



Charlottesville City Schools
 Adult English as a Second Language Program
 Adult Learning Center
 www.charlottesville-esl.org

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My Mother and Me

By Myungjin Oh (South Korea)

In Korea, mothers often say to their children, “If you have a child, you will understand a mother’s mind.” Now, I don’t have a child yet, but I can feel my mother’s heart.

When I was a child (maybe four or five years old), I was raised by my grandmother because my mother had four children, including me, and she was so weak. My grandmother worried about my mother’s health, so she took me to her home even though my mother had a babysitter who lived with us to take care of the children.

I can’t remember my feelings at that time exactly. I can remember just a few things ... I took a train on a cold night,

and my grandmother hugged me very tightly.

I lived with my grandparents, two uncles and two aunts. They all held me dear, and I spent happy days. But this happiness was not very long because my aunt had a baby! All the love and concern which had concentrated on me passed to my cousin. I was jealous of her so much.

About one year later, I was returned to my home. The whole environment was different from my grandmother’s house, and I couldn’t adjust to my family. The house, the smells, the people ... all of these things

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From the Editor

May is the time of year when we celebrate Mother's Day, and it is appropriate that so many of the articles in this issue reflect the importance of mothering in our lives.

Many of the articles are about insights, awakened respect and admiration for our mothers that come from life experience, as reflected in the Korean saying, "If you have a child, you will understand a mother's mind." Others describe the experience of being in the new role of "mothering" our parents as they grow weaker and perhaps a little less intimidating despite whatever hurt and misunderstanding may have developed over the years. The feeling of being torn apart from the closeness of family contact permeates all the writings, a chronic condition for all internationals and new Americans.

Another theme revolves around the challenges "dependents" feel in trying to establish a new life here. For some, the challenges of coming here push them to acquire new skills — such as cooking! — that give them a new sense of independence. Others are heartened by the kindness and patience of a busy salesclerk willing to reach beyond the language barrier to really understand the newcomer's need. While this is a land of great opportunity, for many the decision to come here involves sacrifice and conflict. Some of the hazards associated with this can be anger, frustration, marital stress, and depression that, if not addressed,

could lead to tragic outcomes such as divorce or even suicide.

On a lighter note, learning to drive in the U.S. is another challenge most internationals face. Perhaps we can take a piece of advice from the way many new drivers in Korea warn other drivers about the "tadpoles" in their midst.

Peppered throughout the issue are reminders of why adult education is such an extraordinary experience and why it is so important in changing all of our lives. Through the diversity of our classes, words like Bulgaria, Tibet, and Afghanistan take on new meaning in our lives. Also, again this spring, we celebrated **Voices of Adult Learners** as part of the Virginia Festival of the Book celebration. One writer describes her experience of why she entered the contest, listening to the wonderful stories at the event, reading to the audience, and receiving an award. Again, the theme of mothers and daughters is revisited.

Finally, we offer a special section dedicated to the U.S. Congress regarding the proposed budget cuts in adult education. Many students at ALC have already written letters to Congressman Virgil Goode and Senators John Warner and George Allen, stressing the importance of adult education to all our lives. The students in the Newspaper Class here add their voices. As Wanxia Wang poignantly says, "ESL classes ... not only help us study, but also give us a lot of opportunity to express our feelings, touch the society, and remind ourselves that we are not worthless." In fact, adult learners can be among the greatest resources to our society and the world and deserve our investment. This is a sentiment that is echoed by all of us who participate in adult education.

Happy Spring!

Leslie A. Furlong, Editor

Eva Horvath, Assistant Editor

Mission Statement

The *Multi-Cultural Brief* is an ESL newsletter created by students who want to improve their English and is produced as part of a newspaper class offered through the Charlottesville Adult Education program. Its purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to

- share their experiences of being from another country,
- offer multi-cultural perspectives on life in Charlottesville,
- help inform people who are new to Charlottesville of issues and opportunities around town,
- build a bridge of communication between the ESL population and Americans living in the Charlottesville community.

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From Unfamiliarity to Familiarity

By Eunkyung Heo (South Korea)

Bulgaria, Tibet, Afghanistan ... These were superficial words to me in former times.

I felt that Bulgaria was as far away as Mars.

Tibet... This word reminded me of some ascetics and a young boy monk who looks serious.

When I heard Afghanistan, I imagined tribal disputes, demolition of a stone Buddhist image, and sorrow.

Anyway, those words and places and cultures were unfamiliar to me. But, my thinking doesn't correspond with before.

Now, those words have vivid meaning to me. They are Iliyana's, Nima's, and Zarghuna's homelands, and their beloved families live there.

When these words appear in a paper, I pay attention to them now.



Inner Battle

By Faye Shih (Taiwan)

It was a slightly windy and chilly morning while I was walking my dog in my backyard as usual. The gentle breeze was blowing with long low mourning sounds. The branches of the bare trees seemed dull and lonely. There was sorrow and melancholy hidden in the dormant grass. The view was just like my mood at that moment. My heart was sinking and my mind was lingering on yesterday's phone conversation with my father.

It is difficult to deal with the pain and guilt of living so far away from a loved one, my father. At his age, like a candle glittering in the wind, he has become vulnerable and fragile day by day since my mother

died four years ago. It is time for me to do filial piety, but I still have my own family to take care of. Especially my son, who

“ If you're ever going to love him, let it be now. Don't wait until he's gone and feel regret for the rest of your life. ”

needs constant attention. I am very anxious and put myself in a dilemma now. The burden has been weighing on my mind for years, and I feel so despondent and blameworthy.

Let me paraphrase a poem that I read several months ago: “If you're ever going to love me, love me now. Don't wait until I'm gone and have it chiseled on my headstone; let me hear it while I'm living, so I can enjoy it.” For me, I want to say, “If

you're ever going to love him, let it be now. Don't wait until he's gone and feel regret for the rest of your life.”

I am still scarred by what happened to my mom, who died suddenly four years back. It is always fluttering with fear in my heart. I am afraid of missing the opportunity to be with my father in his old age. I am torn between staying and leaving.



Who Am I?

By Myungjin Oh (South Korea)

"I'll go back to Korea! And I'll get back my job!"

Yesterday I spat it out at my husband again even though I knew it hurt him.

I used to work as a graphic designer and an instructor at a university in Korea. I had good income and was satisfied with two jobs even if it was very hard mentally and physically because I wanted to be a professor. But all of this is just "was" because my whole life has changed after marriage.



I had to come here to follow my husband. Nobody doubted it because, generally, a wife has to follow her husband to be together especially in Korea.

I worried about changing my life. The serious problem was that my husband wants to be in the U.S. our entire lives. But I made up my mind to look on the bright side. I thought it could be a great opportunity to change my living environment — many people believe that living conditions in the U.S. are better than in Korea, especially for raising children — and to study about my area in the U.S.

The most important thing was that I could be with my husband, who had already lived in the U.S. for three years before we got married. At last, I flew in a plane filled with anxiety, curiosity about this new world, and sorrow at parting with family and friends.

About six months have passed since I came here. Many things are different from my imagination. I had guessed that if I came to the U.S., naturally I would be able to speak English well in a short time. But I was completely wrong. Even now, I make mistakes every day using English, and sometimes I feel shame. I planned to take Ph.D. courses in the U.S., but I've lost confidence. I'm just a foolish English speaker!

Another problem is housework. I didn't do this before I got married. I believed, naively, the promise of my husband. He said to me before marriage, "If we get married, I'll do all the housework. So, never mind!" But now, he doesn't do anything, like a traditional Korean man. From time to time, it makes me angry. Housework is just woman's burden? Why do I have to cook while he enjoys watching TV? Did I come here in order to do these things? I'm angry about his unconscious mind that thinks housework is a woman's job. Sometimes we argue about it, and he promises to keep his

word, but the promise isn't kept for very long.

And the problem of money also bothers me every day. Fortunately, I didn't worry about it before I got married. But now, our income is not enough to live on because my husband is a student and I can't work in the U.S. legally. I'm officially a "needy" person! It's a totally unstable situation.

These days, once in a while I ask myself, "Why did I come here and give up my stable life? What am I doing in the U.S.? Who am I?" Whenever these things come to my mind, especially, I fight with my husband about the problem of housework. I used to blame him.

Yesterday, I shouted at him again. He said to me, "It was your choice." I lost my words. That's right. The answer was inside me. I chose him and the U.S. The most important thing was I wanted to be with him. Sometimes I forget it.

Life is a challenge. I have just started a new life. So why do I still hold to my thinking in the past?

I'm starting at "zero." It is a certain chance to make a "different me."

Special Gift for My Mom

By Huyen Thanh Hoang (Vietnam)

My mother was born in 1948 or 1949 maybe. How could she know exactly the time when her mother did not remember it? She was born in a very poor village. It was common that parents did not pay much attention to their children because they were working hard for food, for survival. Now, she has chosen the year 1949 as the time her mother gave birth to her since some people said that year was well matched with her life.

She had a rough childhood. Her father died and left her mother with four children. I don't know about the age of the oldest child, but the youngest child was just one month old. My mother was two years old at that time. She could not remember anything about her father. Life was so hard that giving up her studies was inescapable. After finishing the seventh grade, she stayed at home and helped her mother to earn money. She did a lot of farm work and in her free time, she went to market to sell bananas.

The thing that changed her whole life came when she was 17 years old. Her uncle, who was living in Hanoi, the capital of Vietnam, visited her family and wanted to take care of one of his relatives. My mother was chosen to leave the hometown for Hanoi. The uncle wanted her to study something for her

future job. That was such a good decision. She was sent to an accounting class, which took her for one year. After the class, it was not difficult for her to get a job in a construction company, where she met my father.

“Please wake up, wake up. I will build a beautiful house for you as you have always wished ”

My father was famous for his intelligence in the company. As she remembered, a lot of women fell in love with him, including her. Finally, my father chose her, of course. All of her relatives liked my father, and they pressed for a wedding. After only two months of dating, they got married. That day was October 17th, 1968, when she was 19 years old. It was not so young for her generation. My oldest brother was born two years later. Then, my second brother and I followed in the next six years. She usually had to take care of us all by herself. My father had to study in China for two years, and his job required him to live far from the family frequently.

We, our family, had a happy life. My mother decided to retire early so that she could have enough time to take care of all of us. We grew up under her arms and had a good

education. She did everything for us.

Something happened on a day that I will never forget. It was in 1992, almost 13 years ago. On that night, we went to bed as usual. Suddenly, we heard my father call her loudly.

Waking up and rushing into their rooms, I saw my mother lying on the bed without knowing anything. We didn't know what was happening.

All of us tried to call her and shook her to wake her up. It did not work. My father held her hands tightly and said the words that will stay in my mind forever: “Please wake up, wake up. I will build a beautiful house for you as you have always wished.” I still remember clearly my feeling that I would lose her soon. It was so horrible. But it was also very, very lucky that our neighbor was a doctor. My brother ran out of our house and called the doctor. He came up and checked my mother's health. She was injected with some kind of medicine right after that. She slowly became aware again. We were very happy that she was still fine. Until now, I do not know what happened to her on that night, but the doctor said that everything happened just in time to save her life. My father woke up in time, we called the

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Special Gift for My Mom

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doctor in time, and the injection was in time.

Then my father kept his promise. He bought some new land, and a new house was built for her. We were excited to move to a pretty, big house. The time flew by. My siblings and I now have good jobs and have our own families. When my husband came to the U.S. to study, for the first two years, my baby and I lived with



her. After taking care of me, now she helped me to take care of my child. My father still worked far from us. He usually visited home once or twice per month and stayed with us for four or five days each time. Every time my father came home, she bought a lot of flowers to decorate our house and prepared so many kinds of delicious food. She sacrificed all her life for our family.

Now, I am living in the U.S.

with my husband and will stay here for several years. I was so worried before I left because she would have to live alone. Fortunately, my father has just recently retired. From now on, they will live together forever. I hope that my parents will have a happy life.

Today, April 10th, 2005, is her 56th birthday. It is the first time I have lived far from her on this day. I cannot buy a birthday cake and gift for her as usual. So, here, I write this story about her to tell her that I love her so much and I am very proud of her. This is my gift for her on this special day.

“Excuse Me,” “Very Close,” and Liar

By Eunkyung Heo (South Korea)

In my thinking, “excuse me” is the most frequently used expression in America. The expression looks like it clings to people’s lips. They always say it when they make a little mistake, want to inform others about who they are, ask a favor of someone, or can’t understand the other’s meaning.

“As usual, she couldn’t understand my meaning. But unusually, she started to ask me about my need in spite of “excuse me.”

Sometimes I meet with the last case. It makes me embarrassed. Probably they couldn’t guess my discouragement when I hear that.

This Tuesday, I wanted to buy some package materials. After

class, I dropped into “Michael’s.” I found what I wanted – except for one thing. I looked around everywhere in the shop again, but I couldn’t find it.

Reluctantly, I asked for help from a saleswoman. Actually, I didn’t know its correct name. So, I pronounced it as I had heard it in my country. As usual, she couldn’t understand my meaning. But unusually,

she started to ask me about my need instead of “excuse me.”

Finally, we could find my need. After that, she said to me, “Very close.” I know that was her kindness to a customer and also her good intention. She was a Good Liar.

CANCELED CLASSES

For information about whether classes are canceled due to inclement weather, call 245-2401, or watch Channel 29 News.



Our “Letter”

By Huyen Thanh Hoang (Vietnam)

I got married over three years ago after four years of dating. We really enjoyed our new life. Only one month later, however, my husband received admission to UVA, which meant that we would have to live separately soon. We decided to have a baby with the hope that my child would help me to overcome the difficult time when my husband went to the U.S.

My husband left Hanoi for Charlottesville on the day I was five months pregnant. At that time, we knew that our baby would be a girl. Needless to say how hard it was to be separated from my husband. I cried a lot. Several weeks passed with sadness and loneliness. I slowly realized that I still had strong encouragement. It was from my baby. I talked to my baby every day: on the way to work, or when I went to bed, and any time I could. I bought a book of legends and read to her every night. I began to get used to living far from my husband.

The time seemed to fly more quickly. The day my baby wanted to come out was coming. I phoned my husband to tell him that he would become a father soon. My mother took me to the hospital. After some procedures, I was moved to the waiting room. My parents, my relatives, my close friends were outside, at least ten people in total. But my husband was not there, of

course. I felt self-pity when seeing some husbands take care of and encourage their wives.



Four hours later, I was moved to the delivery room. Vietnam is still a poor country, so the hospital doesn't have a separate room for each pregnancy. All of the women were in the same room with about ten tables, three doctors and some nurses. The relatives were not allowed to come in. It meant that there was no encouragement from them at the most important time.

I chose the natural way of delivery without any kind of drug. I began to feel the labor pains. I cannot tell you how painful it was. Some women in the room cried and screamed because of it. How could I overcome it? Who could help me now? I thought of my husband first. I wished he were here to understand and to share in my hardship. I knew that

even though he lived far from me, my baby and I were always in his heart. It was really a big comfort for me.

But then I called up my mother. I did not know why. Maybe it was a natural reaction when someone faces difficulty. I loved my mother more than ever before. She had had to be in the same situation as me for three times, to give birth to my two older brothers and me. Her time was much more difficult than mine because my two brothers were born during the war between Vietnam and the U.S. My father also had to study in China for two years when my second brother was born.

I thought again of my husband, and then of my mom. They in turns appeared in my mind. Even though they were not beside me now, they helped me a lot. The pain lasted for more than three hours. Finally, at 7 p.m. on November 27th, my baby came into the world. Both mother and child were doing well. My husband named her “Thu,” which means “the Letter” in Vietnamese. That name has a lovely meaning. While she was staying in my body, my husband and I exchanged letters every day after he went to the U.S. She appeared in all of our letters. For us, she is the most beautiful girl in the world.

Becoming a Cook

By Hyunah Lee (South Korea)



Since I came here after leaving my country, I cook every day. How incredible it is. Actually, I used to be poor at cooking. There are some reasons for that. When I was a little girl, I didn't have to cook. All I had to do was study as a good student.

My parents wanted me to concentrate on school studies. Of course, sometimes I had chances to learn cooking from my mother. But that was not my major work.

After I got married, I needed to do cooking by myself. When I got married, I was still a graduate student. I had to read a lot of articles, write critiques about them and prepare my thesis. Simultaneously, I was a researcher at the Institute of Economics and Management. So I worked from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. every day. It meant I was very busy and had no time to cook. Unwillingly, I had to depend on my mother. I lived close to my parents' house. Many Korean couples who are dual earners live like me. From time to time, we used to eat out. It was a more convenient way.

I lived that way until I came to the U.S. last December. It was time to become independent. First of all, I needed to learn cooking for me and my husband. When we decided to go to the U.S. last year, the first thing I did was to register for a cooking class. My sister introduced me to the class in which she already participated.

“ These days, dinner time is the most pleasant time of day for us. I have gained confidence in my cooking ability. ”

My cooking teacher was very excellent. Thanks to her, I developed an interest in cooking. There was a new world that I didn't know before. I went to the class every Thursday. I could learn about three kinds of food at a time. Finally, I made my own recipe book. Now, I look over the recipe book every day, thinking about what to cook today. If I follow the recipe exactly, I can make very delicious food just like the food my cooking teacher made. I can scarcely believe this is what I've done. My husband is very pleased with the fact that I can make food. These days, dinner time is the most pleasant time of day for us. I have gained confidence in my cooking ability. Now I have achieved independence from others' help. The day that I arrived in the U.S. was independence day for my life.

Our Website

Visit the website for the Adult Learning Center! Included there you will see current and back issues of the Multi-Cultural Brief, the latest schedule of classes, and much, much more! www.charlottesville-esl.org.

My Mother and Me

(Continued from page 1)

were unfamiliar to me. Furthermore, my father was a very strict person, and my mother was so blunt. I was very shy, so I couldn't mix easily with my brothers and sister. I felt I was a figure out of place.

I tried to make advances to my mother, but it wasn't easy. In my memory, she was always in her bed, and she didn't talk much.

That situation was very hard for me, and I imputed the cause of my difficulty to my mother. The more I grew up, the more silent I became. I didn't talk with my mother except in normal conversation which was necessary to live until I was a student at university. When I was grown up, I knew it was



not her fault. But it was still difficult to be close with her because we had not been familiar for so long with each other.

As time went by, she became old and seemed to be lonely. I felt my mother was not strong any more. I wanted to change the awkward relationship between us. I tried to talk with her every day even though I was not an outgoing person. It was not easy for me. But she also became open-minded toward me; eventually, we talked to each other about everything and we became friends. At that time, I realized she is not a stern mother, but she is just a shy person like me.

When I left my home country, she felt very deep sorrow. It was difficult to endure being

separated from each other. At the airport in Korea, she hugged me. At that moment, I felt it was very clumsy because it was the first time which I could remember that she hugged me.

It is not easy to express my mind to other people even in my family. But I think it is very important because nobody will know if I don't express my feelings.

Even though my mother has always loved me, I couldn't realize that when I was young. Now, although we are far from each other, she is always inside me. When I see her again, I'll hug her deeply and say, "I love you."

Falling Korean Education

By Hera Lee (South Korea)

My 14-year-old son did not come home until midnight that day. We were living in an isolated area which was a little bit dangerous for kids. My husband became nervous and finally went out to the private learning center.

My son, who is neither smart nor diligent, was sitting in a small classroom with several

students memorizing something. Actually, they seemed not to be able to think any longer. They were simply sitting there waiting until the exhausted teacher would give up testing them and this boring time would pass. The angry father took his son out in front of the embarrassed teacher. Then we started to work to send our son to a foreign

country to study.

During a program called *Falling Education*, a Korean TV station broadcast an interview with a mother who said that she had spent ten thousand US dollars on tutoring her high school senior for just one month. In spring time, when school begins, the main topic

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Falling Korean Education



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of discussion is how much money mothers should give their children's teachers when they meet them. And some mothers do not show up to meet the teacher at all because of this burden. And on Teacher's Day, they

have a similar dilemma whether they should send a gift of money or not. Department stores become crowded during this season with parents who want to send gift cards for Teacher's Day instead of money. They think it is not polite to send money to the teacher. But most parents' concern is that their kids' GPA (grade point average) will possibly suffer if they do not give the teachers what they expect.

Students spend a long time at private learning centers for tutoring after school, which continues almost until midnight or one o'clock. The next day, exhausted students fall asleep in classes. When they are alert in class, they spend their time sending or checking mobile phone messages. They do not respect their teachers and do not expect any human relationship between teacher and student any longer. They think they only need information from their teachers to get good GPAs. And for this purpose, they think their teachers in private learning centers are much more helpful. The teachers themselves seem to shift their responsibility to the private learning centers, and they do not feel shame at advising students to take private tutoring or attend learning centers after school. There seems to be no other goal in school and this society (Korea) but getting into the comparatively right college.

The bases of this blind conviction may be from high competitiveness in Korean society and from Confucianism, which is deeply rooted in this society and teaches that scholars are more respected than merchants or mechanics.

Many conscientious parents want their kids to have a more desirable school life and to send their kids to America instead of these cram schools. Their kids tend to be sent to totally new foreign countries, mainly English-speaking countries, such as America or England, Australia or New Zealand. Setting aside parents' financial burden of expenses, their children are not ready to enjoy the new rich school life in American schools at all. These miserable kids have to face language and cultural barriers before they overcome homesickness. They do not understand what teachers are saying for a long time. Although they eventually adapt to these countries, they do not have identity. They are neither American nor Korean. Perhaps their permanently unstable journey from Korea to this country across the Pacific Ocean begins a long life as wandering aliens.

Want to Contribute to the *Multi-Cultural Brief?*

Do you have a story, an opinion, a skill you want to tell people about, a recipe, a good idea, a complaint, or a 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!

There are still openings in the Newspaper Class!
Classes meet on **Wednesday mornings from 9:30 to 12 noon, Wednesday evenings from 6:00-8:00 p.m., and on Fridays from 1:15 to 3:30 p.m.** Come as many times a week as you like.

If interested, call (434)-245-2817, or e-mail:

Susan.Erno@ccs.k12.va.us.

To receive the *Multi-Cultural Brief*, visit 1000 Preston Avenue, Suite D.

The First Day

By Eunkyung Heo (South Korea)



My country is small. There are many people and many cars there. So some beginning drivers are afraid of driving on crowded roads. They use signs to show about their condition to other drivers. If other drivers

saw the sign, they will pay more attention to the car. It is a sign for people to help each other.

The sign said, “Beginning Driver.” That is very simple and gentle.

But some people make their own signs by themselves. I have seen a variety of special signs made for beginning drivers. Some show a picture of a chicken or a phrase that says, “Remember your tadpole times.” Some are humorous warnings, some are extremely flattering, for example, “Don’t

kiss me.” One that made a great impression on me seemed like the work of a master. It was written with thick black calligraphy on white background. It said, “The First Day” – brief and short, but strong. He or she drove back and forth many times on the street in back of my house with that attached serious sign.

I remember him or her whenever I meet beginning drivers in their cars – like today.

After Award of “Voices of Adult Learners”

By Soo-Yeon Lee (South Korea)

On March 17, at 6:30P.M., My family and I went to the Burnley-Moran Elementary School for an award ceremony and sharing the stories of a writing contest.

In fact, last January, there was a writing contest called **“Voices of Adult Learners.”**

It was implemented for adult education students, including ESOL students, of the city of Charlottesville and five counties around Charlottesville. I have been here two and half years, but I never heard about any contest for internationals.

When I first heard about it, I was curious and excited. It was a new challenge and a pleasant experience for me.

And one more thing, I wanted to show my daughter that her mother did a good job about something. Actually, I want to be proud of being a good mother to my daughter in all parts of life. Even though it can be impossible, if I do my best in a small part of my life, I will obtain confidence and happiness. These were the reasons that I applied to the writing contest. After all, I got honorable mention for my writing and I went to receive my award.

I had to wait for a long time until my reading turn came. Of course, my young child was bored by the long sharing time of the stories. How beautiful the stories were! I was so

impressed during the sharing of the stories.

At last, my turn! Usually I rarely tremble in front of an audience, but I was so nervous at that time.

My ESOL teacher had suggested that I read the story more slowly, but my nervous voice made me gradually faster. Anyway, I finished reading my story, and I received the certificate with a rose. I was so happy and proud of myself.

When I remember again that time, it makes me smile. This is a small event of my life, but it certainly has given me happiness and vitality!

Proposed Cuts in Adult Education Funding

By Susan Erno (Program Director)

On February 7, 2005, President Bush proposed a reduction in Adult Education funding for the 2006 budget from \$569 million (current funding for state grants) to \$200 million (FY2006).

This translates into a 74.4% reduction in federal funds to Virginia from

\$11,266,838 to \$2,884,920. Adult Education funding supports GED, Skills Development and English as a Second Language (ESL) classes.

A 75% reduction in federal funding will destroy or severely disable most adult education programs.

In Charlottesville, we are fortunate to have financial support from many additional sources such as the City Schools, contracts with businesses and agencies, tuition from students, and grants. Nonetheless, the deep cut would force us to close 4-5 classes.

Adult Education Is Good for Us and We Are Good for the U.S.

By Myungjin Oh (South Korea)

Many international people come to the U.S. for many different reasons. We come because we need or want to work, study or follow our families. Some people come here because they want and need freedom and safety.

The U.S. also needs us. American people need co-workers, talented people who have good ideas or know well about special areas and people who are interested in different cultures. The U.S. cannot live alone. We all have to live together with our friends and families. There are many problems between countries, and we need to build understanding. In order that Americans and we live well

together, communication is very important. Some international



people speak English very well, but many of us can't speak English fluently. So we need English education. But many people can't get an opportunity to learn English easily. Fortunately, the U.S. adult education system is well-developed, especially in

Charlottesville. It helps many international people learn English and adjust to a new world. Eventually, it allows all of us to work more efficiently and live with other people harmoniously.

We can contribute to this society in many ways. In my case, if my English is improved, I will be a volunteer. I think it is one way to give back some of the benefits which I've received. In my opinion, this circulation between people makes the U.S. more abundant, and it is the power of this nation.

Thank You

By Marcia Isoldi (Brazil)



Our first home in the U.S. was in Laurel, a beautiful town in the state of Maryland. I had gone through difficult decisions before I arrived there. My energies had all been consumed with obsessions and worries. I couldn't relax, and I kept saying to myself, "Resign yourself! From now on,

what are you going to do?" I was rundown and very stressed. Living in another country, the language of which is different from ours, is a great challenge and sometimes very difficult. But in spite of my stress and the new uncertain prospects, I could overcome. Fortunately, I had a lot of help.

My husband and I were living in a fourteen-story building. There, I met Mirela. She has two intelligent and kind boys and is from Romania. We are the same age, and she also had left her job in her country. With all of those things in common, we made a good friendship. She helped me a lot. We spent many hours talking in English. Do you believe it? She speaks fluent English and has a very good ear. She didn't know, but the first time that she invited me to go to her house, it was the day of my birthday. I'll never forget it.

I had arrived in Maryland in May during summer vacation, so there weren't regular English classes anywhere. I was looking for a church to attend, and Mirela's husband introduced me to the First Baptist Church. I started to attend Bible Study for foreigners on Sundays. It was my first contact with Americans two months after my arrival. Bible Study is taught by a kind couple, Norma and Dan. They are in their seventies, but they radiate the vitality of 30-year-olds. Every week, I got anxious for Bible Study class to begin. I loved the way that they led the class because I'm not Baptist and they simply talked about the Bible and passed the Baptist

message on without imposing. They gave me a Bible on the first day even though they didn't know anything about me. I thought it was amazing! They always had a smiling and affectionate welcome. Norma was the director and Dan one of the teachers from the ESL course offered by the church. I started the ESL course when the class began in September. One day, I couldn't go to class because I didn't have a car, so I called them to explain. Much to my surprise, they came to my apartment and gave me a ride. But the most important thing to tell is that they are volunteers. They do things like that for everybody without receiving anything in return.

I was almost adapted to the new life in Laurel when at the very end of October I had a surprise. The lab's team of researchers in which my husband works would be transferred to the University of Virginia in Charlottesville in December. I couldn't believe that I would have another move, another start; but God works in mysterious ways.

"Resign yourself! From now on, what are you going to do?"

I had already been to Charlottesville and had loved it. There, I found the Adult Learning Center, and here also I have felt very welcome. I have been attending classes since the beginning of January. I have two incredible teachers – Miss Leslie Furlong and Mr. Jim Gordon. Both are excellent teachers and are always ready to help. Jim starts the class asking, "Do you have any questions?" Soon after the questions, he plays the guitar and sings a song. It's wonderful! Leslie has a lot of patience and is always encouraging the students.

As I have already said, I have really had much help. What can I say? Only, "Thank you so much, Lord, for the wonderful people that You have put in my path and please bless them." From now on, everybody will be in my prayers.

ALC and Me

By Huyen Thanh Hoang (Vietnam)

My husband received a scholarship from the Vietnamese government to study abroad. The U.S. was his choice without any hesitation. He came to Charlottesville and now has a better life with a well-developed education, good living conditions, and friendly American people.

Two years ago, I visited him for nearly two months. At that time, I did not speak anything. I have studied English in my country for many years, but speaking is the most difficult skill for Vietnamese people because of the many differences between English and our native language. English pronunciation is always a big problem for ESL learners. Without English, I could not even go shopping alone because of lack of confidence and shyness. Everything I did needed help from my husband. I felt my life in the U.S. was so boring and useless.

This time, I have come to the U.S. to take care of my husband. It means that I will stay here until he finishes his Ph.D., which will take at least three more years. Before coming, I was so worried about my boring life in the future. What would I do for three years? Stay at home most of the time without friends? I did not want to leave my country for

the U.S., but my husband needed me. I had no choice.

To study speaking is the most important thing I have to do.

” To study speaking is the most important thing I have to do. ”

So, how to speak English clearly and confidently? I know the best way to learn is to practice! But how can I practice speaking by myself? I decided to find an English class. I found the Adult Learning Center of Charlottesville! It is so great that it offers a lot of free classes, which are so important for students' spouses like me who have low income. With Dialogue Café, students have a chance to talk with many native English speakers. With the Writing Newspaper class, you not only have an opportunity to talk with an American teacher but also learn how to write, which is not less important a skill. The teachers and some volunteer American students helped me to overcome my shyness in the first several days and fit into the classes quickly.

From the ESL classes, I now have a lot of friends. We talk about America, about our countries and many things. Besides studying together, we do a lot of entertaining activities, like eating out or going shopping. The next activity that we are excited

about is the Festival of Cultures, also organized by ALC, which is on May 14th, 2005. ALC always tries to do its best to help people from different countries to be closer and have more mutual understanding.

I now feel much more confident when communicating with all people. But I am just a beginner. It will take me a long time to speak English more fluently. Furthermore, there are still so many interesting things about American history, extensive experiences of life and culture, and people that I need and want to know. ESL classes will always be important to me the entire time I live here. They also will help me to have a good job more easily with my improved English when I go back to Vietnam.

ESL classes have changed my life in the U.S. to be more meaningful and more enjoyable than I could have imagined. I know for sure that all students at ALC also have the same feeling as I do when they think about ALC.

Thanks to American adult education! Thanks to all of my great teachers and my friends at the Adult Learning Center of Charlottesville!

Why We Need Adult Education

By Hong Zhu (China)



I heard that President Bush and the U.S. Congress have proposed to cut 75% of federal funding for adult education. I felt sorry and restless. America

is a country of immigrants. Many people come from different countries. Actually, most of them have made great contributions to the U.S. When they came here, many people were not able to speak English fluently, but they had to work, live or study as other local Americans. They had a long and difficult time until they adapted to the new life. They need the government to support their efforts and to have education to

learn the new language and the new rules; this is especially true for many dependents of newcomers. If these people don't have a chance to learn, they are not able to communicate with other native English speakers, to help their children, to travel, even to go shopping, and so on. So I don't think it is a good plan for this country, and it is not a good plan for most immigrants.

Why We Need Adult Education

By Marcia Isoldi (Brazil)

Education is the only thing that we have that nobody can take away from us; it is a human right. All governments should do their duty to provide equal opportunities for everyone. It's not a fair decision to the adults of the State of Virginia to cut funding by 75%. It is crystal clear that a lot of things are at stake for the teachers and the learners.

At ALC I have found a lot of hope. Here, I can see many adults who haven't had good luck in their lives. After getting over all sorts of difficulties, they try to find a meaning for their lives. Education is the first step. They know that they can

„ ...with knowledge, we get understanding; with understanding, we acquire tolerance; with tolerance, we can reach peace. ”

achieve something by coming and studying here. Some ALC

teachers even go to jails to teach.

Here I have found many foreigners studying English, learning about American culture and other cultures as well. We aliens have come here for many reasons, such as to study, to work, or to seek political asylum. Some of us come as “dependents” of these people. Besides learning English, we have the chance of learning a better way of dealing with our cultural differences. It is good for all sides. Sometimes a simple and educated gesture in some cultures can be considered a rude gesture in others. Learn-

ing makes life easier for everyone.

Education gives us knowledge; with knowledge, we get understanding; with understanding, we acquire tolerance; with tolerance, we can reach peace.



The Importance of Adult Education

By Wanxia Wang (China)



In America, if you have good English communication skills, it can help you make friends, reduce the risk of isolation and offer more chances to get a job. You will have more chances to make a good condition for your life.

For example, the salary of one of my friends was five times that of her Ph.D. husband when she was in her homeland. But for love she gave up her good position and relationship to come to the U.S. She had to learn how to speak, how to do housework by herself, how to save money for living. She couldn't find the American lifestyle of her dreams. She felt frustrated and didn't want to communicate with others. She was depressed until she found an adult ESL class. In the class she found that most classmates have similar problems in living. The teacher and students had patience to listen to each other with all ears. So soon she overcame the depression.

In many American universities every year, several foreign

students commit suicide. Dr. Marion Ross at UVA told me that the university decided to offer more ESL classes to help students feel less isolated. It has been six years since UVA has reported a student suicide in part because of ESL classes. I'm really proud. It shows how important ESL is! I wonder, however, how many university spouses commit suicide or how many marriages end in divorce. I'm so lucky to live in a city with a strong adult ESL education program. Through adult ESL education, Americans can tell us about their world, what real U.S. culture is. Why is America so powerful? Because America cares for education. America has a high quality education system. Famous American universities attract excellent students from all over the world who come to America to study. Most foreign students' dependent partners are excellent, too.

In my ESL class, every dependent partner has graduated from college. Some have their Ph.D. degrees. Most of them had good jobs in their country. Some are doctors. Some are university professors. But for love, for more opportunity, they left their country to find their American dream. However, they can't speak English fluently. Most dependent partners are not allowed to work because of their

visa status. They feel lost at the beginning. They are even scared to go outdoors by themselves. They feel pressure; these emotions even affect their kids and families. This is not good for the psychology of developing children.

Through adult ESL education people can be good teachers to help their children study and guide them in how to grow up healthy. Children are the future of every country. Helping their parents is equal to helping children.

Studying English and getting cultural knowledge can help these newcomers quickly fit into American living. Adult ESL education can lift the quality of life for all. Once internationals decide to stay in America, it will be a big treasure for America for the following reason. Everybody knows training a student is an all-consuming thing. Many internationals come to this country already highly trained, and this saves America time and money.

I'm one of the "dependent" partners. I deeply feel I need to attend adult ESL classes. It not only helps us study, but also gives us a lot of opportunity to express our feelings, touch the society, and remind ourselves that we are not worthless. Through going to adult ESL

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The Importance of Adult Education

(Continued from page 16)

classes, we quickly get over the depression period. We find we have potential ability to do other things, like cooking, art, decorating, teaching, etc. The international classmates open our eyes, open our hearts in these special adult ESL classes. The classmates become friends. They have a lot of information about their countries' policies, cultures, entertainment, and living experiences. All of these things help us understand life's real meaning. Life is precious. We start to love adult ESL class; we look at it as our family.

Through adult ESL classes we know where you can have a romantic dinner, where you can count the stars with your lover,

where you can enjoy music, shop for fashionable clothes, learn how to feed a baby, decide whether to choose a private or public school for your children, learn where you can attend entertainment events, and more.

Through adult ESL classes we learn good communication skills. We know how to rent an apartment, buy a dream house, buy insurance, how to reduce risk to society and to protect ourselves, etc. With good English communication skills and some rules of law which we learn from ESL classes, we can travel in the U.S. without problems. All of these things stimulate the American economy, and people can feel America – the free kingdom. Good friends with a good

environment help us realize our self value, speak the same language, and help each other. This is our American dream!

Through adult ESL education, every person who has become introverted and shy because of language and cultural barriers becomes a more open and happy person. Through relaxing about life and good communication ability we can enjoy life and no longer feel like aliens who cannot catch up to current society's steps. Don't let others think we are idiots!

So, I'll say, adult ESL education gives us good training and helps us achieve fruitful living!

We Need Adult Education

By Baili Peng (China)

The Bush Administration's proposed budget cuts 75% of federal funding for Adult Education for the State of Virginia. I do not think that is a good decision and policy. I have a few reasons to explain my opinion.

1. The U.S. is a country of immigrants. Every year, thousands of people immigrate from different countries in the world. When they come here, they need to learn to communicate and read in English. Adult Education can give them the opportunity to learn what they need. I have a friend who

comes from China. She could not speak English very well when she came here. After she took Adult Education English classes for two years, she could speak fluent English. I started to take Adult Education courses after I heard her story.

2. Adult Education can provide low-income families, adults and youths opportunities to learn how to do math and to use a computer. That gives them the chance to find good jobs and get good pay. Without basic knowledge and skills, it is difficult for people to live.

I want our Representatives in Congress not to support President Bush's proposed slashes in funding for Adult Education.



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