

# Writing From the CUNY Language Immersion Program (CLIP)

## A Piece of My Heart

Shakhnoza Almatova

I was nine years old when my parents were talking about divorce. But since I was just a child, I could not understand everything that was happening, until one day, after even more arguments and disagreements, their marriage ended. I lived with my mother because my parents believed children needed their mother's care most of all. Even though my father had remarried, every day I eagerly waited for the weekends to spend time with him.

One day, I learned his other child had been born. That was when my father began to forget me. He stopped calling. I was a child who needed her father's love but I had become invisible to him. So I created an illusion. My parents and I always had dinner together and sat by the TV afterwards.

Over the years, when someone asked me about my family, I told them my fantasy. I am sure children and teenagers do this because they don't want to answer too many questions. It's only now, when I wrote this story, that I have told the truth about my life and learned a piece of my heart will forever remain in my childhood.

## I Thought Heroes Had Superpowers

Augustin Marc

When my mother told me this story, I cried.

"Everyone expected it to rain but the rain didn't fall. It was on a grey day when I heard people screaming and the ground started to shake. You were sick and couldn't go to school, so you were watching cartoons in bed. I was sitting in my shop in the front yard. I ran as fast as I could to get you. The house was pitch black inside. The TV hanging on the wall fell on my back, almost crushing me. But I heard your cries. As the walls crumbled around me, I reached you. You were panicking, so I grabbed you and held you tight to calm you while my hand was a shield to protect

your head. As we flew out the back door, the house completely collapsed. Honestly, I was terrified to try to save you but I could never have lived with your absence.”

My mother risked her life for me. I will make her proud of me for the rest of my life.

## Almost Adults

### XuHui Deng

I had never left the muddy roads of our village, 15 kms away from movie theaters and skyscrapers. But one afternoon, as my 8 year old friends and I stood on our tiptoes and peered through a chink in the curtains of a neighbor’s home watching a TV show, we saw a trailer for the American blockbuster *Avatar*. I had an idea. We would ride our bikes to Guangzhou to see it.

I felt like a restless cat, nervous and agitated, on the morning of our journey. The wind was piercing cold, and the sounds of crows filled the air. I grasped a 50-yuan in my pocket from my grandma as I stood next to my rusty old bicycle. Even though I wasn’t tall enough to reach the seat easily, I knew the stormy weather and bumpy road wouldn’t stop my friends and me.

As we pedaled on the pitted road, my bike felt like it would fall apart, and my body felt the same way. However, curiosity to see *Avatar* and a desire to be independent prompted me to continue. Eventually, we arrived at the edge of an asphalt road, the main road. Cars, like ostriches, sprinted in front of us. I decided we should ride along the curb to the river, and cross to the right side of the main road, cycling under the bridge to safety. My friends followed me without complaints, similar to the relationship between Odysseus and his crew on their odyssey.

A few hours passed. We were exhausted and didn’t know how far away we were from our destination, until finally we saw the tall buildings for the first time, and an *Avatar* poster on a pole near us. We followed the arrows to the movie theater.

In front of the movie theater, hundreds of families stood in a long line. The sounds of cheering filled the air because everyone, like us, was excited to see the movie. My friends and I stood up straighter to make ourselves taller, like adults. We gazed into each other’s eyes and smiled. That day, we walked into the movie theater boys, and came out proud young men.

# The Most Dangerous Journey

Bader Alrohani

The airports and the border were shut down for a month because the war had begun and the military had stopped all transportation. Only one port remained open. My mom had told us we would travel on a boat soon, so I was expecting it to be like the ones I had seen in the movies, with a pool and playrooms and all the other fun stuff.

When we arrived at the port, my mom pointed to a small cargo boat at the end of the pier. It was old and the paint was peeling. Workers were loading boxes of alcohol onto it. I could see there was no swimming pool. Once inside the boat I saw some families had brought blankets and pillows and I wondered why, but after a couple of hours I realized they had brought them because it was freezing. My family and I were laying on the top of those boxes on the side of the boat trying to sleep. We didn't have any blankets and the ocean was rough. The spray from the waves hit us because the boat didn't have a roof. I was terrified we would roll into the ocean.

As I looked at the sky the huge clouds covered the moon and I remembered one of the movies I had seen where a family was trying to escape aliens but they had all drowned. I realized I didn't know where we were, not even the name of the country we were going to, on this last boat to leave Yemen before the military closed the port.

# A Journey That I Want to Forget

AbuBakr Aljahmi

In Yemen, the civil war had broken out. Houthi rebels were in the streets, and our neighboring countries sent airstrikes. Schools were closed. Gasoline was hard to find. Water reserves were bombed, which had caused the largest cholera outbreak in world history. My mother decided we must move back to America, where I was born. Since the airport had been destroyed by airstrikes, we could escape by bus and travel all the way to Saudi Arabia.

My mother, younger siblings, and I began a two-day bus trip on a rundown bus, in extreme heat, with a lot of rebel checkpoints. I remember one checkpoint. Two people came onto the bus. One of them was a boy the same age as me, sixteen. There was an AK 47 behind his back. I felt pity seeing someone had been taught to be violent at such a young age. I thought to myself, I could have been in his position if I was not an American citizen. As we traveled through the desert, all I did was stare at insects being squished on the bus's windshield.

I want to say that this journey made me stronger. But the sadness I feel for the people we left behind, and for the boy my age with the AK 47 who was in a war he didn't start, still haunts me. This is especially true since, after we arrived safely back in New York City, I learned all the teenage boys from my village had been rounded up and forced to join the rebels.

## I Lived With Secrets

Yinelfi D. Almanzar

My grandfather, my best friend and mentor, had a stroke. He could never walk or talk again. He and my grandmother moved to another city and I was left in the house with my uncle and his family. My cousins soon began to bully me and even beat me because I was the smallest girl in the house. I also felt my mom had abandoned me, because she lived in a city three hours away. Yet, as I look back, I actually never told her my situation because I thought she would not believe me.

Luckily, I moved to the U.S to live with my dad, where I thought I wouldn't suffer again. However, in middle school I was bullied because I had curly, uncombed hair that I would not let anyone touch to comb it except my grandmother. I told my dad about the bullies but he did not really know me so he did not believe me. I cried every night because I missed my grandparents but I knew I couldn't go back to the Dominican Republic.

One day, my father's cousin came to our house. He was drunk and tried to touch me. I pushed him away but that wasn't the only time. I told my sister and brother and even though they talked to my dad, he told me I was inventing things. That's when I started to have nightmares. When I woke up from these nightmares I cut myself. However, every time I cut into my arms something in my heart stopped me from going further. Maybe it was the memories of my family.

One day my 8th grade adviser noticed that I had been wearing many sweaters, even on hot days. When she asked me if I was okay, I lied to her. I knew she would have called social services and my dad would have been furious. Yet, over time, she continued to talk to me. When I cried, she held my hand, looked at my arm, and saw the cuts. After she called 911, I was taken to St. Barnabas Hospital where I lied to the doctors and to everybody else about my life.

Eventually, my father sent me back to the Dominican Republic to live with my mother, where I experienced the impossible. In church, a woman whom I had just met, and whom my mother didn't even know, first hugged me and then looked deeply into my eyes. She told me about the problems I was having. I cried like a little girl and as I cried, the weight inside of me lifted. At that moment, I believed God existed and that he loved me and would help me love myself. That day was the first time after a long time that I thought I wanted to live. I wanted to show people that the damage they had done to me was not enough to stop me.