. It’s been years. But my dream knew. They were *my* books, you know, Ara? And I let them down. I went away.”

Ara felt herself crying, too. What had Ara been looking for? She sat down. She didn’t give a fuck.

“Who reads them now, the books of your childhood, once you’re not there anymore?” The two girls cried together on the ends of the phone. “They have no one to read them.”



## Scattered Memories

by Reema Saleh

She pieced through photograph after photograph strewn on the red and gold threaded rug. Every few minutes, Mom would reach out and pick one from the scattered patches, look at it wistfully, and then become distracted by another distant memory. I yawned – the laziness of the Sunday morning refused to shake itself from my eyes. Then, she smiled at me again.

“Look at this one, *maa’re*. I thought I’d never find this one again!” She handed it to me, and I inspected it. A photograph of an elderly looking man gently smiling in the crowd of several of his daughters. “Here’s your grandfather, Saeed.”

I stared closer at the wrinkles around his smile and children he was surrounded by. Mom always mentioned that she was the

youngest in the family, so I looked out for her in the children milling about, but I could not tell if any were her.

“I wasn’t born yet, honey,” she said in response. “There’s Auntie Gumja, Auntie Geday, Uncle Absalam, Auntie Nura...”

The chattering lady, the scold, the soft-hearted uncle, the one in Europe...and a bunch of other names that I didn’t recognize. But my heart fell in disappointment.

“I wish you had photos of you. Then I could know if you looked like me when you were little,” I said. I thought back to the picture of my dad as a baby, nestled in the arms of his mother in a bonnet and messy onesie. “Dad has baby photos, so why don’t you?” I asked.

All of the pictures I had seen of Mom were old – her old passport photo when she left for Jeddah in her twenties, her Canadian citizenship papers, and a faded photo of her with a college roommate. She was always frowning in them, her eyes too serious as she stared blankly into the camera lens. Everyone always said that I looked like my Dada, but once a random aunt looked at me when I blew out my sixth birthday candle and said I looked exactly like my mother when she was a little girl. Which was true?

“Dad has baby photos, so why don’t you?” I asked.

Her lips pressed together in a tight line. “You know, he had a lot of advantages growing up in Addis Ababa. Better jobs, better schools, better houses. His dad was a warehouse manager, too.” she said. “It was just easier to afford than in Asmara.”

I paused for a while.

“Do you ever miss home?”

“A little bit. Your dad wants to move back when we retire, but I’m not sure. I think I’m a bit too much for Eritrea now. I’m probably too American to fit in there now,” she snickered. “Besides, most of my sisters have left our home there.”

A tear trickled out from the corner of her eye, and she wiped it away before it left a trace. I pretended not to see.

And suddenly, she was only human.

Then the kettle whistled from the kitchen and demanded our attention. The breeze stopped drifting like dead air and resumed its daily movement. She held up the camera sitting in her lap and flagged down my Dad as he passed through the living room.

“We should take some more photos together. You’re going to change so much when you’re gone, Reema. We have to keep these things around if we want to keep the memories intact.”

Even now I smile at the lens, but I can’t help thinking that it’s a bit pointless – trying to separate each memory into its own separate corner. I look at the scattered photos, and I don’t remember where my uncle went to school, what year mother immigrated here, or the exact spot in Canada where my father met my mother. I’ll remember the wrinkles of my grandfather’s smile that are unmarred by the aging photograph, the smell of bitter coffee drifting around the room, the sounds of Ethiopian jazz fading in the background, and my father’s hand resting on my shoulder. The details will fade, but we can still trace the shape they’ve made.

## Mothers and Daughters

by Michelle Gan

When I was 18, I left New York City, the only home I'd ever known, for college in Chicago. Every three months or so, sometimes six, I make the journey between the two cities – a measly distance, really: about 90 minutes in a plane with complimentary peanuts and pretzels.

When my mom was 30, and pregnant with twins, she left the Philippines, the only home she had ever known, to join her husband in this new country. She sat alone on an 18-hour flight to New York from Manila. Unlike me, she didn't know when she would get to go back.

I talk to my mom almost every day, we Skype once a week, I send her casual emails asking her to help me with taxes and W-9s. My parents grew up in an era of pagers, where

long-distance phone calls were a luxury for holidays, birthdays, and anniversaries. I hug my parents every three months; my dad hasn't seen his in over 10 years. I can't fathom a relationship with my parents where we talk so infrequently, without hearing my mom ask me if I have a boyfriend yet, or my dad tell me about the latest Pokemon he's caught walking in the park. I cannot imagine not seeing my parents' faces for so long. My father does not know how it feels to hug my grandfather, and to wrap my arms around mostly bones and feel the weight he has lost in the last three years. My father cannot see how my grandfather's wrinkles sharpen into angry lines when he complains about how wearing his hearing aid makes his ears hurt. My father cannot hear my grandfather's voice rise with excitement as he describes

his dream family vacation: all of his children and grandchildren visiting China, where he was born so long ago. Unstable, staticky connections over long-distance phone calls and pixelated Facebook photos only serve as faint reminders of how time has changed both of them.

Nevertheless, I moved to Chicago to get away from my family. My love for them didn't change the fact that our house felt too small for the four of us, and that my seventeen-year old self wanted to feel free from my parents' scrutiny. She might not like it, but I was taking a page out of my own mother's book.

My mom moved 8,491 miles to get away from her parents; that's how much she wanted to be independent from her family. My mother did not want the life her parents had dreamed for her: marrying a "good" Chinese man, preferably a friend of the family, and playing the dutiful wife to a husband that made all the decisions. My mom didn't want her in-laws to have more input than she did, and how could they, from across the ocean? My grandfather disapproved of my father, felt like he was the wrong choice. He kicked my mom out of the house when she refused to break up with him, and refused to walk her down the aisle or even attend her wedding.

In the last three years, I have visited my home every three months; in the last three years, my mom has visited hers every summer. Returning was required. My mother had let me attend college in Chicago under the

condition that I would always go home whenever I could. For her, it took my grandmother's sickness to bring my mother home after almost five years of phone calls at holidays and birthdays. My mom had always wanted to visit sooner, but we always said it was too expensive or too hard to schedule time off from work, that we would go the next year. Now, while honeymooners and backpackers lounge on the tropical beaches of the Philippines, my mom spends her summers at my grandmother's bedside, helping feed and clean my grandmother.

As I grow older, I realize that I am becoming my mother. We wanted to escape our parents, hopping on planes to carve out lives independent from where we came from and their expectations. Yet, we both return home.

## A Meeting

by Sara Maillacheruvu

It was 1985. My father was twenty-three. He received his visa and was about to immigrate to the United States from India. He booked his ticket on the cheap—a few weeks earlier, Japan Airlines Flight 123 crashed into Mount Takamagahara, killing all but four of its passengers. The misfortune of 520 was his good luck.

His father had been in the Indian Army Corps of Engineers but was forced to retire at fifty-eight. To make ends meet, he took consulting jobs and was rarely at home when my father was a boy. My grandfather developed Parkinson's in his later years, and when my mother met him, he was on his deathbed, bedsores raw and red over his decaying body.

My grandmother was married when she was thirteen. She was short, less

than five feet tall, with a nose that curved down at the end, like a tree branch dipping down toward water. She was born in Idumudi, a village too tiny to find on a map, but would spend most of her life bouncing from city to city with my grandfather and her ever-growing brood of children, my father the youngest of her eight. While in college at IIT Chennai, my father lived at home, watching his parents decline, wanting to be somewhere else. Still, he gave his mother a portion of his scholarship money to help her buy groceries—the dowries of his five sisters had nearly bankrupted the family. When he told my grandmother he had received funding to study at the University of Iowa, she was overjoyed. She thought that the US would make him rich the second his feet hit its soil. The equation: West equals wealth.

He flew across the ocean, leaving the heat and monsoons of Chennai for the deep winters and cow-skunk-farm smell of the Midwest. After immigrating, he wired some of his graduate student funding to her, the dollars churning into *rupis* over the Pacific. He lived on a couch his first year in the US.

Long distance phone calls were too expensive, so the family would record messages on cassette tapes, send them across the sea, and listen to the garbled voices through recorders. He kept some of these tapes and converted them into CDs, and I've listened to my grandmother's voice, my grandfather's voice crackling in Telugu. I have no idea what they're saying.

A year after my father immigrated to the US, my grandmother died. Years later, he told me that he knew it was the last time he would see her.

When I asked him how, he told me he just did. He knew, he just knew, he'd never eat amma's *dhal* again, feel the creases of her fraying sari. And he knew, too, that he wouldn't be able to come back for her funeral, give her that final goodbye that he should.

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My mother was a sophomore at Briar Cliff College, a small Catholic school nestled on the Iowa-Nebraska border. She was the first in her family to go to college and wanted to be a teacher. Her father was a carpenter and a janitor at Kuemper High, the

local Catholic school that she and her four younger siblings attended. Her mother had wanted to be an airline hostess, dreamed of serving wine and packaged peanuts to *l'étranger*, but her parents didn't let her. Too far. Stay on the farm, Norma. Feed the chickens. She married my grandfather when she was twenty and had my mother a year later. She worked in the kitchen at the local hospital, stocking the storeroom with industrial-size cans of tomato juice and applesauce. She became bitter – and still is.

My father met my mother when she came to Iowa City with her friend from Briar Cliff, who was dating my father's roommate, another Indian student. My father mustered up enough courage to see if she would go out with him, and after their first date, he asked her if she wanted an Indian boyfriend. She told him that she needed to think about it, peering at him behind coke-bottle glasses, mug of diner coffee in hand. She said yes the next day.

A few years later, she flew to India with him when his father was dying, his body wracked by Parkinson's and years of work and travel and children. She saw his bedsores, felt the suffocating heat of Hyderabad sucking the life out of him. She had never been out of the US before, barely out of Iowa, but in India, there were cows in the streets, mango trees in the garden, people, everywhere. These were the tropes of what India was supposed to be, but they felt true.

My mother and father went for a walk one day, and he got down on one knee—his homeland, her customs—asking her if she'd marry him. She told him she had to think about it and called her parents. She told him yes the next day.

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Hindu wedding ceremonies can be three-day long affairs, but my parents' was condensed into a few hours. My grandfather lay on a cot, watching as they fished for a ring in a pot of rice to see who'd be the dominant spouse. My mother's not quite sure who won. My father says he let her.

Some of my father's nephews were angry at their marriage—she's white, she's not Hindu, she's not a Brahmin. My grandfather gave them his blessing and died three days later.

They travelled back to America, not officially man and wife under US law, so they married in a Catholic church two years later. This wedding made the marriage official, legal to my mother's family, too. At one point in the ceremony, they knelt at the feet of my mother's parents as a nod to the Indian tradition of pranama, heads bowed as they pressed their hands to my grandparents' feet, praying for wisdom and showing their respect, hoping that a marriage thousands of miles in the making could make it.



## City Lines



## Word Problems

by Urvi Kumbhat

One brown-eyed boy stood me up three separate times. The third time I drink four cups of coffee as I wait, and the pistachio green door swings open and shut ten disappointing times. A vendor outside peddles twenty-two heart-shaped red balloons, and a man buys one. I wish he would

buy one more for me, like grandma who always asks my mother for one extra spoon of sugar in her tea, despite her diabetes. My mother asks my father for one lakh rupees to start her own clothing business, my father asks me once what I think of her ambitions. My aunt and grandma ask once: why won't your parents talk to each other? I think about it countless times on my trip. The first flight takes six hours, the layover three, and the longest sky-borne prison sentence lasts a lifetime. For the lucky, college means shuffling between worlds, hovering in between yesterday

and tomorrow in an aeroplane. As I while three hours away in class, my mother shells fifty pods

of peas for lunch in Kolkata. The cook has gone to her village a 100 kilometres away, and so the matriarchs do the complicated math. If there are four guests and one kilo of potatoes, how many

portions will be left for my brothers? Today I ate one caprese sandwich, plucked a thousand daisies on my walk home, and gulped down a chocolate eclair. Three women I knew have died in the last two months, and in the whole wide world zero answers can be found. Over a hundred thousand

people have died elsewhere, and that's only in one day, a day on which I missed five calls from grandpa. Deep in the churning cosmos a hundred billion stars have twinkled to life and exploded in a single year. A cataclysm of light and dark. I tell myself, if I'm already counting, I may as well tally the stars.

## Blue City

by Urvi Kumbhat

In the alabaster courtyard, maps crumble.  
A rusting lantern glows like an abandoned  
diamond. My father's voice fills the sky  
with memories and rickshaws rattle past,  
eavesdropping. An orchid wilts in the heat.

Here, a glass of water from his childhood.  
There, a ghost story from the partition,  
tales of a departed saint, his blessings  
scattered among both Hindus & Muslims.  
The eons-old family shop catches light,  
cordoned off by tin shutters and death.  
No one lives here but the poor.  
No one comes here but the lonely,  
seeking something like history –  
the children have become so curious.

The blue walls have been doused in  
peeling majesty. In the afternoon noise,  
I hear the silence of time. Bikes growl.  
A lilac dusk sweeps over the fort,  
tracking the to and fro of generations.  
A man squats, his muscles rippling.  
Under his turban, sweat mixes with

moustache. I think he wonders who  
we are. I wonder the same thing.

## “Chinago”

by Calvin Chu

Chinago

My parents left

probably the only situation where smart people left somewhere that has 5 stars

china

go

they came

city of broad shoulders

supporting many colleges

education is important they said

my dad's never worked elsewhere

from teaching grad assistant to tenured professor

climbing like the skyscrapers around his office.

my mom's sweat,  
washed away into the Chinatown sinks  
hands calloused forever from dishes cleaned  
as a waitress paying for school  
sending money home  
don't know how she engineered all of it  
then she became an engineer.

And it wouldn't have happened, if it weren't for this terminus of their  
journeys

chicago is a city of immigrants  
chicago is a city of taking nothing for granted  
chicago is a city of grant park  
from burnham to buckingham  
to wright to wrigley  
legendary people and legendary places  
for my parents, it was chiNago  
for me, it is chicaSTAY.

## **“Chicago Cycle”**

by Calvin Chu, photographs by  
Calvin Chu, Eliot Zapata

## Views From Green

The murals on the walls are vibrant,  
two deer facing each other, noses touching, eyes on eyes.  
two dears facing each other in my train, noses touching, eyes closed.  
two doors facing each other on my train, no touching, they're closed.  
and I am the sole observer on this train going the wrong way into the  
city in the late afternoon.



### **The serpentine L**

Emerging from the ground  
To the rustic posts and hotwheel tracks  
I wonder who's playing on this train set.

### **Mental arithmetic**

Lines run on numbers.  
Math class number line  
Pre-school, learn the colors.  
In college you learn to separate your colors in your laundry  
Go to school K-8  
Take public trans, get K9 - checked  
Little kid dancing in the aisle  
Mother not approving  
Things never change in this city  
Do you really learn?

### **Dancing for Money**

In the terminal  
To pay for school  
To become a teacher  
I think she taught me something already  
Don't be afraid to try.  
We're all just performers  
You just need confidence  
Hope her dreams aren't terminal  
Even as her music fades  
As the train accelerates into the distance

### **Ragged lady**

Cardboard sign and donation  
And coin cup  
Looking down is a universal sign of no.  
She sits down in the corner to dump out her change.  
Improving her totals on the day  
Change we can believe in

### **Cubs victory**

Toothless wheelchair man John  
64 going on 65  
64 going to 79th  
offering Doritos to everyone  
enjoy them, kid!  
'Cause I can't.

### **Going**

The hum of rap from headphones around  
The smell of high fructose  
corn syrup of gobstoppers  
Leaning into someone's  
soft winter jacket  
As the train lurches  
To a halt  
Intermittently and repeatedly



Photograph: Eliot Zapata

### **Home**

Home Slice restaurant before the Sedgwick stop  
Lit in the night  
As the L whizzes by  
I want a slice of home  
Please?

### Bus Transfer Interludes

A dropped xtra long cigarette  
tumbling around on the floor  
Princeton stop.

How many people here know Princeton is a university?

The cigarette got stomped on.

So did I

Standing too close to the doors

Triggering them open

Nobody is moving

We are all stuck together

Impedance

\*beep \*beep \*beep \*beep

Big velvet earrings

Cornrow top bun

Man, I wish I had style like that one.

\*beep \*beep \*beep \*beep

Paris leather jacket man,

Picks up the stomped cig

Steps off with his cane.

Bracing himself for the drop

Barely prepared for the change in elevation.

I need to go to Paris, too man

\*beep \*beep \*beep \*beep

He breaks the seal as he steps off

The bus rattles

Sloshing within the bus content.

Shake well after opening, I guess

\*beep \*beep \*beep \*beep

## Chicago

Where a plastic bag on a stand  
Is a trash receptacle  
Anything goes  
Writing my wrongs  
100% post-author content  
I'd give it  
4 mustaches out of 4 mustaches  
no  
I didn't buy them off of Rod Blagojevich



## Caravan

by MC Hawk

There is no east  
There is no west  
There is no north or south  
They come from near  
They come from far  
They come from wherever  
They are.

Through shady green boulevards  
And potholed, gunshot  
Gang-membered streets;  
Over skyways and tollroads  
And cold, steel rails  
By car, bus, train.

They travel back in time  
Back to a time  
When boys and girls  
Were taught apart  
When men in robes  
And women in habits  
Ruled with iron fists  
And wooden paddles

Back to a time  
When Agnus Dei and mea culpa  
Meant little more to the faithful  
Than the rosary beads they clutched  
In their coarse, calloused fingers  
Smoothed over and over again  
By the toil of their hands  
And the sweat of their brows.

But they knew what to do  
When they heard the piercing, metallic  
Clanging of the bells:  
Silence! – Sacred; they froze  
And wondered:

“If bread and wine  
Become body and blood  
What is to become of me,  
Lump of clay though I am?  
I possess the divine spark  
Which will set the world a-blaze  
With the gifts of the brooding,  
Black Dove; A hovering sign  
Of God’s love. Awful mystery,  
Awesome terror:  
Ad majorem dei Gloriam.”

With fear and trembling, they knelt,  
Rose, sat, stood, and knelt again  
Reminded of their own frailty.

And now, in a different era  
In the same city, with the same God  
We do what the dead did  
So that we, too, will have eternal rest  
Granted unto us  
And perpetual light may shine upon us  
Ad infinitum.  
Amen.

## You Came a Cropper

by Jacqueline Feng

Sometimes the liver aches, because  
it is all in impressions, a thing thick  
smudged on the fingers like a tarnish  
of the skin, scent of tóng and weight  
of chain, hollow like a lung. (and this

all laid out in rewrite and you hate it,  
in the tongue of ice water, taffy)  
unbearable unhappy, without what on the bus  
in a child's way you judged skims  
the brain like bird song, to make it good  
and real and faithful, in the words

God give me the words that are right.  
Something else about the palms, book  
spines there burrowed, sat in the arm  
of grandmother who cannot write  
but her own name, in bifocals with the  
hands shaking, of all waking hours

in the work of food or contemplation  
of the work of food, who dreams of this year's vegetables.  
The garden ugly ugly, plastic sheeting from  
a white woman's curb, dug of lawn.



## One Brick, Two Walls

by Sharanya Srinivasan

Bangalore, 2013

The shrieking power of electric guitars, the booming drums.  
Tschk ta da ta da ta da ta ta ta  
Pink Floyd through tall speakers – the floor thrums with the music.  
I am oblivious to the world. Auto rickshaws  
pass me in a blur of yellow and black.  
vruuummmmm  
A battle between Doppler and Pink Floyd ensues –  
with every passing rickshaw,  
I expect Floyd's dialogue to take over.  
I expect Floyd to mimic Ravi Shankar,  
beginning the song with lyrics,  
not weird beats for 2 minutes.  
That's not how music worked.  
not in my Indian head,  
in my Indian room,  
in my Indian city.  
All in all you're just another brick in the wall.  
Finally! Words!

Chicago, 2016

The same Floyd (less expectations)

Through headphones  
Tschk ta da ta da ta ta ta ta  
I walk through a myriad of white people with weird accents.  
People whose “colour” was “color,”  
And who had a zed when I had an ess,  
People who I had only seen in the movies,  
Or had heard about from Floyd.  
“How are you,” people said as they walked past,  
Time enough to ask a question, too busy for an answer.  
A homesick silence replaced ten thousand rickshaws.  
I longed for the vruuuummmm,  
For the Doppler v. Floyd,  
But Floyd had changed too.  
I felt energy and urgency when I heard them  
with my Indian friends,  
in my Indian room,  
in my Indian city  
All in all you’re just another brick in the wall.  
But the words didn’t excite me.  
There was no energy.  
No surprises, only memory.

Bangalore, 2013

I was an Indian brick in a wall  
that I had nothing to do with  
The wall still had bricks I knew –  
memory, friends.

Chicago, 2016

An Indian brick  
in an American wall.  
No familiar bricks –  
only unknown stones.





## Oceans



## Ocean Echoes

by Chandani Patel

Bits of pieces of stories about his life filter into my mind. I remember. From the time I was a child, his legacy was made known to me. At the dinner table, snuggling in bed with my parents, fragments would appear. He crossed a great big ocean all on his own at the age of 14 to help his father repay some debts. Across the ocean and all the way to Uganda, where he would set up a business. In a place where three of his six children would be born, as well as one of his grandchildren. We would count on our tiny fingers which aunt or uncle was born where, piecing together a family history that spanned continents our imaginations couldn't quite make sense of yet. A migration that would leave its mark on our family for generations to come. And one that sparked, for me, an entirely different kind of life.

But for so long, I hid from these truths about myself, about my past, about my ancestors, and instead, I ran into the arms of another culture, another language, one that still comes to my lips in fullness, in more fullness than my mother's. And I still look back to try to make sense of it all: why that one and not this one? And I think it's because I was a kid, trying to fit in. A kid, whose parents were trying to fit in. Not to draw attention to ourselves, to become fully American in walk and talk, even if that walk and talk would forever be different than those around me. But it was a refuge, of sorts, for this small Indian girl who knew not herself but only what others knew of her. Brown. With a funny language. And with parents who were not Christian. We didn't eat meatloaf or go to Church, even though I would sometimes pretend to know what that food tasted like,

pretend that my mother knew how to cook that most American of dishes. But also a different kind of brown than my friends who grew up speaking Spanish and belonged to communities inaccessible to me. I never did quite belong there. Other to everyone, including myself.

And so I left for Chicago, a city I would call home, a place where I could have a new start at knowing myself. This time, though, equipped with the fullness of my own past, with a desire to discover those threads that bound me to that Ocean, to that crossing, to those stories. And discover them I did, if not in full, then at least through other lenses. If not our own, then at least related stories about that Ocean, the kala pani. I learned new words, new ways of investigating, new ways of knowing myself through a shared sense of the crossing, a shared sense of lives forever marked by movement. Haunted by a desire to reach my ancestors, even if only by imagining what their lives were like on a new continent, even if only by wondering what our conversations would have been like... about the crossing, about the unknown, about ourselves. And to this day, I try to capture myself through visions of the vastness of that space, try to touch my grandfather's life through the shards of memories I have of him and the fragments of stories of others like him. And every day, when I utter my daughter's name, I am connected to the echoes of his life all around me.

## Over the Pacific

by Zoe Goldberger

“Stop touching my arm! It’s my armrest” I said with anger and persistence.

She turned her head to face me. She had a short brown bob, sparkling eyes, and thin quivering lips.

“Stop it Mom!” I said with my eyebrows furrowed in frustration.

I poked her arm away from mine and looked back out of the small oval window at the moving forklifts pushing waves of luggage toward bright orange containers. I raised my eyes and glanced at the familiar morning sky.

“Attention please, we will be departing from Charles De Gaulle Étoile this morning at 9:30 and arriving at Chicago O’Hare airport at 10:30 local time.”

Wondering how we could possibly get all the way to America in one hour, I checked my watch to see if the hands were moving slower. I was quickly distracted by the rumbling sound of the engine warming up. I looked at the small people on the ground waving neon batons to signal our departure. The wheels started to turn and propel the airplane forward following the small lights illuminating our path and guiding us toward the sky. The back of my head hit my seat, my stomach turned and I saw the clouds get closer, as we flew away from my home.

Once the plane was horizontal again, I turned on the small black screen in front of me to watch a movie. I scrolled through the options - comedy, romance, horror, in search of the cartoons. Although I could not

understand what they were saying, I was particularly enjoying Bugs Bunny and drifted off resting my heavy head on the side of the plane.

“Hello passengers and welcome to Chicago, it is now 10:33 am. The weather is quite nice today at a warm 80 degrees.”

I woke up abruptly and understood that the journey had ended while I had been asleep. Immediately, I forced myself to remember the smells and sounds of my home so it would stay fresh in my mind. As I was virtually traveling throughout my old room, I looked at the lemon colored wall and the wooden floor. I saw my twin sized bed and the pictures of my aunts and uncles hung above. I looked across the room to the painting of cartoon characters my grandmother had given me. I saw the tall pig on the right side and the shorter giraffe next to it, but there was a gap. The middle was blurry. I could not recall how many characters were in the picture. I sat in agony as I berated myself for falling asleep and forgetting. Who knew when I would get a chance to see it again?

“Come on Zoe, we need to go now,” my mother said gently placing her hand on my shoulder.

I stood up, following her toward the exit with my carry-on luggage rolling behind me. As we walked into the airport, I noticed the huge glass windows the rows of black leather seats with outlets in between and the loud sounds of travelers speaking

an unrecognizable language on their phones. The ground was clean, much cleaner than the french airport and the bathroom smelled freshly disinfected. The toilets had plastic covers that rotated when you sat down on them, I sat down, stood up, sat down again just to see if the toilet could keep up. We went searching for our baggage and walked through a hallway with zigzagged rainbow neon lights extending over the whole ceiling. I looked for signs to the baggage claim area, but even they were unintelligible.

I felt my stomach growling; although it had only been an hour, I was starving. I asked my mom if we could go to get a pain au chocolat. We looked around the unfamiliar airport for a small coffee shop or bakery, but we could not find one. Finally, after searching for what seemed like forever, my mom settled for Starbucks, a typical American place that I had never heard of. She asked the barista for a croissant. Expecting the barista to reach for one of the pastries in the display case to our right, I was eager to tell her exactly which one I wanted. However, she turned quickly and grabbed a sealed bag from under the counter. Popping it open, she asked

“Do you want it warmed up?”

Intrigued by this new way of baking, I said yes. My mom had warned me that people did things differently here, so I was prepared for anything. I inspected my warm croissant, trying to understand how it came from a plastic bag. I decided the best

approach was to eat it, and so I did. I was immediately horrified by the taste of mushy gluten with a semi-warm outside, but a cold and wet inside. I looked at my mother feeling betrayed.

“Why did you bring me here if it was going to be bad?”

“It’s not bad, it’s just different; you’re going to have to get used to it.”



## The Boat

by Carly Offidani-Bertrand

*These passages were transcribed from an interview that I did with my nonna, Maria Luisa Offidani, in the Spring of 2015.*

We were in Brahmenhaven, Germany. We were two days on the train. The train was going so slow. We were all ready; we were all through the medical exam and all that. 4 months for Zia Nerina, finally they gave her an ok; we were able to leave because we were a family and we gotta stay together. So finally they put her on this train that goes to Germany. It was going slow and full of people of different kinds. And we got in this huge refugee camp, and that was near the water because in Bramenhaven, they have, you know the ship that carries the army from here in Europe, like now from here or whatever because we have so many army men all over now.

Then with the same ship, we came here. 12 days in December. We spent Christmas and New Year on the ship. I cannot tell you the storm that we had when coming here! You know we were hiding 3 days all the door was closed, you cannot go out. It was so scary. The ship, was going like this up up up like this and then, you know from one wave to another is a big empty space and then the ship was going ta ta ta ta ta ta. And then up again. And ta ta ta ta ta ta ta. The wave was so big, it was so scary. So many people, they tied us in. That you cannot move, you cannot sit down, you have to hold yourself. Oh my god, they put me in the kitchen too, to work. Every place they put me in the kitchen.

But it was really, that was so unbelievable. So scary. First one thing then another thing then

another thing, I don't know how they managed. My father, Uncle George was supposed to be always with my father because he was a boy, but he was only 10 years old. Why? Poor thing he wanted to stay with us, no he's gotta stay with the men. Oh my goodness. Anyway, they put him with the men and we, we got here and who came to say welcome us, the Salvation Army. The Salvation Army came on the pier they have donuts, they have milk, they have juice for the kids. Yeah, and they were there and I always sent something to them cause they really did a good job. You really, you hear when something happened the Salvation Army is always there to help you. And the Red Cross, but we had the salvation army that came to the pier there.

*And were you scared when you were going to America?*

Well you know what we had, a young guy, German-Italian, he was speaking Italian and German and he had, I don't know how he had Hollywood in mind and he want to put up a show on the boat. So, me, Zia Nerina, Nonno. That's how I met Nonno. He tell us what to do. He make something, I was one of those that throw up because in the boat, everybody was throwing up. You don't have no idea. There was this poor Jewish guy, I saw in the toilet. You don't have anything separate. He had a big beard and he was holding the toilet and throwing up in the toilet he was like that kneeling down in the toilet with the beard inside. It was, it was, the boat, I tell

you the sea was so big. So bad. The storm was so bad. Oh my goodness.

*What was the play about? Life on the ship?*

The play was. Zia Nerina said something, they told me to be like that. Nonno was supposed to show that he was drunk. I don't know. Oh, they even, you know they even make a miss boat there. Miss something, and one of the young German girls won 'Miss' I don't know what they call it.

*Miss America.*

Miss America, I tell you. but at least he was doing something, you know. Just I don't know how they have the courage for all of this. And then they have a big room where they have chairs to sit down, the soldiers I think, when they were taking over there, they sit on this chair, but my dear when the wave was coming, you cannot sit down on the chair, they have to tie one chair after another to stay still, otherwise it was terrible. Terrible. It was so scary. And to sleep was a huge room on the bottom of the belly of the boat, HUGE. Was 3 bunk beds, one inside of the other, another 3 bunk beds. It was one single room for everybody, and who was throwing up here, who was throwing up there, it was unbelievable. And Nonno was on the front of the boat and you know when you are in the front of the boat it's worst because you're going zoom zoom. The middle was bad but not as bad as that. And Uncle George only with my father Nonno Pipa,

they supposed to be.

But anyway, then we got there and it wasn't too bad, and the captain said, that was american boat, the captain said that he got so, he was so scared that we gonna sink because that storm was unbelievable, in the middle of the ocean. I don't know how we make it. And you know the army boat, it's not like a passenger boat, it was awful. Very, very plain, it was called the General Stuart, was called the boat.



## **I just passed by a box...**

Anonymous

I just passed by a box that asked for immigration studies and I thought this one could be of interest to you all.

This future American's mother got him commissions as a cadet in the Italian Navy. It was back before World War I, the date and his age I do not know. A commission as a cadet could have involved sailing with the duca d'Aosta, in-law to the king.

Apparently this cadet wanted some different opportunity so, "I watched and waited and just as I was about to go I learned of a ship which was docked [up the way] and taking on staff". The ship carried passengers as well as cargo. He went there, applied for work and was taken on as a cabin boy.

He had left without anyone knowing

it and used a last name more usual for the area.

While they were in the middle of the Atlantic, World War I started. The ship was stopped, boarded by men who took it under control and asserted authority, they lined up all the men and pointed out those they wanted to remain with the ship. They wanted only the able bodied men, so, saying he was two years younger than he was, he and others were put off on another ship which came by.

It happened again. But he still had a job. He was proud to be paying his way.

Then a third time it happened and finally he was put off on a tramp steamer. It had one passenger, "What to do?" he needed a job. He

decided to contract with this man to be his cabin boy.

This man was an Italian business man who agreed, told him to “Stick with me” and he would “Get him through”. They heard later that the two previous ships had gone down with all the men aboard.

Having no registered itinerary or schedule to keep to, the tramp steamer was able to avoid regular sea paths where destructive German U-boats lurked and eventually ended up in New York.

This man connected him to the Italian business community in New Jersey and an Italian family which had a restaurant and needed help.

Shortly, when the United States entered World War I, he went over the Delaware River from Camden to the U.S. Customs House in Philadelphia where he enlisted. In the American Expeditionary Forces he served in France at San Mihiel and Meuse Argonne. He acquired American citizenship through General Pershing’s initiative for a special order giving American citizenship to troops who were foreign nationals in the A.E.F. and returned to New York.

Troop train cars had been put off in New York then Philadelphia, and the troops marched there in historic parades. His troop train was put off on a siding in Trenton, New Jersey and they waited and wondered.

Finally it pulled out and they

disembarked in Camden, New Jersey. They marched south down Broadway. One boy recognised him as they passed through the Italian section calling his name then all the kids ran alongside the parade shouting to him and calling his name.

It was 1919 in the Delaware valley and New York, the “Roaring Twenties” began.

## Ourania's Journey

by Charles Daston

My great-grandmother was born Ourania Nicholaides – my dad and his sisters called her Nenia. She was born into a well-off Greek family in Smyrna, Turkey. Her father was an engineer who may have brought electricity to Smyrna, and her family owned a prosperous store there.

Her childhood was cosmopolitan. She went to school with the children of businessmen, and the daughter of the Russian consul. Her family also vacationed each summer on the Greek island of Mytilene. She dressed in the height of fashion; this was always a point of pride for her.

The Greeks living in Turkey were a minority. In the early 1920's there was a territorial dispute between the Ottoman Empire and the newly independent nation of Greece. The Greek and Ottoman governments

agreed to resettle the Greeks living on Turkish land, and Turks living in Greece. This resettlement ended up being violent on both sides.

In September of 1922, the Turkish army marched through Ourania's city. They burned Greek homes and businesses, killed men, and raped women. My great-grandmother was 15 at the time. Her father was captured and killed and her home and family's store was burned. She hid at the Russian consulate on the night of September 13th – she says that she and several other affluent girls hid under the floorboards.

She left the consulate a couple of hours later, alone, looking for her mother, father, sister, and brother, and ended up hiding in a local cemetery for four more days. She didn't say much about hiding in

Smyrna when she told this story to my dad or his sisters, but we're pretty sure that Ottoman soldiers attacked the Russian consulate, possibly while she was there. We're also pretty sure that she had a run-in with a soldier while she was out searching for her family.

After four days of hiding, she was taken, on her own, to a refugee camp on the island of Mytilene – the same place her family vacationed each summer. In 1923, her future husband, Leonidas Arhondy, came to the camp looking for a new wife. His previous wife had died after giving birth to my grandmother. Ourania agreed to marry him and come to America in what was essentially a business deal – he went against custom and agreed to take her with no dowry, since her family wasn't around. She was 15, and he was in his early 30s.

The fact that they made it to America at all is remarkable. In 1921, the U.S. government had passed strict national quotas on immigrants, especially those from southern and eastern Europe. My great-grandparents got held up in France for 30 days while they waited for Ourania to get documentation in this new quota system.

Interestingly, Smyrna's American consul at the time, George Horton, wrote to congress urging them to grant asylum for the refugees. He used an argument similar to pro-immigration arguments of today: Greek refugees, primarily farmers, would be willing to take jobs no one

else wanted, like picking grapes.

My great-grandparents arrived in Massachusetts and made a life for themselves. Ourania learned English, raised my grandmother as her own child, and she and Leonidas ended up with a respectful, loving relationship. Her Greek roots stayed important to her – she cooked elaborate Greek meals for her grandchildren well into her old age. She remained fashion-conscious; she couldn't afford to buy as many colorful dresses anymore, so she was constantly making them for herself and for her daughter, my grandmother.

Eventually, some Red Cross workers helped her find her mother, sister, and brother. That's part of the reason she volunteered for the Red Cross for the rest of her life.

My family's story is remarkably similar to the refugee crisis today. Syrian and Afghan refugees are fleeing violence in their homes, and finding themselves at refugee camps in the same places in Greece. And we're still having debates in America about what quantity of them to let in.

Another interesting part of this story is how Greeks assimilated into American culture and essentially, over a few generations, stopped being foreigners and became white. Part of that assimilation came from generation after generation living in American society – my dad and his sisters went to public schools and spoke English at home. And part of

the assimilation was intentional – my aunt was given an anglicized version of Ourania’s name: Lorraine.

It’s important for me to explain the easy and the hard parts of my family’s story. I’m happy to talk about how my dad worked really hard and became a scientist at Proctor and Gamble – that’s what’s paying my way through school. Another part of our story is the kindness of strangers, like those Red Cross volunteers who helped my great grandmother find her family. Equally important is harmful and helpful government policies: the national quotas that nearly kept Ourania out, but also, later on, the GI bill that would help her son-in-law, my grandfather, become the first in our family to go to college. And part of our story was the pain and violence that forced Ourania out of her life in Smyrna and into her new one in America.



## Time Pieces



## Two Images

by Vidura Jang Bahadur

The image, a scanned copy of an old photograph, yellow around the edges, shows a woman, possibly in her twenties or early thirties, holding a small child in her right arm as she tries to feed the child milk with an oddly shaped bottle in her left. She is smiling and looks away from the camera. The baby, head turned, looks directly at the camera. There is a charpai (a traditional Indian woven bed) behind her and one can see a window with a metal grille and a door in the background. The woman in the photograph wears a floral dress similar to what many Chinese women wear at home. The ease with which the woman stands, the casual nature of her dress and the charpai give the impression that this is a domestic setting or an environment that the subject of the photograph is familiar with. Her gaze away from the camera indicates shyness on her

part or hints at the possibility that the woman in the picture does not know the photographer. This would be difficult to say with certainty if I came across the image in a family album. The photograph could have been made anywhere, if it were not for the charpai that gives the image a distinctly Indian flavor. From looking at the photograph itself, it is difficult to say it was made in an internment camp in Rajasthan, India.

A scan of the back of the photograph shows a caption that states at the top “DEOLI CAMP FOR CHINESE INTERNEES”. Below that it says, “A happy Chinese mother and child at the Deoli camp. For children under 5, there is an extra ration of a half litre of tested and pure milk a day”. The caption, faded with age, is typewritten on a brown piece of paper stuck to the back of the

photograph. The scan does not show the entire back of the photograph but just a little more than the brown cover paper with the caption on it. On the edges of the scan I can see traces of two stamps, Y and ST, and another stamp that says 'from' and then below that the letters 'g o v e r'. I infer that it may stand for government, given the nature of the caption itself, and how the caption is pasted and stamped, but I cannot say for sure.

The photographs of the camp, made by Kulwant Roy, a photographer active in post independence India, survive thanks to the effort of the India Photo Archive that houses his work. I came across the archive thanks to Roy's nephew, Aditya Arya, a photographer and archivist. He had walked up to me after a presentation I had made of my work on the Chinese in August 2009 saying that in his uncle's archives was set of negatives described briefly as Chinese in Rajasthan. Till then he had never known the context for the images. It's difficult to ascertain if any of the images that Roy made of the camp were published in the 1960s, but they are among the very few images that survive of what is a largely unacknowledged part of Indian history.

In 1962, during the border conflict between India and China, many Chinese, some of whom had been living in India for several generations, were interned in a camp in Deoli, Rajasthan. In her memoir, *Doing Time with Nehru*, Yin Marsh, a writer and former internee

of the camp in Deoli, describes the ordeal of being a Chinese Indian living in India during the time of the war from the perspective of a young girl. She was thirteen at the time. In a conversation over email she said, "I felt somehow ashamed of what happened to us, as though we had done something wrong. I was born in India and felt I was Indian. I could never understand why we were singled out. We were civilians, just living our lives like everyone else. For my part, and I think I can speak for others too, we were totally humiliated and our lives as we knew them were destroyed. Once we embarked on a different path to a different life, we wanted to leave that sad part of our lives behind."

Marsh adds that once the internees were finally released they were not allowed to return to the places they had lived in before. During their time away in the internment camps, the government had seized their properties and auctioned them. There was little to go back to. Travel between cities was restricted for Chinese Indians, as they needed permits to travel from one place to another. Life was hard for the community and those who could leave left for Canada and other parts of the world to start afresh.

My interest in the community was sparked by a visit to Kolkata to witness the Chinese New Year in early 2003. Tangra, the suburb of Kolkata where large majorities of the city's Chinese community reside, was far from what I had

imagined. There were restaurants and little family eateries jostling for space with the tanneries and sauce factories. The lines between home and workspaces were all blurred. Keen to document the lives of the community in Kolkata I spoke to a friend's uncle. Shrugging his shoulders, he simply said, "what is there left to document, and why?" What he said still remains with me. I don't think I truly understood the meaning of this sentiment then but over time as I came to know more about the community's history in India I began to understand better why he felt that way.

It was only several months later after my visit to Kolkata that I learnt of the internment of Chinese families in Deoli, although few spoke about the camp and the persecution that they experienced at the hands of the authorities. They feared that they would be interned once more or asked to leave India in the instance of another war between China and India. This fear pushed the community towards silence.

Following a mention in an essay on the Chinese Indian community by writer Dilip D'Souza, I traveled to Tinsukia, a small town in Assam, in December 2013. Tinsukia and the neighbouring town of Makam had been home to many Chinese before the war in 1962. Now only a few families remained. John Wang, who now runs a Chinese restaurant called Hong Kong, was among those that D'Souza interviewed for his essay and whose family had been interned in the camp.

I remember the day I met Wang and his mother, Li Su Chin, now in her late eighties, at their restaurant-cum-residence in Tinsukia. There was a bandh (curfew) and the streets were largely deserted except for the presence of military vehicles and Indian army soldiers patrolling the streets. I entered through a door that led to a courtyard and then into the restaurant through a side door. The restaurant was dark, the windows closed because of the bandh. I was seated on a stool near the cashier's table, a plain wooden desk in the middle of the small room that lay between the house and the other rooms that made up the restaurant.

Wang arrived shortly and took his place behind the desk, looking through the drawers and leafing through papers on the desk. Even though the bandh was in place there remained business to attend to. In time his mother walked in and he dutifully vacated his seat behind the table for her. A policeman walked in asking if it was possible for them to rustle up a bowl of noodles. Wang's mother, quiet and attentive, asked a helper standing by her side to place an order and asked the policeman to sit at a table in the restaurant. This seemed a common occurrence and over the afternoon there were other regulars who stopped by to see if they could cook a plate of momos or chow mein.

I was struck by the ease with which she communicated with both customers and workers at the restaurant. She spoke little and communicated largely with just



Li Su Chin, Tinsukia, India 2013

a shake of her head or hands. The workers in the restaurant knew exactly what she wanted and went about doing her bidding without asking questions. Even though Wang ran the kitchen and did the daily shopping, it was his mother who sat at the desk, approved the policeman's request for a plate of noodles during a curfew, received and doled out money. At 86, she was still in control of the family business.

We spoke briefly, Wang repeating what I already knew about the family from D'Souza's essay. Before the war in 1962 Wang's father, Wang Shu Chin, ran a successful sawmill in Tinsukia supplying sleepers to the Indian Railways. During the war they lost everything, the GMC vehicles and the many elephants they owned, the machinery in the sawmill and all their other property was seized and sold by the government. His father, he remembers, turned to providing private tuition and survived the years after the war with the help of other families. In 1970, they opened the restaurant. I sat with Wang and his mother for a few hours and before leaving made a few photographs of him, his mother and other members of the family.

It was in the summer of 2015 that I finally made time to head back to Tinsukia, stopping for a day to meet Eugene Tham, a prominent member of the Chinese Indian community in Guwahati, Assam. I had landed in Assam at a time when residents of the state were being asked to submit evidence that they or their ancestors were residents of the state

as part of an initiative to update the National Register of Citizens (NRC) of 1951. The mention of individuals in the electoral rolls of 1971, or other admissible documents that proved their presence in the state before March 1971, was taken to be legitimate proof of their citizenship.

I met Eugene at his home, where over a cup of tea we looked through old family albums talking about his late father and other Chinese families in Assam. I asked Eugene about the NRC and whether it had affected any of the Chinese families that lived in the state. He replied in the negative adding that some of the Chinese had even used their release letters from Nagaon (previously Nowgong) jail to prove their residency in Assam. I smiled. The irony that members of a once ostracized community could use evidence of their internment to prove their citizenship to the same state was hard to miss. With this, the conversation turned to the war and the internment of the Chinese in Rajasthan. I was sharing stories of the many people I had met during my travels who were interned in Deoli when I remembered the photographs that Aditya Arya had shared with me. Taking out my phone I showed Eugene the few photographs of the camp that Kulwant Roy had made during his visit to Deoli. He looked through the images, pausing only when he saw the image of the woman and child that I described at the beginning of this essay. He called his mother to confirm the identity of the woman in the image. After a brief discussion

he turned to me and said, “ask John Wang, it could be his mother”.

I carried a print of a portrait I had made of Wang’s mother as I walked the streets of Tinsukia towards Cheena Patty where Wang’s family-run Hong Kong restaurant is located. It shows Wang’s mother seated at the cashier’s table. There is an uneasy stillness to the image, conveyed by the expression on Wang’s mother’s face. It’s difficult to tell what she’s thinking even though she appears calm and possibly in a reflective mood. She’s looking down and I wonder if she’s just waiting for me to make a photograph and leave, or if she’s thinking about another time, person or place. Or is she simply waiting for the next customer to step in and to start the process of taking orders once again? A ritual that brings much comfort and order to her daily life. It is difficult to tell. Her left arm is placed over her right, as if a defence between the photographer and her thoughts. On the left of the table is a fridge with the Coca Cola insignia and on the wall behind it a photograph of Wang’s late father Wang Shu Chin garlanded with plastic flowers. It’s the kind of photograph that people put up in their homes to remember their loved ones; he looks directly at the camera. It’s not a remarkable photograph but there is a quiet warmth to it. This is in sharp contrast to my image of Wang’s mother seated at the table. Beside that, on the right, is a sign for ‘no credit,’ a common sight in many shops in the area, although allowing people to pay in kind or later is not uncommon in practice. The room

is lit by a strip of fluorescent lights not visible in the frame, which registers as greenish on the daylight-balanced film that I use. It is possible that it is this quality of light, and the solitary central figure surrounded by an inanimate assortment of objects, that makes me uncomfortable. It’s as if all life has been drained from the world in front of me.

On hearing from a waiter that I’m in the restaurant, Wang appears shortly. The family is eating lunch in a room directly behind the room with the cashier’s table. Wang disappears behind the curtains with the portraits that I have made of his mother and other members of the family. I wait for him to return, eager to speak to him about the photographs from the camps. In time Wang returns and we start talking. He asks me to stay for lunch and once he places an order for noodles I show Wang the scans on my phone. He’s surprised. Very few photographs of the camps exist. “*Yeh to mummy hai, hum pochta hai!*” he exclaims, confirming it is his mother before disappearing behind the curtains to show the photograph to her. I hear some surprised noises from inside. I edge closer to the curtain and see Wang’s mother and other members of the family seated around a long table. Wang is showing the scanned images on my phone to everyone around the table. Wang turns to me and reaffirms that it is his mother.

I ask him about the baby in the photograph. I scan the faces of people in the room and wonder which one of them their mother is holding in

her arms. Wang's mother is seated at the far end of the table and shows little interest in the images, now apparently absorbed once again by the food in front of her. Wang turns to me and tells me that the child in the photograph is the sister they lost to chickenpox a year after reaching Rajasthan. There's a mention of this incident in the essay by D'Souza. In the essay Wang says that his sister had fever for three days and "her skin turned black, and there was no doctor service." Others who lived in the camp had also mentioned such instances to me. I had hoped that the response to the photograph would have been different, somehow joyful. That Wang or his mother would point to another person sitting on the table or mention another sibling in another part of the world, or that possibly the photograph would bring back a memory from the camp or spark a conversation about the child in the picture. I look at Wang's mother. She remains quiet.

In his essay D'Souza describes a scene where he is sitting with Wang at the restaurant talking about his years in the camp when his mother walks in to the restaurant. Hearing Wang talk about the camp she whispers to him in Hindi, but loud enough for D'Souza to hear, that he should not talk about these things. "They are finished now."

Close to five decades have passed since the war, between when the two photographs were made, the first in the camp in the 1960s and the second more recently in 2013. Much has been lost.



## The Jungle May be Finished, its Spirit Should be Remembered

by Will Boast

A row of restaurants serving Afghan, Middle Eastern, and west African food. Tea houses where young people sprawl out to sip chai, chat, and flirt. A barbershop giving hot shaves. A sandy soccer field where German and Sudanese players show off their skills. Language schools offering classes in French and English, tutors and students gathered outside in the sun on scrap lumber benches. Ethiopian and Eritrean women kneeling to pray in a Coptic Christian church built from plywood and rusty corrugated steel but decorated with vivid, intricate murals. A daycare where parents and other minders watch small children giggling and tumbling across a handmade play net, the adults all proud and attentive.

This is what I saw when I visited the notorious Calais “jungle” last

August. For the last year, I’d been working with refugees in Rome, many of whom hoped to go to Calais and from there to the UK. I wanted to see firsthand what conditions were like in the most visible refugee camp in Europe. The media coverage of the Jungle generally presented it as squalid, chaotic, and violent. *The New York Times*, in its recent reporting on the French government’s clearing of the camp, described it as “festering” and a “political and humanitarian disaster.” More often it is simply called “Europe’s Shame.”

Yet, when I visited, residents were strolling the dusty lanes between the tents and shacks, laughing and visiting with one another or lining up for a hot meal from one of the several volunteer organizations providing them. Volunteers were

everywhere – serving food, teaching, handing out clothes – some staying for a week or two, others who had been working in the Jungle for years. Those who'd just arrived were, like me, stunned; we'd been prepared to find only misery here.

Granted, the sun was shining. Many of the longer-term residents and volunteers told me the mood was much different once the autumn rains began and the dirt and sand turned to mud. Yes, there had been violence in the camp, fights between residents and confrontations with the police, though many felt these encounters were not as severe or frequent as much reporting implied. And those children I'd seen playing, there were many more like them, some unaccompanied, all vulnerable. Women and children were housed, however, in a cordoned-off, semi-permanent facility administered by a French NGO. The Jungle had dire problems, but it was also finding tentative ways to solve them.

In fact, it seemed that what had been created here was not a jungle but something like a living, working village – with distinct neighborhoods, an economy, free medical clinics, and several houses of worship, the mosques just down from the ramshackle but sturdy and even beautiful Coptic church. The French locals I spoke to in Calais proper complained that their own city was dying, that tourism could no longer sustain their beach resort. The Jungle, on the other hand, was bustling. I heard that some Afghan refugees travelled to the Jungle every

summer, as a kind of holiday. It was the only place they'd been in Europe where they felt fully accepted.

Over that week in late summer, anyway, the Jungle seemed like a testament to the fact that people, no matter how desperate their circumstances, will try to rebuild a society and home wherever they must go. Now all their work is gone.

This is far from the first time the French government has dismantled the Jungle. It cleared a swath of the camp in May (the part, it should be said, that could be seen from the road into Calais). Now it will bus the refugees and other migrants pushed out of the Jungle to “reception centers” in towns and small cities across France. If these are anything like similar facilities I've seen in Italy, they will be cold, disused, concrete hulks in places where there is not much hope of work or real assimilation into the local culture. The problem will simply be spread out and largely given over, once again, to volunteer and charitable organizations.

The UK – the dreamed of destination of many of those in the Jungle – has responded to the camp's demolition by accepting a few hundred unaccompanied minors. A more visible sign of Britain's policies, seen all around Calais, are the white, razor wire topped fences David Cameron paid to have built along miles of highways going into the Chunnel.

The Jungle may grow back again. Or perhaps “Europe's shame” is

finished for good. Hopefully, the efforts of thousands of refugees and volunteers who tried to make the best of an impossible situation, with only meager donations and resources, will not be completely forgotten or erased. Imagine what might have been done in Calais with the millions upon millions of Euros and Pounds spent instead on keeping migrants out.

That's the real shame.



## America Today

by Luke Ehrenstrom

In America, we have an odd look at those who cross our borders to fulfill the American Dream; some of us portray those coming over like bad guys from a movie – foreign hordes pouring into our beautiful nation, stealing our jobs, committing crimes against American citizens, destroying the very fabric of our society, and changing the course of the nation towards the icebergs of evil; at my school and even in my extended family, I get to hear about the illegals and Muslims seeking to destroy America; this is a view that has no logic or reason to me. Has America never been the beneficiary of migration? Not once have I woken up in the morning and thought that the Swedes and Irish who make up my DNA ought not have made the travel, that my great-grandfather should not have come to America from Europe and then went back to

the Old Country to fight for his new home, that the weapons wielded by my grandfather in fighting fascism should not have been built by black people seeking factory jobs up North, that Chicago's Chinatown does not have some of the city's most beautiful and unique architecture, that the apples and pears and bananas that I get to purchase so cheaply are not provided to me by Mexican migrants seeking to provide for their family, that my school community is not benefited by the diversity provided only by those who decided to travel here, and that my life is not personally benefited by the relationships of those who came here in spite of their differences and who make my life better because of them, whether they be the Muslims, Filipinos, or African-Americans who I am so happy to call my friends. My family ended up here seeking new

lives and new opportunities, and I recognize that those Syrians, those Mexicans, those people whom we are most told to fear are the exact same, and I am most proud of being an American when the opportunities provided to my family that allow me to be successful are provided to others. America has a culture and society unlike any other in history, and it only improves and develops and grows with more people coming in, something that history and our own lives can account for.

## **Finding Their Way Again: Reflections on the Educational Paths of Refugee Youth**

by Ashley Cureton Turner

I didn't experience war or genocide as a young girl in Kentucky. I have never received a death threat, and I have never seen a family member murdered. I didn't flee my country of origin to an unknown place. I have never lived in fear for my life and my family. I have never spent countless nights wondering where I would live after my home was destroyed. I've never yearned to return home even though it didn't exist anymore. I have never cried myself to sleep with memories of violence imprinted on my mind.

I initially saw how hard it is for young teenage refugees as a volunteer at GirlForward, an organization that mentors young girls who have been displaced due to conflict and helps them adapt to their new surroundings. The program also teaches participants skills they need

to become successful, independent young women and productive members of society.

One girl in particular, Dani, stood out to me. She migrated to the United States at 16 due to war. After Dani and her family fled the Democratic Republic of Congo when she was 3, she, her mother, and her six siblings lived in a Tanzanian refugee camp until they moved to America. But when Dani arrived to the US, like others in her predicament, she didn't know the language and struggled to adjust to her new surroundings. She also had the added burden of caring for her younger siblings and mother while working at a local grocery store to earn additional money. She also attended a rigorous English Language (EL) course while attempting to remain engaged in school. Due to her hectic schedule,

she constantly felt overwhelmed and exhausted, questioning whether she belonged in America.

Unfortunately, Dani was not the only teen who expressed these challenges upon resettling to the U.S., sparking my research and clinical interests to learn more about their pre- and post-migratory stories. Youth are often left out of the narrative of how they're navigating these unfamiliar spaces. In the places where I began doing this work, most of us, including myself, had very little insight into the migration stories of refugees. Further, very few people understand resettlement or the global refugee crisis which displaces millions of people from their homes. Frankly, it can seem like a rather elusive process as to whom and why particular groups resettle to the US. Most people are unaware of their daily struggles to function in an unknown land while trying to hang on to their past.

Based on findings from previous research, refugee children and youth undergo a myriad of unique migration-related stresses while adapting to a new schooling environment (Garcia-Coll & Magnuson, 1997; Suarez-Orozco & Suarez-Orozco, 2001) Further, their levels of engagement with the school may vary depending on previous experiences with schools in general or their level of understanding of schools in the U.S. in particular. Disruptions in schooling or limited formal education, gaps in knowledge and skills, low English language proficiency, low literacy,

and advanced age upon arrival in the U.S. may also affect how refugee youth feel about school. Refugee children are often exposed to multiple languages of instruction as they migrate from countries of first asylum to final resettlement. This can lead to confused, disorganized educational experiences (Carnock, 2015). Finally, their specific racial, ethnic, or cultural identities might impact their overall feelings of school.

Ten years have gone by, in which I've had the chance to work closely with refugee children and teens in schools and resettlement agencies. I've been granted a very intimate window to learn about the experiences of refugee youth and their families. For example, several families shared how difficult it has been to navigate schools without understanding specific customs and norms. Moreover, these experiences have allowed me to give them a voice. I've heard hundreds of stories about the dire situations from which refugee youth and their families fled, in search for refuge. I've also heard stories of hope and resiliency among the same people.

For my dissertation research, I am exploring school engagement among Iraqi and Syrian refugee youth at a local public high school in Chicago. I am interested in how refugee youth and their families navigate unfamiliar settings like public schools in a US context. Many families describe how difficult it is for them to have a clear understanding of school and

classroom expectations. Due to the current political climate, numerous families also claimed that they have been bullied or slandered by school staff and students based on their perceived political and religious beliefs. For example, several refugee girls in my study stated how their classmates taunted them about wearing a hijab or mocked their accents. Finally, the refugee youth and their parents seek to understand differences and conflicts that arise in situations where school culture is more individualistic than the home value system. Being confronted with these challenges makes it more difficult for refugee youth and their families to successfully integrate into their schools. I hope to help inform educational policies around particular services and programs refugee youth need upon resettling to the U.S. Most importantly, it is my goal to give them a voice -- to allow them to share their perspectives.

I've never experienced the level of trauma and hardship many refugee families endure, but I join them in solidarity to protect and expand their rights. I believe every human has the right to be treated in a fair and dignified way.



## UndocuTime

by Alejandro Monroy

Time takes on a more complex meaning depending on one's legal status. For undocumented immigrants, there are various clocks that may stop ticking, slow down or speed up – we are rarely fully in the present. While we are aging on a linear path, there are various layers of “growing up” that may be contingent on documentation. Driving, working, education, traveling, voting, and so on depend on documentation. And yes, undocumented immigrants have found creative ways to excel without documentation, still, each level of documentation, whether it is DACA or citizenship, provides greater access to spaces. As a result, different aspects of undocumented immigrants' life exist paradoxically depending on their “papers” as they try to hold a firm grip on all of them. For some, DACA is like a two-year battery that keeps the “work”

and “education” clock ticking. However, DACA doesn't cover *tu papi y mami*, so we try to adapt, resist and thrive. And yet, it's not the same to celebrate your new degree or job, when your *viejos* can still be deported.



## Conclusion



## Scarecrow Eclogue

by Srikanth Reddy

Then I took the poem in my hand & walked out  
past the well & three levelled acres  
to where the sugarcane built itself slowly to the songs of  
immature goats  
& there at the field's shimmering center

I inserted the page  
into the delicately-woven grass of the scarecrow's upraised hand  
where it began to shine & give a little in the gentle  
unremitting breeze sent over from the east.

I stepped back several paces  
to look at what I'd done.  
Only a little way off & the morning light bleached out my ink  
on the page so it simplified

into a white rectangle against a skyblue field  
flapping once, twice  
as if grazed by one close shot after another.  
The oxen snorted nearby

& there was a sense of publication  
but not much else was different, so I backed off all the way  
to the sugarcane's edge until the poem was only a gleam

among the fieldworkers' sickles surfacing

like the silver backs of dolphins

up above the green crop-rows into view, then down from view.

How it shone in my withdrawal,

worksongs rising





## Contributors

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An alumnus of the University of Chicago MFA Visual Art program, **Vidura Jang Bahadur** is a Mellon Sawyer Fellow at the University of Chicago.

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**Chandani Patel** earned her PhD in Comparative Literature from the University of Chicago, where she was an Assistant Director at the Chicago Center for Teaching as well as a Resident Head in Jannotta House. She and her family now live in New York.

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