



Multi-Cultural Brief

Volume 3 Issue 3

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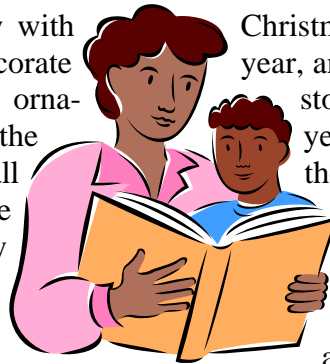
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Christmas Picture Books

By Hsing-Hsin Hsiao

There is a nip in the air; carols come floating in from somewhere afar; it is Christmas, my favorite time. It is a time to celebrate and enjoy with friends and family and to decorate the house. Lights, color, ornaments, wreaths, angels, the Christmas trees and stars all form part of the festive decorations. I find a variety of decorative items in the market, from fancy lights to musical decors and much more. But the best part is the one that you create. After all, the spirit of Christmas is all about being together, caring and sharing.



Reading is a great way to get into the Christmas spirit. I like my son to sit on

my lap and read picture books together. It is the way we celebrate our Christmas. There are dozens of Christmas books published each year, and the shelves of the bookstores are filled with this year's offerings. Most of them use the traditional characters, such as Santa Claus, Christmas trees, toys, elves, and the little helper to build the story, and the stories are often related to the Polar City where Santa lives. But they also add some new ideas to create new Christmas stories. Here are some Christmas picture book favorites from my reading experiences. As a mother, I have used
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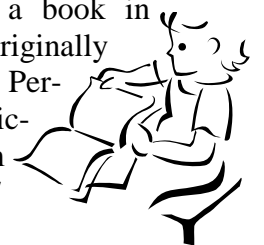
The Pleasure of Reading a Picture Book

By Akiko Fujita

Reading a picture book is one of my recent daily jobs. I don't read it to myself. I read it to my one-year-old son. He often crawls to me bringing a picture book in his hand, uttering something in his own language. This means he wants me to read the book. I receive it and start to read it.

At first, reading a book to my son was just a troublesome task for me. He urged me to read the same book again

and again, and that made me dislike this job. However, in the course of reading, I noticed some interesting points. When I read a book in Japanese that I usually read in English, he becomes fussy. The same thing happens when I read a book in English that is originally written in Japanese. Perhaps the image of pictures and the rhythm
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I Know You Have to Leave To My Friend — Toe

By Qiong Qin

I know you have to leave.
I never refuse grant from destiny.
Meeting and separating is a gift, as is life.
I believe every event is the best arrange-
ment.

I don ' t know why I still feel
sad.

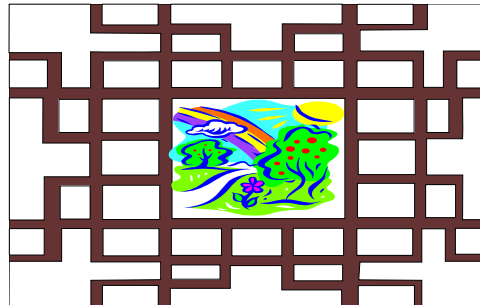
I know you have to leave.
I am just sitting here today,
with thoughts about you.
I am a little girl in your mind.
And you are the first person
whom I met from Japan.

I don ' t know how to be your friend.
I know you have to leave.

I remember the first time I met you.
You are so quiet and polite.
Your smile is like a breeze.

I don ' t know how to respond with the same
smile to you.

I know you have to leave.
I saw a rainbow in my childhood.
The rainbow, beautiful but not brilliant.
Refreshing and peaceful.
I don ' t know why I never forget it.



I know you have to leave.
I find you have a strong
soul.
You attract me like the
rainbow.
A short time, but enough.
I don ' t know how to make
my spirit like yours.

I know you have to leave.
I love the small talk we can make.
You are a graceful woman.
Good-bye is too hard for me.
I don ' t know what is the best wish I can
say.

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Are You Going to Move? Find a Doctor First!

By Natalia Brylera



My family and I have been living in the United States of America not so long. When we first moved, I did not have any conception about medical service here. We did not hurry to buy insurance. Then, my daughter got sick. For a whole month she had an infection. Now, I have more information

about the American medical system.

When my daughter, Angelina, had a very high temperature and we needed a doctor's advice, I was absolutely sure that a doctor could come to our place because in Russia it is the normal thing. My husband asked our neighbor how we could summon a doctor. He told us that doctors never come to your home, even if you feel very bad. Then we asked if maybe we could call the emergency number, 911. It was a surprise for us when he told us that you can call 911 only if you think you are dying.

We drove to UVA Hospital. We did not go to the Emergency Room because a friend who is in medical school did not recommend it. We waited for one hour before some woman took us to the examining room. She weighed our daughter, took Angelina's temperature, and showed us a room where we could wait for the doctor. After half an hour, a medical student came, asked a lot of questions, saw

our daughter, and went away. We waited for the doctor for a half an hour more. He did not see his patient because the medical student had told him everything. His advice was to wait five days and, if nothing changed, come again. We did not have insurance, so we paid \$30 for the visit. My daughter was really tired after two hours, and we did not hear any advice. I saw that my child was sick, and I did not want to wait. I felt that it was not acceptable to wait.

Then our friends gave us the address of Prompt Care. We waited five minutes and, after the standard procedures, a doctor saw Angelina. He was attentive and explained everything to us. He gave us some antibiotics and wrote down his phone number, so we could call him when we needed to ask some questions.

It was very useful because, if we did not know what to do, the doctor could tell us by phone. But Prompt Care is more expensive. It cost \$55 for a visit. For me and my husband, the main thing is that Angelina will be strong and healthy. We visited Prompt Care several times, and I have a good opinion about its service and workmanship.

Now we understand more about the American medical system. My advice is to find a good doctor before something serious happens with you or your family. But there is one thing I cannot agree with the American medical system about. It is the necessity to go to the doctor's place when your child has a very high temperature.



Calendar News



- Dec 24: **Winter Break begins**
- Jan. 7: **Classes resume** at Jefferson School
- Every Tues: **Book Group**. Intermediate Reading and Discussion of American Literature. International Center. 10-11:30 am. Call 924-7983.
- Every Wed: **Latin Nightclub Dancing**, New Dance Space on Downtown Mall, 105 N. 1st St., 8:45 to 10:00 p.m., \$10/person. Contact: Edwin O. Roa (804)295-7103, edwinart@yahoo.com.

Helpful Tips When Moving to Charlottesville

By Grace Yang

I have been in Charlottesville for one year. All of my family enjoy the American life very much. However, I, as well as my friends, really had some difficulties in the beginning. The major problem was that I could not speak and understand English well. Laws that were different from those in Taiwan and cultural bumps were other problems. The following are some examples that caused my friends or me to pay more money than necessary.

First, when you install telephone or cable, there are many options you can choose. You have to make sure what service you want. Do not say "yes" before you understand the questions clearly; otherwise you will be shocked when you receive the bills. Sometimes you can choose programs that are cheaper.

Second, you only can buy your car insurance from a few car insurance companies if you do not get a Virginia driver's license. Even if you can buy it, you have to pay a higher fee. When you pass the two-part knowledge exam, you have to wait for 30 days before you can take the road skills test. I bought my car insurance from the agent before I got a local driver's license. One month later, I received a note from the insurance company to tell me that they would terminate my insurance one week later because I had no license. I could not help but prepare to get a local license. You can demand that your car insurance company lower your insurance fee after you get the license.



Third, you have to check your car for two stickers. One is a decal from the County of Albemarle or the City of Charlottesville, depending on where you live, and the other one is an inspection

sticker. You have to renew them both before their deadlines; otherwise, you may have to pay a fine. My friend forgot to post the decal and was fined \$25.



Fourth, do not violate the traffic rules. Especially, do not drive over the speed limit. On Route 29, many of my friends got tickets for speeding. You not only have to pay the fine (\$30 plus \$3 per mile over the speed limit), but you also get a record of violation of traffic. Your car insurance fee will increase next time. For your safety, it is wise not to speed on the highway.

If I could have spoken and understood English well and had more friends when I arrived in Charlottesville, I could have avoided getting many troubles and paying more money. Now I know a very good method to learn English well — go to English as a Second Language classes. You also can know many friends from different countries. They can give you some information and share some experiences with you.

Massage @ Home

J.W. Gordon

823-6152

Swaleview@worldnet.att.net



Swedish and Deep Tissue Massage in your home or in mine. Call for details or ask Jim at the Jefferson School.

How to Get Your Language Partner

By Kazue Matsumoto

It was a beautiful fall day. The sky was blue. In contrast, the trees were red and gold. Ann and I were talking about her friend's engagement, sitting on the lawn and drinking coffees. "I was chosen as a bride's maid by my friend. We are going to select her wedding dress," she smiled. "That sounds so nice!" I said.

Ann and I are language partners. We meet once a week and have a chat about everything. For half of each meeting we speak English with each other and the rest of the time we talk in Japanese. That is, we can exchange languages. It is a great experience for me.

I think we ESL students can take three benefits when we have language partners. First, the more we talk with our language partners, the more we have interest in our own countries, or we can discover our own countries again, because our language partners have great interest in our country or our country's culture. It happened that my Japanese acquaintance who lived near my house had a license as an "Ikebana" teacher, so Ann and I decided to learn it from her. "Ikebana" is Japanese flower arrangement. "Ikebana" has many rules and theories. It is an art that condenses a landscape, such as a famous Japanese garden, in a flower vase. I didn't know that until recently.

Second, we can ask our language partners about English grammar or a word's meaning or spelling whenever we want to ask, and vice versa. Usually, we often hesitate to ask native English speakers such questions because we tend to worry if they feel unpleasant being interrupted.

Third, we can get new information or new friends through our language partners. But the most important thing is that we can have language partners who can be our good friends.

How can you get your language partner? I know two ways. One way is that you can access the International Center at the University of Virginia [21 University Circle, Charlottesville, VA 22903; phone: 434-924-1488; e-mail: intlctr@virginia.edu]. They can match you with appropriate partners. There are some guidelines of the program. (1) You must meet with your partner at least once every two weeks. If you and your partner decide to meet more often, the International Center encourages you to do so. (2) Each partner's native language should be spoken for half of each meeting. (3) You will meet with your partner independently of the International Center, but you can attend as many of the events sponsored by the International Center as you like.

The other way I know to get a language partner is that you can apply for language partners with a professor who teaches your own country's language at the University of Virginia. The teacher who teaches Japanese at the University of Virginia introduced me to a student in her class as my language partner. I am not sure that every teacher is willing to do the same thing. But I think to try it is worthwhile.

Don't hesitate to have a language partner, and you



SNOW DAYS

In case of bad weather, call
245-2401 for school closing
information.



Home Away From Home — The Life of an *Au Pair*

By Daniela Weberling

For some time now, people all over the world have been coming to the U.S. to experience the American way of life — freedom, rights, equality. America, dreams of big cars, big houses, big cities, money, good-looking people — something you have to explore at some point in your life. Something I decided to do. Just finishing high school and looking for an adventure and new experiences, I decided to live one year abroad. One year without the things I have gotten familiar with — without the friends I have made in the 18 years of my life, without my parents or sister — alone.

My journey began last year in December 2000. I was looking through some magazines and found a nice article about a girl who worked as an *au pair* in France. Not knowing what the word “*au pair*” meant, I started to search for information about this position.

An *au pair* is somebody who stays with a host family to help look after their kids. It is based on a cultural exchange program. The *au pair* earns a small amount of pocket money for her work and gets food and a room in the family’s house. The host family pays for the flight of the *au pair*, and the only thing I had to pay was a small amount to the organization I travel with, because of an insurance plan and their work.

This sounded great to me, and, after talking to my parents, I decided to take this chance. It is an opportunity to improve my English language skills, to meet new people, to find new friends, to explore a new culture, and to work with children while doing so.

The first step I took was to write to different organizations which help to place *au pairs* in host families in the U.S. Addresses for these companies can be found at www.au-pair-box.com. This website also provides addresses of families searching for an *au pair*.

This step was done. Then I made contact with a German organization called GIJK — a company for international youth contact. They went on to send me material about their program and an application form. This included references for proof of 200 hours childcare experience, character references, some pictures of

me and my family, and a letter about myself. Because of my four years’ working experience as an after-school babysitter in my neighborhood, the proof of 200 hours of babysitting experience was no problem for me. This step was done.



Part three was an interview — half in English and half in German — and a personal test. I was kind of scared as I met my first interviewer, who was an American woman living near my hometown in Germany for almost seven years. She was so nice and polite that I felt comfortable talking to her and showing her that my English was good enough to live in the U.S.

Only three weeks after this conversation, I received a call from a family in New York City. We talked about their kids, my duties, and how my schedule would look. Everything sounded great, but somehow I wasn’t sure if they were really the right ones. So we decided that they would call me again in a few days so that I had time to think about the position.

Luckily, a few days later more families called. Some were from California, some from Minnesota, and one was from Virginia, here in Charlottesville. Now without thinking very carefully and wondering if I really did the right thing, I said yes to them. I guess the most important reason was their sympathetic voice and the way they described everything to me.

On August 13th, the big day came, the day I was to leave 18 years of life behind me and start from the beginning — at point zero. Not knowing anybody, I went to the airport in Frankfurt, Germany. I took my seat next to another girl who seemed to be the same age as me and just started to talk. I was so happy to find out that we were both sitting in the same boat! She was an *au pair* on her way to New York City, where both of us would have a four-day orientation, before going our separate ways.

I expected myself to cry and feel lonely, but it wasn’t that way. Instead, I was excited and looked forward

The Pleasure of Reading a Picture Book

Continued from page 1

of sentences cannot be separated for him. Therefore, if either is missing, he may be disappointed.

A sentence in a picture book is mostly simple and rhythmical. Sometimes it seems like a poem. Sometimes I even feel like singing a song when I read it. It is fun. It is also interesting that the way of reading affects my son's reaction. When I read it joyfully, he seems joyful. When I read it quietly, he seems to wonder why. The picture has a great impact, too. It easily takes us into its own unique

Castella

By Akiko Fujita

Castella is a traditional Japanese cake. It was introduced from Portugal in the 16th century. Its name is derived from the Spanish kingdom, "Castillia," which was prosperous in the 16th century.

12 eggs
1 pound of sugar
1/3 cup milk
5 Tbs honey
2/3 pound bread flour (or all-purpose flour)
13x9x2 baking pan

Beat eggs and sugar together with an electric mixer at high speed for 10 minutes.

Microwave the milk and honey for 1 minute and add to mixture. Continue beating for 2-3 minutes until the mixture becomes fluffy.

Add flour to the mixture little by little (a quarter or a third at a time). Mix for a few minutes by electric mixer at low speed.

Put mixture into baking pan. Bake for around 60 minutes at 350 degrees (Check it frequently, and, if the top becomes brown, cover it with aluminum foil).

Enjoy!

world. In that sense, I suppose, a simple picture may leave the greater room for imagination.

One of my son's favorite books is *The Very Hungry Caterpillar*, by Eric Carle. This is a story of a caterpillar that eats various things each day for a week to become a beautiful butterfly at last. The story itself is very simple. The pictures are also very simple. Yet my son loves this book so much. I think the reason is because the book is colorful in sight and crispy in sound. "But he was still hungry." This may sound pleasant to him. He has made me read the book so often that I finally have come to read it without seeing it.

Reading a picture book is a good way to communicate with a child. I would like to be patient and have much fun with my son.

Want to Contribute to the Multicultural Brief?



Do you have a story, an opinion, a skill you want to tell people about, a recipe, a good idea, a complaint, response to what you learned here?

Share it with others!

All submissions are considered. You don't have to be part of the Newspaper Class to contribute! Next deadline is January 24, 2002.

There are still openings in the Newspaper Class! Classes meet every Wednesday from 9:30 to 12:00 and Monday from 8:30 to 10:30.

If interested, call 245-2817, or e-mail: erno@esinet.net.

To receive the *Multicultural Brief*, visit Jefferson School, Room 215A .

Seven Days' Vacation in Florida

By Daesung Oh

I traveled to Florida with my family and three other families on November 16th, 2001. A month before, my friends and I came together and planned to have nine days' vacation in Florida during the week of Thanksgiving.

I was riding the I-95 freeway. I was excited about traveling to Florida, and I was feeling as if I was flying on the clouds. On the way, I found a lot of cars running toward Florida like me, regardless of the threats of terrorism.

It took two days for us to reach Orlando, Florida. At last we arrived at the lodging where we had made a reservation. The lodging was a kind of condominium, which was a beautiful house, and it had a swimming pool inside. The condo had five bedrooms and three bathrooms. It was big enough for our four families to stay for seven days. One of the bedrooms was very luxurious. Fortunately, the room was assigned to my family because I was the oldest member among our friends.

After dinner, I went out with my friends to purchase tickets for Disney World, Universal Studios, Sea World, and the Kennedy Space Center. Disney World Resort is largely composed of five parks, including the Magic Kingdom, Epcot Center, MGM Studios, Animal Kingdom, and the Typhoon Lagoon, but the Typhoon Lagoon is generally closed in winter.

We stopped by several ticket stores on the street to buy tickets, and then we compared ticket options for Disney World. There are park hopper tickets, discounted promotion tickets, used tickets, and one-day tickets. Most were available at ticket stores on the street outside of the Resort, but only the one-day tickets were sold at the entrance.

A one-day ticket was \$48 per adult and \$38 per child under age 10. This ticket was valid only in a spe-

cific park. The park hopper ticket was a kind of package ticket which was valid in any Disney World park except Typhoon Lagoon for four days (There were also five-day hopper tickets). This ticket was about \$188. A discounted promotion ticket was a kind of park hopper ticket, but it was far cheaper than the regular price. The ticket holders had to attend a promotion event for 90 minutes early in the morning before entering the Disney World Resort. As I was told, the price was about \$120 for four days using the discounted park hopper ticket. Lastly, the used ticket was a kind of four- or five-day package ticket which had been used by the original purchaser for only one or two days and the rest of the days had not been used. So the ticket was valid only for the rest of the days, but it might include some risks.

Among these choices, most of my friends chose four-day package tickets and Universal Studios and Sea World tickets. But I decided to buy one-day tickets at the entrance of Disney World for only three days. So I did not have to buy package tickets beforehand. Accordingly, my friends paid around \$1000 for tickets per family, but I paid only \$650.

Buying one-day tickets to the Magic Kingdom, I realized the new fact that one-day tickets were cheaper than the package tickets. That is, if I bought a one-day ticket *and* second-day and third-day tickets, the second-day ticket was discounted 5% and the third-day ticket was discounted 15%. Thus, I saved \$60 total, because the number in my family was four people.

I decided to spend only three days at the Disney World Resort, and for the rest of the days I was going to visit Miami Beach, Key West, and Everglades National Park.

On the first day, I entered Epcot Center, which was one of the parks in Disney World. It had a lot of at-



Seven Days' Vacation in Florida

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tractions. This park was crowded with a lot of people, as usual, but I was told it was less crowded as compared with other holidays since the September 11th attack. Some attractions could be ridden only after a one hour wait. Therefore, my family determined to take advantage of the Fast Pass ticket as much as possible. The Fast Pass ticket is a free pass ticket, so you don't have to wait if you arrive at the entrance on time. But not all attractions are available if you use the Fast Pass ticket. Only a long waiting time attraction was available for Fast Pass tickets. Among the attractions at Epcot Center, the Illumination was the most interesting and popular for us.

On the second day, I visited the Magic Kingdom, which is the most popular park at Disney World. In the park my children, who were a 13-year-old daughter and a 10-year-old son, ran back and forth looking for attractions to ride. They rode almost every attraction. But my wife and I walked slowly around the resort because we were easily tired from standing in lines for a long time. Among the attractions in Magic Kingdom, Spectro Magic Parade was the most interesting and popular for us.

On the third day, we visited the Kennedy Space Center. The entrance fee was \$25 per adult, but children under age 14 were free if the children were accompanied by their parents. We watched two I-Max movies. One of them was a 3D I-Max movie which I had never watched before. They were so interesting. We took a bus tour to see the places where artificial satellites were launched, but most of the launch places were closed since the September 11th attack.

On the fourth day, we enjoyed the MGM Studio Park, which was part of Disney World. The park was similar to Universal Studios, but some attractions were more interesting than Universal Studios, so I decided to omit Universal Studios. Most attractions at MGM Studios were thrill and adventure rides. My wife and I were not strong enough to ride these attractions, so we took a rest and relaxed while our children rode. Among the attractions at MGM Studios, Fantasmic was most interesting and popular for us. It was com-

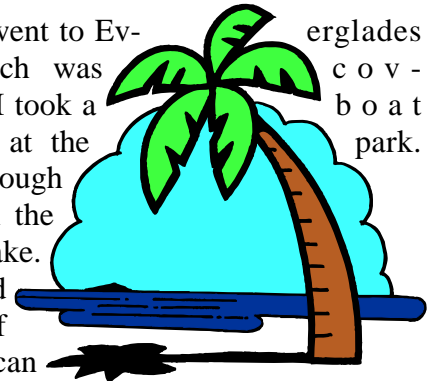
posed of a performance and a special effect movie which was reflected on the water screen. To see this attraction in the best place, viewers had to occupy a seat at least two hours in advance.

On the fifth day, I departed for Key West early in the morning. Key West is located in the utmost south of the U.S. and the utmost south of Florida. I had heard Key West was famous for its sunsets, so I had planned to visit Key West during the vacation before I started the trip. On the way to Key West, I came by Miami Beach. It was hot enough to swim as if it was summer. The beach was very clean and well arranged. The color of the water was emerald. The sands were shining under the sun. There were some people who were enjoying swimming and sunbathing.

After we took several pictures, we soon headed toward Key West. I urged my car to run fast to arrive before sunset. It took almost three hours to drive the length of the sea road which was connected by many tiny islands. I barely reached Key West by sunset, but, unfortunately, the whole sky was covered with dark clouds, so I couldn't see the magnificence of the sunset. The sight of the sunset I saw there was not as beautiful as that of Charlottesville. My family also was disappointed at the scenery for we were expecting so much.

I was obliged to leave Key West at once because I had to search for lodging on the way back to Orlando before thick darkness, and also I had the schedule of the next day. As we returned, it was so boring to drive the same way for three hours.

On the sixth day, I went to Everglades National Park, which was covered with swamps. I took a boat tour for two hours at the park. The boat sailed through the streams between the swamps and the lake. The passengers could see several kinds of birds and American crocodiles which were living in the swamps.



When I returned to my car after the boat tour, unfortunately my car battery was fully discharged, so I

Survey

The following are the results of a survey given during the week of November 5th, 2001 to ESL students participating in the Charlottesville Adult Education Program. A total of 52 students participated in the survey.

1. How long have you been in Charlottesville?			8. How long do you see your partner every day?		
0-3 months	22		2-3 hours	13	
4-6 months	9		4-5 hours	4	
7-12 months	5		6-8 hours	6	
1+ —2 years	10		12 hours	6	
2. How long will you stay here?			18-24 hours	6	
2-6 months	5		No answer	12	
1 year	10		Is this different from when you were in your country?		
2 years	7		Yes	23	
3-5 years	8		No	16	
11-13 years	3		No answer	12	
Forever	10		9. Do you have children?		
Not sure	9		Yes	20	
3. Why did you come here? Because of:			No	31	
University	19		No answer	1	
Job	4		How many children do you have?		
Immigrating	12		1	10	
Refugee	7		2	7	
Children's education	1		3	2	
Travel	3		4	1	
Other	6		How old are they?		
4. Who came here with you?			Less than 1 year	1	
Family	23		1-2 years	6	
Husband	15		3-5 years	3	
Children	1		6-10 years	7	
Sibling	2		13-16 years	3	
Alone	10		Adult	10	
5. How old are you?			10. Do your children live with you?		
Under 19	0		Yes	14	
20-29	21		No	6	
30-39	20		11. Do you have close friends here?		
40-49	6		Yes	33	
50-	4		No	17	
6. What gender are you?			12. How often do you see your friends each week?		
Female	34		Less than 1 time	3	
Male	16		1-2 times	21	
No answer	2		3-4 times	13	
7. Do you have a partner or spouse here?			5-10 times	7	
Yes	31		11-12 times	2	
No	18		many	1	
No answer	3		no answer	7	
			13. How often do you see your friends from the same country each week?		
			Never	3	
			Less than once	3	

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Survey

Continued from page 10

		3-4 times	10
		5-6 times	3
		7-10 times	16
		11-15 times	3
		All the time	3
		No answer	8
14. How long does it take for you to make friends?		22. Do you have broadband?	
Depends on many things	7	Yes	10
Soon	8	No	36
A long time	5	No answer	6
No answer	13	23. How often do you read the news about your own country each week?	
1-2 weeks	4	Never	5
1-2 months	8	Less than 1 time	6
3-5 months	6	1-2 times	20
several months	3	3-5 times	10
15. Do you have a job in your country?		7-10 times	5
Yes	32	More than 7 times	1
No	17	No answer	5
No answer	3	24. How often do you call your family or does your family call you each week?	
16. Do you have a job here?		Never	5
Yes	20	Less than 1 time	8
No	29	1-2 times	21
No answer	3	3-5 times	8
17. Do you wish you could be working?		6-7 times	5
Yes	30	More than 7 times	1
No	16	No answer	4
No answer	6	25. Do you know what you want to do in the future?	
18. Do you wish you could get a degree here?		Yes	41
Yes	28	No	8
No	17	No answer	3
No answer	7	26. How do you feel most of the time?	
19. Do you feel comfortable expressing your feelings in English?		Happy	26
Yes	26	Busy	15
No	20	Lonely	4
No answer	6	Thrilled	4
20. How many activities do you participate in each week?		Worried	4
1-2	16	This is a great opportunity	19
3-4	14	Bored	3
5-7	10	Sad	0
a lot	3	Relaxed	8
not sure	1	No answer	3
no answer	9	Note: It was found that the people who had a job in their own country but not in this country even though they wanted one were the ones who also felt lonely and bored here.	
21. How often do you use e-mail/internet each week?			
Less than 1 time	3		
1-2 times	6		

A Return to Childhood

By Sujaila Kazan

I loved my childhood, and I am trying to forge a path to experience those precious times again. The glass of time ran fast while growing up and seems untouchable to me. I haven't been able to reach an atmosphere of belonging like the one I had when I was living those early years of my life. But these remote moments show up in unexpected forms.

We are so used to our native language, and the words denote something, but they also connote all the emotions that surround us while learning them. We are foreign speakers in the midst of the transition between the denotation and connotation of words. We may even develop our personality, becoming someone else, speaking the known language. But some feelings of discovery may awaken. This fact allows us to step into the domains of childhood. We experience the meaning of new words; we can even play with that new language, forming a new cognizance, an adventure in comprehension.



A transition is happening, and we travel back in time until the arrival at those groovy years of spiritual joy, asking our parents about the "what" and "why" of things. Deeply curious about the order of things, in the mind of a seven- or eight-year-old, the joy is infinite and the sadness, too. This is the period when our subconscious awareness of the universe is still fresh due to our recent return to life on mother earth. Our love and respect for our fellow souls is genuine and deeply true.

Although this is like a utopian dream, the sparkle stays forever in us. As we grew up, we may have been able to stand for our principles even if many times we may have done it in rebellious ways. As the years go by, we are more inclined to forget these manners of childhood, unless we are in the learning process, while grasping a new line of thought. The doors of a whole new universe of words and meaning open for us and return us to our original states of consciousness.

Togo, My Lovely Country

By Roger Agbati

Togo, my lovely country, why can I not forget you?
 Why can I not forget you with your nice relief
 Represented from the north by the mountains,
 Plateaus, valley down to your beautiful sand
 beaches?
 Why can I not forget you?
 Why can I not forget you with your different
 cultures and educations, oh Togo, my lovely
 land?
 Why can I not forget you? Who let me see
 every morning the beautiful picture of the sun
 coming up at your east in the morning or going
 down at your west at dusk? Why can I not
 forget you?
 Oh, Togo, my mother country. I will never
 forget you and I will always leave a place in
 my heart for you.

Oh! My Country

By Louise Agbati

She cries her parents.
 She cries her children.
 Where can she find safety?
 Where can she find comforting?
 I want to tell you, Togo, take courage!
 Look at your gift, offered by inheritance
 By your mother Africa.
 Very nice it is.
 I want to tell you that you are not powerless
 Only your political strife can help you.
 Take care of your resources.
 Take care of your children.
 I love you, Togo.
 I love you, my country.

China

By Xin Zhenghan



The Yangtze River rolls eastwards.
 The mountains stretch to the sky.
 A boat is drifting.
 The boatman is singing.
 The valley echoes.
 Monkeys hang on trees
 Hearing the singing.

Seven Days' Vacation in Florida

Continued from page 9

asked the ticket office to recharge my Continued on
 page 13
 battery. But the man at the office asked \$20 for the
 jumpstart. It was a little steep and unfair, so I
 searched for another driver to ask for a jump. A
 man from Massachusetts was glad to have his car
 connected to my car. Thanks to him, I could return
 to my condo in Orlando on time. As soon as we
 arrived in Orlando, we visited the Disney down-
 town and went shopping.

On the seventh day, we departed Florida for Char-
 lottesville early in the morning. On the way home,
 when we came by Atlanta, Georgia, we met heavy
 rains and severe thunderstorms, so we were obliged
 to stay at a lodge. The next day, it was so fine. I
 was so pleased to drive home without any problem.
 At last, I arrived home at 5 o'clock on the ninth day
 of my vacation.

I did all the driving for more than 3000 miles dur-
 ing the vacation. When I decided to do this trip, I
 was somewhat worried about this vacation because
 lately the anthrax cases made all American people
 tremble with horror, and the FBI announced a high
 alert on terrorism. Besides, my destination was
 Disney World, which was very crowded, so it could
 easily be targeted by terrorism. But I finished my

The Heart of Nature

By Gyaltzen Sangpo

The beginning of my morning
 Wake up by bullets of hail,
 Music of thunder,
 Visitor of lightning.
 Sweet calling from
 the mist
 The dirt from the
 earth
 swept by downpour
 The beautiful turf show-
 ered by drizzle
 And kissed by squall.

This happiness of soul created
 From deepest heart of your
 nature.



I have felt a lot of things from this trip. First, the
 American land is so wide that four seasons could
 be felt in the same period of time. When we had
 vacation, Minnesota actually had snow, but Miami
 was as hot as summer. Second, because America
 has so many natural resources and so many kinds of
 resources, this gives future generations the hopes
 and promises to make their dreams realized. Third,
 a long trip by car, especially in America, has always
 given me a lot of refreshment and new visions into
 an unknown world.

Christmas Picture Books

Continued from page 1

those books to celebrate my family's annual Christmas. I hope you enjoy these with your loved ones this holiday season.

Most Christmas books tend to spread the happy holiday atmosphere, such as Jonathan London's *Froggy's Best Christmas* (2000), Holly Keller's *Merry Christmas, Geraldine* (1997), Rosemary Well's *McDuff's New Friend* (1998), Chris Van Allsburg's *The Polar Express* (1985), William Joyce's *Santa Calls* (1993), Stephen Krensky's *How Santa Got His Job* (1998), Michael Garland's *An Elf for Christmas* (1999), etc.

Some Christmas books want to give children some good models, such as giving, sharing, etc. The purpose is to tell children the spirit of Christmas. In Cynthia Rylant's *Silver Packages* (1987), Frankie grows up to be a doctor and returns to his community in a continuation of the cycle of giving. Gloria Houston's *The Year of the Perfect Christmas Tree* (1988) describes a warm world. Set in Appalachia during the First World War, it is the tale of a poor, but proud mountain family determined to provide the church Christmas tree.

Christmas is filled with miracles. Some Christmas stories tend to encourage children to work hard and to help them picture a wonderful world filled with miracles and hope. In David Mephail's *Santa's Book of Names* (1993), when Edward has trouble learning to read, his teacher urges tests, but his mother counsels "patience". Then, in Edward's house on Christmas Eve, Santa accidentally drops the important book listing the gifts that children will receive, and, when Edward catches up with him to give it back, Santa invites him to come along to help. Since Edward can't read, he just holds the book and turns pages. But when Santa's glasses tumble into the sea, Edward realizes he must try to read and finds he can. Appropriately, the last gift is a book for Edward, which he reads all by himself on Christmas morning.

In a newer type of picture book, the illustrations tell the whole story, without words. Children enjoy the opportunity to provide the missing text for wordless books, an excellent way of developing their oral and written language skills. Wordless books stimulate creative think-

ing and enhance visual literacy abilities, as children must watch the pages for clues to the action. Wordless books are especially valuable because they allow children of different backgrounds and reading levels to enjoy the same book. *Peter Spier's Christmas*, by Peter Spier, is a wordless picture book which contains more than ninety full-color paintings capturing the spirit and joy of Christmas through the delight of three young children. The beautiful illustrations take you through a journey of a family's Christmas season. More than a portrayal of the preparation for the celebration of a holiday, this wordless picture book is a warm and nostalgic look at a family and a very special time of year.

Through Christmas picture books, children can learn the spirit of Christmas and get the pleasure of the holiday. Picture books have various degrees of detail and plot complexity. Some contain much detail, while others do not. Some develop easily identifiable plots, while others can be interpreted in many different ways. Some are large, making them appropriate for sharing with a group, while others are small, easily held by one child or one adult with a child in the lap. We should consider all of these characteristics when choosing picture books for children of different ages, reading levels, and interests.

I think reading is the best gift from parents to their kids. You can find your and your little one's own favorite Christmas picture books. Merry Christmas!

