

Sharing Our Stories:
A Presentation of the Immigrant Memoir Project

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As told by:

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About this Project

"To be a person is to have a story to tell." –Isak Dinesen

This collection of stories is the product of a group of brave women who participated in the Immigrant Memoir Project in 2016 and 2017 at the Brookline ESOL Program. For weeks, these women – all English students, all immigrants, and all older adults – practiced telling life stories to one another with the guidance of a team of dedicated educators. Together, they each developed a story of their choosing to share with us here. To them, we owe this compilation.

It is not easy to leave everything one has known to come to a new land in a new language. Similarly, this project represents new territory for many of us unaccustomed to this mode of learning in the ESOL classroom. But, we were drawn to this work for many reasons, including our hope that through telling our stories:

- *We learn to ask questions to understand one another's experiences more deeply.*
- *We learn to listen with appreciation and curiosity.*
- *We learn to add detail to enrich our telling.*
- *We practice using dialogue in spoken and written form.*
- *We think about the connections between another's experiences and our own.*
- *We can encourage, inspire, and entertain others using our real-life experience.*
- *We expand our vocabulary by hearing other's stories and working on our own.*
- *We develop our capacity to speak on a familiar topic at length.*
- *We develop our capacity to control and shape our story that we tell to others.*
- *We are motivated to think about ways to share stories with our families, and to pass on our respective legacies with them.*
- *We reflect on and find meaning, joy, hope, and laughter in our experiences.*

How to Use this Guide

As you read the following stories, you are invited to be active participants by responding to the associated prompts (questions) from your own experiences.

You can:

- *Choose which story or question(s) to respond to. You can also choose not to respond, or to not share your responses with others if you do not feel comfortable to do so.*
- *Take few minutes to tell a spouse, child or grandchild, classmate, or friend about your answers. Then ask them about theirs!*
- *Working alone, write down your responses using as much detail as you can. Use a dictionary if necessary. Do not worry about making mistakes!*
- *Record your responses using the voice recorder function on your smart phone (or other device with a microphone).*

Guidelines for Listening

These stories were written to inspire your own conversations, whether with your children, in the classroom, or with yourself!

To benefit most from these exchanges, consider these suggested guidelines for listening:

- *Listen quietly; do not interrupt.*
- *Listen with an open mind.*
- *After the storyteller has finished, tell them something you liked or appreciated about their story.*
- *Ask the storyteller a question about their story.*
- *Most importantly, have fun and enjoy the process!*



New Year's Day

By Irina Degtereva

Questions as you read:

1. What is your favorite holiday?
 - How did your family celebrate it?
 - What was the most important part of this holiday for you?
 - What are some the sights, tastes, and smells you remember of this holiday?
 - Was there one particular year that was extra-special for you? Why?
 - How do you feel when remembering this holiday?

New Year's Day

The New Year was a favorite holiday in my childhood. Every year our family (my father, my mother, two older sisters and I) looked forward to the wait and prepared for this holiday. But one year before 1953 New Year celebration, my father had to leave Moscow for a business trip to Leningrad. We had hoped that he would come back by December 31st.

I had poor health as a child and that year I got sick right before my father was due to come home. Father sent a telegram that he would not be able to get home by December 31st. We were very upset by this news, and in addition, it meant that we would not have a Christmas tree. My father was the one who always brought a fresh Christmas tree to our home from the railroad station where trees were delivered straight from the forest.

My mother and sisters tried to cheer me up. Mom brought spruce branches and placed them in a vase. My sisters decorated our flat for a holiday.

The apartment was filled with the smells of holiday food. The rooms smelled of fried duck and different cakes. But I missed most favorite smell, the fragrance of the Christmas tree.

I lay in my bed and read my favorite fairy tale of Hans Christian Anderson and suddenly I heard a noise and cheers in the next room. I jumped up and ran to the other room. There was my dad with a Christmas tree! My dad and the tree were covered with snow, and dad was like Santa Claus. All at once the whole apartment was filled with my favorite smell. Everyone began to bustle in the apartment. Our parents began to put up the Christmas tree and we didn't even have time to decorate it before the New Year.

But we have a wonderful holiday and this is one of the best memories of my childhood.

--Irina Degtereva © 2017



The Tiny Old Lady

By Nancy Lozada

Questions as you read:

1. What “words of wisdom” (sayings, expressions, or advice) has a parent, grandparent, or important adult told you when you were young?
 - Have you followed this advice as an adult? What did you do?
 - What was the result of following their advice?
 - Do you now share this advice with others people in your life, such as your children or grandchildren?
 - What do words of wisdom would you like to pass on to the younger generation?
2. Think about a time you helped someone. It can be a recent time or in the past. What did you do? What was the result?

The Tiny Old Lady

I remember when I was a little girl, I lived in Caracas, Venezuela with my mother and grandmother. We were very close, happy, and lived in harmony. I learned from them to help people with love, kindness, and compassion. As I grew up, my mother always told me, "When you help someone you have the greatest opportunity to feel satisfied with yourself because you are connecting with another human being."

When I was 20 years old, I was about to finish my dental school. On my way to class to learn about making crowns, I went into the clinic patients' waiting room. One woman grabbed my attention. She was a tiny old woman sitting in the corner. Her dress was black and looked very tidy. She had her face in her hand and was looked scared and sad. I went toward her and she told me, "I have a big toothache. I need two teeth pulled out."

I told her, "Please don't worry. Here there are many students that can help you." I left and went to my class. After 3 hours I returned to the oral

surgery department. I was looking for my friend in order to eat lunch together, but to my surprise, the old lady stayed there. She was crying and anxious. I held her hand and it was cold. She told me, "The only person who will pull out my teeth is you."

"Okay. Wait here for me." First I had to speak with the head dentist.

He told me, "Okay, you can do it."

I went into the room with her and I told her, "Please sit down in this dental chair and try to relax." I was washed my hands, put on my gloves, and my mask and began the procedure to pull out the teeth.

When I finished, the face of the old lady changed. "Thank you, thank you. I don't feel pain," she said. She took my hand and kissed it. "Thank you, thank you," She blessed my hand and my heart and gave me one strong hug and a kiss on my cheek.

I felt so satisfied. I never saw her again, but she is still in my heart.

--Nancy Lozada © 2017



My Cat Teasha

By Emilia Dedyukhina

Questions as you read:

1. Did you ever have a pet?
 - What kind of animal was your pet? (A cat? A dog? A fish? An insect?)
 - What was your pet's name?
 - How did your pet get its name?
 - What did your pet look like? How big was it? What colors?
 - What did you like about your pet?
 - Was your pet considered "a member of the family"? If so, how?
 - What was one special memory you have about this pet?
2. If you did not have a pet as a child, what kind of pet would you like to have? Why?
3. Describe your most memorable family vacation. Where did you go? Did something exciting or unusual happen?

My Cat Teasha

One summer many years ago I lost my cat while I was staying in our *dacha* in the forest. This story could have ended sadly for my family because it was our beloved cat, Teasha.

Sometimes we took our cat to the *dacha* (summer house). It wasn't easy to get to the summer house because my family didn't have a car. We traveled by public transportation to the forest and then walked 5 kilometers through the forest road. The cat sat in his small backpack. When we got off the bus we took Teasha out of the backpack and he ran behind us all the way to the *dacha*.

One September day when it already got cold and dark early, I decided to take Teasha with me to the *dacha*. When it was time to

return home, we left the *dacha* together. Suddenly we heard "vroom, vroom" a loud sound of a motorcycle on the road. Teasha got scared and he ran into the forest. I looked for him everywhere. He was silent.

I walked to the town and called my family. Then I went back to the dark forest to find my cat. I was scared to be alone and I began to cry. I was walking and shouting, "Teasha, Teasha..." Suddenly I heard, "Meow, meow.." and the sound was getting closer and closer to me. He came to my voice. In the dark, I couldn't see Teasha until he brushed my feet. I picked him up, hugged him tightly and kissed him. My heart started to beat so fast. I cried some more because Teasha is our family member.

--Emilia Dedyukhina © 2017



A Little Funny History About My Father

By Ekaterina Ioffe

Questions as you read:

1. What qualities do you admire in your parent(s)?
 - a. How did your parent(s) demonstrate these qualities in their life?
2. Did your parent(s) have any funny habits or qualities? If so, what was it?
3. Do you have any funny habits or qualities? If so, what is it?

A Little Funny History About My Father

My father was a wonderful man. I remember him as smart and intelligent on the one hand and as brave and athletic the other hand. He knew mathematics and physics very well, and he was an excellent teacher in a technical college. He painted wonderfully and made a lot of photos. However, his main hobbies were athletic challenges. He enjoyed swimming, bicycling, boating and skating alone, and with a team, friends, or our family. Later daddy led his students hiking and he took my brother and me. He was strong physically. But he could not stand being tickled.

When I was 5 years old, Dad asked me, "Do you want me to teach you not to be afraid of being tickled?"

"Yes, I do!"

My father advised, "If somebody tickles you, don't show your fear. You have to say, 'I'm not afraid.' "

As soon as my daddy said it, my fear disappeared and never returned again. But my father couldn't use his own advice. It helped me immediately, but not him. He stayed afraid of tickling his whole life.

--Ekaterina Ioffe © 2017



A Lesson Learned

By Nina Feinbarzsegyan

Questions as you read:

1. What was a favorite room or space in your childhood?
 - Where was it?
 - What did it look like?
 - What objects did it contain?
 - What did you like about this place?

2. Did you enjoy reading as a child? Why or why not?
 - Who were your favorite things to read?
 - What were your favorite books? What were they about?
 - When and how often did you read?
 - Did reading ever get you into trouble? If so, how?

A Lesson Learned

In the home where I was born was a big library. We had about 2,000 books. In this room there were shelves from floor to ceiling. A lot of books were old, some even early from 1900. They were covered with leather and the pictures inside were covered with parchment. There were history books, philosophy books, science books. There were many books for children. I like to read history and adventure books.

My friends and I often passed new books from one to another. One day a friend of mine loaned me novel, *Consuelo* by George Sand only for four days. This novel has two volumes. I finished the first volume in three days. I had only one day for the second volume.

I forgot about my violin practice.

My mom asked me, "Honey, don't you have practice?" I half-heartedly went into my room. I put the novel on the music stand and I continued to read. I played scales.

My mom heard my playing scales for a long time. She knew that was impossible. She tiptoed into my room. She hit me with the book I was reading and explained that I wasted my practice time by reading.

Through this experience, I learned first comes homework and duties; after that, I can do what I want. By the way, I got the book finished and returned to my friend in time.

-- Nina Feinbarzsegyan © 2017

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<http://mixedmediamemoirs.com/>

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