

Foreword

The stories in this book were written in the winter of 2020 by the students in the Level 2 class at the Belmont ESL School in Nashville, Tennessee. The students' teacher was Mary Jane Duke. The first drafts of many of these stories were written in the student's first language. A special thank you goes to Patsy Lanigan and Muye Yu for translating. Patsy volunteered in Level 2 and is fluent in Spanish. Muye used to live in Nashville and now works in Chicago. He is a friend of a friend of Mary Jane's. See the story **SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION** for how his translating of the stories came about.

A very special thank you goes to Peggy West for editing and typing all of these stories. Mary Jane types with two fingers so it would have taken her many, many hours to complete this task! Peggy has volunteered with Belmont ESL since 2006. She leads the Thursday Conversation class at noon. Before she retired she was a librarian and a professor at Fisk University. In 2018, she received the ESL Service Award for volunteering with Belmont ESL.

The 2019-2020 school year was cut short by two catastrophes, first the Nashville tornado and then the Covid-19 Pandemic. The last day of class was March 10, 2020. Many of the students are continuing to study English remotely by doing the lessons Mary Jane sends via email and audio file or with other online opportunities. As soon as it is safe for Belmont ESL to open again, Mary Jane will welcome all of her students back to study English.

MY DAUGHTER'S QUINCEANERA

by Patricia Gonzalez

I have two daughters, Karen and Anahi. Karen is 9 years old and Anahi is 15 years old. Anahi was 15 on July 16, 2019. She had a party on August 9.

In Mexico, my home country, there is a special celebration when a girl reaches 15 called La Quinceañera. It is to celebrate her becoming a woman. There is a special mass at the church with the big party later that day. The girl always has a special dress which is very fancy with a big skirt and lots of decoration. Many friends are invited.

For Anahi's, celebration, I made all the food for 300 people. I had many dishes. I made mixiotes, beef cooked with adobo, green salsa, avocado, pork, cabbage chipotle, shrimp, mixed fruit, mixed salad, tortillas and chips. There was a special cake with different flavors in each layer. The decoration of the cake matched the dress. The tables had flowers also matching the dress.

Anahi's dress was burgundy with gold decorations. Her godmother bought it for her. (Her sister had a matching dress.) Anahi had a special hairdo and make up. She looked very beautiful.

During the party, there was eating, special dances, and then everybody danced. A little girl danced and played with dolls to remind us of Anahi when she was little.

The party lasted until 2 a.m. It was a wonderful day for all of us.

Patricia Gonzalez is from Puebla, Mexico, and has lived in the United States since 1997. She has one son, one grandson and two daughters. Patricia works very hard to take care of her family. She is an excellent cook and made all the delicious traditional Mexican food for her daughter's La Quinceañera. Her teacher was privileged to attend. It was a lovely celebration with music and dancing held at Fantasy Hall last

August 2019. She studies English and says sometimes class is easy and sometimes it is hard.

CATS

by Younghwa Kim

There are few kinds of animals in my house, like a dog, a cat and rabbits

My dog always wants to go for a walk and give me directions with eyes and nose.

My cat has favorite order for people and acts charming. My rabbits don't even know their owner. They just eat and poop. Of all these animals, the cats make me laugh. I'm in love with cats.

Younghwa Kim is from South Korea and has been living in Tennessee for 13 years. She and her husband have been married 30 years and they have 2 sons, one dog and one cat. She enjoys traveling with her family and one day would like to go to Hawaii. Her favorite color is yellow and she wishes she could play the drums.

MY STORY

by Chanjun Li

When I was in the army, two people lived in a room. Liu and I had a room .The room often had mice because our house was very old. Liu often ate at night and didn't washed her face and brush her teeth.One day, I saw her mouth was injured.I asked her what had happened.She answered that it had been bitten .

Another story is from when I first got into the army. I was in the art corp. I played the Mezzo-soprano instrument. One day, I had an important performance but I forgot my Mezzo-soprano instrument's mouth piece. The show was about to begin and I had to go on stage with my instrument. I pretended to work hard and was very convincing because nobody found out

that I was faking. When the show was over, I put the Mezzo-soprano instrument in my case and closed the lid. I laughed!

Chanjun Li is from Shang Hai, China, and was an officer in the army in China for 20 years. She is married to Kejia Zhao and they have one son who is 3. She is an artist and calligrapher. She has created beautiful pieces of art for her teacher and classmates. She and her family will stay in Nashville 2 more years. She likes the beauty of Nashville and the friendly people. She started in Level 2 and is now in Level 3 at Belmont ESL.

THE RAT

by Christina Martinez

One day while Cristina was cleaning, she heard a noise. Later that day when her family came home, she told them about the noise and they started to look for the cause. They found out that the noise was two rats. They caught one rat but the other rat escaped.

Four days later, they put down some rat traps and put some cheese in them. They caught the other rat. They put the rat in a bag and threw the rat outside.

Cristina never heard another noise again.

Christina Martinez has lived in Tennessee for 20 years. She is from Mexico. She and her husband have been married for 14 years and have a 12 year old son. She likes cooking especially tamales and taking care of her home. She wishes she could visit Orlando, Florida, and see Mexico again. She enjoys taking walks and drinking coffee. Her favorite color is red.

WHO I AM

by Marilyn Martinez

My name is Marilyn Martinez, originally from Bolivar, Venezuela. I was born on June 6, 1986, with a twin brother. I grew up in a very hot city where summer is eternal. I studied in a Catholic school where they instilled in me values like my family instilled in me, great family values.

Then I studied in another city in Venezuela called Valencia. I lived there for 5 years during my university career. I studied physiotherapy. After graduating, I returned to my city where I worked with children with different disabilities. I was a part of a multidisciplinary team for 5 years. Then I became independent, working as a physiotherapist in intensive care and doing consultations in the physical and respiratory area. I like my profession and although in this country I have been able to help many people, I would like to practice my career again.

I like to travel and know different countries, but they taught me to love my country and in my country we have beaches, jungle, mountains, plains and desert. I hope to return to it one day and enjoy my country again.

Marilyn Martinez is from Venezuela and is a dedicated student at Belmont ESL. Marilyn has been in Nashville for a year and is currently working in a restaurant. In Venezuela she was a physical therapist.

NOSTALGIA

by Flory Mejia

It was a tough farewell to the people who brought us life, our parents. The moment we let them know we were going to the U.S., none of our

parents agreed with the idea of our family leaving the country. In my family, all my siblings and I, we all had lived in the same city. Even though my husband, children and I did not live in the same house, for my parents hearing the news about our journey caused them sadness.

The same thing happened with my mother-in-law when we gave her the news that we had to travel to the U.S.A. Tears sprouted from her eyes and we hugged tightly, showing a feeling of sadness because she had lived close to us for a long time.

The day we left Quetzaltenango, our parents went to the bus station to say goodbye. The bus would take us to the capital city of Guatemala. These were difficult moments shown by the tears of all of us present. With a strong hug we said goodbye. The next day we'd take the flight to Nashville, Tennessee. My children Alex, Alan and Saqbe, my husband Carlos and I started our journey with a new challenge and a hope for a better future of improvement for our family.

When we left Quetzaltenango, my mother-in-law stayed with one of her daughters, but after a while the daughter announced that she could no longer take care of her. At first none of her children in Guatemala could take care of her. She currently lives with one of her children.

Time has passed, my mother-in-law and my parents have suffered from very delicate diseases. My mother-in-law lost her sight almost completely. There have been times when my parents have said goodbye to us on some phone calls, but thank God, my parents have been slowly overcoming these diseases.

We fear we won't be able to visit them one day to give them a strong hug again and tell them how much we love them. We only ask God for infinite blessings for them and for the opportunity to see them again.

(Flory asked that this be added to her story.) Unfortunately a great sadness overwhelms us for on May 9 my mother-in-law, Granny Fasha, passed away and we will not see her again physically but we will carry her in our minds and hearts forever.

Flory Meija is from Guatemala and has been in Tennessee for two and a half years. She has been married to her husband, Carlos, for 22 years and they live with their two sons and daughter. In Guatemala she worked for 16 years in business accounting. In her free time she enjoys listening to marimba music and walking in the park with her family. Flory's work at Kroger is considered essential and she is among the brave people keeping food available for all Nashvillians.

ME AND MY TEENAGE STEP-DAUGHTER

by Tukta Miller

My name is Tukta. I am from Thailand, and I am 33 years old. I have lived in the U.S. close to 4 years and I have no kids. But I have one step-daughter. Her name is Ainsley. She is 13 years old, and she is in the 9th grade. She came to live with us 2 years ago.

I had no idea how to be a mom of an 11 year old, close to 12, at that time. I think this is going to be easy because she is not a little kid. But "Oh Nooo!" (Nothing bad!)

My style is I am not strict at all. I watch her a lot: what she is like, what she's interested in, what she says, how she talks, how she acts. I am patient with her and do not tell her to do this or do that. But if something she does I do not think is a good thing or is going to hurt her, I let her know or let her dad know. I never yell or scream at her because I am worried she is going to be mad at me and think I am a mean step-mother. So I am really careful what I say to her and what I do with her.

All my patience has worked because it has made her feel comfortable

with me. I have learned a lot from her. I better understand her: what she likes, what she wants and what she is interested in.

Normally kids take the school bus but I am her school bus on the way to school and on the way back. We listen to music. Ainsley loves all kind of music. She likes to introduce music to me. I know about music because of her. Normally I listen to Korean music mostly, but I know some popular music now.

I like to spoil her with Starbucks breakfast and milk shakes every week on different days. I do this because I want her to be excited about what day she will get her treat, and sometimes she tells me when she really wants it.

I cook food for her. She loves my Thai food, especially fried pork and sticky rice. She has grown to love many Thai dishes, but not spicy ones.

She loves to read and she reads a lot. She is a very smart kid.

In the last two years, we have both learned a lot. I have learned to like new music. She has learned to like more Thai food. She had taught me how to be a good mom. She learned that I love to spoil her. I have learned that soap operas on TV are not correct; I have a step-daughter that is also my sister. We get along and we love each other.

I know we will continue to learn from and teach each other for a long time. I am excited to continue to watch her grow up and hope she continues to learn every day that I will keep supporting her every day in everything.

Tukta Miller from Thailand has lived in Nashville for almost 4 years. She is married to Erick Miller and is the step mother to his teen age daughter. Before coming to the US she worked for American Express. She has a 140 pound Newfoundland dog that weighs more that she does! She enjoys shopping, cooking Thai food, listening to Korean music, watching YouTube videos and gardening. She likes that the traffic in Nashville is not as bad as the traffic in Bangkok.

OUR NEW FAMILY MEMBER

by Antonio Paredes

There are 7 members in my family but my wife wanted to add one more member, so we decided to add one more. This member we added is our macaw whose name is Palo.

He was very friendly the first few days we got him. But now these days he isn't as friendly as before. We believe that he isn't as friendly because our children are very playful around him and that stresses him out.

We are trying everything we can to make him more friendly and happy again.

Antonia Paredes is from Mexico and lives in Nashville with his wife, five children and one macaw.

COMMUNICATION

by Nilvani Perpetua da Silva

My name is Nilvani. I work as a storyteller, and in the year 2016, my husband and I went to Japan. We lived there for four months and did a beautiful literary work with Brazilian communities in some regions of that country.

I didn't speak Japanese and hardly any English, so I didn't used to leave home alone. My mobility was very limited, only going out with my husband. We lived in Yokohama, a beautiful city in Japan. But I found all the houses very similar to each other. The streets were organized and clean, and they looked identical to each other. People also looked alike to me. So I was afraid to go out alone and get lost in the city.

I thought “If I get lost, how am I going to communicate with people?” Besides, I didn't have a cell phone to use on the street. If I lost myself, I would be in a delicate situation. My husband used to tell me again and again that I needed to leave the house, go for a walk and meet people. He used to say that I had to be brave. I also wanted to go out and walk the streets of the city. However my fear prevented me from doing this.

One day, I woke up and saw the city through the window. It was so beautiful. The sun was hot and there were so many beautiful things outside. I no longer wanted to be trapped like a bird in a cage. So I had the courage, got ready and left.

It was the first day that I left the house alone. I was very happy. I walked the streets. I saw children playing with their mothers in the playground. I could see lovely houses, gorgeous gardens, people, trees, birds, cars and other things. I went up hills. I went down hills. Then I thought, "What a beautiful city!" I walked and walked, and then I realized that I couldn't find my home.

I went around and around and seemed to stay in place. I was already worried. I saw a lady cleaning the front of her house, so I went to her and asked for help. We had a very complicated dialogue. She didn't understand me because I didn't speak her language.

I was desperate. I cried because I felt very embarrassed by the whole situation. We talked through mime and very basic English. We managed to get enough communication for her to take me to the place where my husband worked at Yokohama National University. At the University, we met a boy who worked at the local library. He told us he would help. I thanked that lady very much. She was very nice and kind in helping me through that difficult time.

The kind boy welcomed me and placed me seated in a library chair. I couldn't get up until my husband came to pick me up. He called my husband, explained the whole situation and said that I was safe. A few minutes later my husband arrived. We thanked the boy and returned home. I had some lessons from that experience.

That day I understood how important it is for us to get organized before leaving home. It is also important to have access to a language translator application in case of need. But the ideal is to learn to speak English as it is a universal language.

Here in Nashville it's another reality because I have a cell phone and

my mobility is more relaxed. I am learning to speak English, and I am very grateful to ESL for the opportunity to learn.

Nilvani is from Brazil and has been in Nashville for 8 months. She is a writer and storyteller for children and sometimes teaches children, also. She lives with her husband who is doing a post doc at Vanderbilt. She has written a story about the Covid 19 virus and is translating it into English. It helps children understand, cope, and stay safe. She likes everything about Nashville. She says, "The best part is people really are very supportive."

KOKITA'S SISTER

by Alejandra Rios

Three years ago my daughter wanted a pet. She always liked the pet. I go to look to give for her birthday of six years. I found a female dog. It is white and cute. It is a breed called Chihuahua. She named the dog Kokita.

It was three days that the dog was sick. We went to the veterinarian. The dog was really a baby and the dog died. We invented a story so my daughter not feel sad. The dog was a baby and returned to its mother.

The next day we went to buy the new Kokita. I told my daughter that the new Kokita is the sister of the other Kokita. My daughter was very happy. For three years that Kokita's sister is with us, our family loves Kokita. She's beautiful, loving, and friendly. All the family is happy.

Alejandro Rios is from Monterey, Mexico, and has lived in Nashville for 7 years. She and her husband, Roberto, have been married for 15 years and have a daughter and a son. She majored in sports nutrition in college. She is an esthetician and cosmologist masseuse. She likes to listen to music and dancing and would like to parachute one day!

MY DREAMS OF LOVE

by Ariana Rosiles

When I was four years old, my parents left me with my grandparents to go work in another city away from the town where we were living. Being four, I missed my mom so much that I dreamed of her every night. The dreams were so real that I didn't want to wake up. When I did wake up, I cried and cried and cried because they were only more dreams.

One night I was dreaming, and I got up walking in my sleep. I walked and walked until I arrived at a sand dune. Then my grandparents realized that I was not sleeping in my bed. They looked for me all night. In the morning, they found me sleeping with my eyes swollen from crying, cold because of the cold air.

When I woke up, my mom was in front of me. This was a more beautiful way to wake up. My mom had returned because she was dreaming too. My mom came back for me and my brothers and sisters. There wasn't a single day we didn't dream of each other for all of one year that she was working far away. Since then, she never left us again.

And that is my story.

Ariana Rosiles, from Mexico, has lived in Nashville for 15 years. Her husband Miguel and she have 2 sons and 2 daughters. Her youngest 2 children are twins. Her oldest son was supposed to go to Spain in June 2020 to play soccer. She takes care of her home and her family and enjoys walking in the park, listening to music and shopping. She would like to travel to New York and her favorite holiday is Christmas.

WHERE LOVE TAKES US

by Angela Maria Santo Domingo

It all started where the best things begin, with God! God's time is

perfect and his gifts too. I bear in mind that the most important thing will always be to live a healthy life giving myself to God, but never ceasing to be a self, having control of my life and allowing myself to live and enjoy what God gives me. When God gives you something, do not think about taking advantage of it. Rather, enjoy it and always be grateful.

Two years ago I was in Nashville and coming to my English class looking for a way to go in life, giving myself time to think and reflect. The class not only captivated me by the teacher's great methodology but also by the ways the community lovingly served a purpose. God began to speak to me. As I saw my mother do always in life, because she was a great example, every day I went to my church. Suddenly, as always, God had all the answers for me.

On a wonderful Sunday, I was preparing to listen to my Sunday Mass by serving coffee to the community. A great human being approached me, putting himself at my disposal to give me his inner beauty, his human qualities of love and service. He was unconditionally accepting and persisted in seeing good things for the future. I allowed myself to know this person thoroughly.

To my amazement, I discovered an affinity in our hearts. This is most important. With the heart one feels, with the heart one thinks, with the heart the great decisions are made, with the heart one loves. This is enough reason to take care of it, keep it clean. The heart is the inside of a human being. Though definitely for love, actions must have more value than words.

After this exhortation to love, my story continued: Even not aware of the great gift that God showed me when I was in the right moment, time and place to meet that good human being, I returned to my country for two years thinking that everything is a coincidence. However, to my astonishment, God had let the great human I met know a message that he transmitted to me. He said, "Now is the time. Please come back. I wait for you."

So after two years, here I am back three weeks and five days in this beautiful, thriving city in love and full of joy, as the city is full of art and

music. And of course I in my English class again. I am aware that it is not a vacation, that it is not a short trip, but a life opportunity for both of us.

You have to believe in miracles. I applied a saying that I always say, "When life presents a bridge, cross it" and I did that. We are not afraid. We are enjoying this beautiful dream. We live day by day, step by step, learning from both cultures, foods, languages. We are a team, and we work together for everything. We saw the opportunity that God presented to us to touch the sky and seek happiness.

Preparing for our wedding, I have to decide what to do with a third citizenship because my country only allows two and I already have them, Italian and Colombian. So I will have to give up one of them; but that will be another story that I will tell you later.

Long live love! Long live Nashville, my new home. When I got onto that plane back to this country I knew that I had made the right decision to accept that offer God gave us to be happy and in the best way always taken from his hand. God and us: "The rope of three is a knot that will never break."

Angela Maria Santo Domingo is from Columbia. Her heritage is Italian and Columbian. This helps to explain her exuberance for life! Angela has a grown daughter and son, and has been volunteering at the Red Cross during the pandemic. She has been back in the US for almost 4 months and got married on May 15th!

FOR THE LOVE OF MY PARENTS

by Lisbeth Solano

From a very young age I always wanted to be a dentist. I played with my sisters and my mother that I was my mother's dentist; it was very funny. I always kept that idea in mind. I talked to my mother about it and I remember telling her that my post grade would be in Mexico. (I don't know why I came

up with Mexico); the things and dreams of a little girl.

When I was 15 my older sister married her boyfriend who was a my dentist. It was the best sign God was sending me about the path I should take in my career. It was about the year when I had to make the selection of my career and I was still firm on the idea of being a dentist.

I was selected for Bioanalysis and dentistry medicine. That was the happiest day of my life to that point. The university where I was selected to study dentistry was 24 hours from my hometown. It was a great distance.

My parents installed me in a small and comfortable apartment very close to the university, which I shared with 2 more girls. My parents were with me the first week of school and then they had to go home. The farewell was painful. I was only 16 years old. The reality was different. Not everything was so beautiful as I dreamed. The days were long and the nights were short. The absence of my parents for me was very painful.

The money they sent me for my expenses and food I spent it completely on phone calls to talk to my parents and siblings. Although I kept myself busy from early morning to 3 in the afternoon, after that time I returned to my sadness of not having my parents with me. At 3 months I removed my papers from the university and I went home.

Of course I still had the possibility of entering the other university that was near my city to study the career of Medical Technologist. I did all the paperwork and in very little time I was already studying another career. It was not what I had dreamed but it was in the health area and, especially, I had my parents close and I could visit them every weekend.

So it was for 5 years that I did not miss a weekend in returning to my house of my parents. They always supported me in my decisions. I got my degree in Bioanalysis and my parents were very proud of me. I put aside a dream that I had since I was little in order to spend more time with my parents and it was very worthwhile. I do not regret it at any time of my life. I love my parents above allthings.

Lisbeth Solano is from Upata, Venezuela, and has lived for 2 and a half years in Tennessee. She and her husband, Jesus Salom, have twins, a boy and a girl who are 7. In her home country she was a Medical Technologist for 16 years. Now she takes care of her family, studies English and designs beautiful handmade jewelry. She wishes she could travel to her country every week to visit her parents.

MY PET

by Ellaine Wen

On March 30th, 2019, my family and I adopted our first dog in Nashville from the local adoption center. The first time I saw him I was attracted to him. He is a Chihuahua. He has a tiny body, yellow fur, black eyes filled with curiosity, and a black nose like a small mountain. Whenever someone hugs him, he will willingly lean his head on their shoulder.

We gave him a handsome name, Max. Max loves to eat, and even though he is small, his appetite is surprisingly large. He is interested in anything food. Whenever we eat, he will always sit quietly, starring at us. Sometimes I'm tempted to feed him a tiny amount of our meat. Every time I go grocery shopping, I would always visit the pet food area to get his favorite snacks.

I love him a lot. When I lay on the couch watching TV, he will lay next to me and lean his body on me. At home, he likes me the most and follows me everywhere. It always makes me very happy to see Max and our two cats get along and play. They are very adorable together.

Ellaine Wen from China has been in the United States for 3 years. She has been married for 18 years and has one daughter who is in high school. She also has two cats, Mickey and Mirio, and a dog named Max.

She likes to read, travel and watch TV. Ellaine likes to sing but she says she does not sing English songs very well. She would like to visit New York one day.

MY LIFE

by Yong Ling Zhai

I was five months pregnant. The Shanxi Provincial government had revised its planned-parenthood policy shortly before the Chinese Central government. Giving birth to a third child would result in a 14-year penalty, during which there would be no salary raises, no merit bonus, no medical compensation, and no maternity leave. My husband and I would see our salaries halved. We were caught in a dilemma, and this was our most difficult times.

We were very frugal and modest with our spending before that. Most of our income were sent to my parents to help ease their burden, as I have two younger brothers and five younger sisters.

We lived a very tough life. I hoped that my children wouldn't die from starvation, and that they would have a good future. So, I always had to meticulously plan out everything and search for better opportunities. I believed that education was the only way to change our fate. Hence while we were struggling with everyday expenses, we also had to squeeze money out to prepare for our children's education.

As a result of our persistent struggles, all three of our kids went to college. After their graduations, my two daughters were assigned by the government to work in Beijing. My son, at eighteen years old, received full scholarship to attend Vanderbilt University. Besides the full scholarship, he also received \$5000 every year in stipend. After a year, he had saved up \$3000. He took me to the doctors and bought us a microwave, which at the time very few people had. We also went to Beijing on a month-long vacation,

then the beach. He bought new clothes for me, along with lots of everyday supplies. My husband and I were filled with happiness.

After that he took us to 14 different countries. Once he bought us first class tickets to go to Indonesia. When we were getting our Canadian visa, I lost my passport. He took us to the Chinese Consulate in DC. Usually the Chinese Consulate only handles authorizing visas for Americans going to China, and not issuing Chinese passports. My son wrote a letter to the Consulate explaining the situation, and eventually we were able to get new passports.

After my husband passed away suddenly, my son's first words to his father was: "Dad, I love my mom". For a while after that I was afraid of sleeping alone, so my son would sleep beside me. He took me to the doctors and to receive psychological therapy. He took me on more trips, though I didn't like the shopping part. He taught me to drive and brought me to yard sales. He always accompanied me to buy flowers, and sometimes I wouldn't even have money with me. Our house was always full of fruits, vegetables, and snacks. We truly lived a comfortable life then. I am very proud and happy, thanks to my son!

A Few More Stories About My Son:

This was perhaps my fondest memory of my son, filled with joy. When he was little, my son never lived a lavish life: he didn't eat well and didn't have fancy cloths. Once, his classmate's father had returned from a trip to Japan and brought back some candies. They were quite colorful and seemingly tasteful. My son took some back, but he didn't want to eat by himself. So, he made sure every member of our family got some.

When our second daughter was awaiting her work assignment, I gifted away every valuable item from our house to help her land a decent job. My son was in college then. He called to ease my anxiety: "Mom, don't stress

about it. Whether or not this works out, after I graduate, I'll make thousands each month." My heart was very warm.

The last time my son returned to China before his father passed, he accompanied us to hike in Qing Cheng Mountain, in Sichuan Province. On our way down, he had put all our bags on his shoulders and his arm. His other arm held on to his father's frail body, as they slowly made their way down. I used my camera to record this final moment. After my husband had passed, my son was devastated. But as my brother always said: "Everyone will die someday, at least you don't have any regrets."

Yong Ling Zhai is from China and has been studying English for two years. She has lived in Nashville for two years with her son. She also has two daughters and three grandchildren in China. She was married for 48 years to her husband, Ru Xin Wang. Her favorite color is green which is appropriate because she has a green thumb! That means she is very good at gardening. She grows vegetables and flowers and shares seedlings with her classmates. She also enjoys going to yard sales and is good at finding good bargains like a folding pair of reading glasses for just a few dollars. She likes studying English.

SIX DEGREES OF SEPARATION

by Mary Jane Duke

Six degrees of separation is the theory that any person on the planet can be connected to any other person on the planet through a chain of acquaintances that has no more than five people between the first person and the last person. Here is how Muye Yu became the translator of some of the stories.

Mary Jane always gives her students the opportunity to write the first draft in the student's first language. Many of the students do this

and then Mary Jane finds people to help translate. She thought she had it all worked out but the abrupt end of school altered her plans.

One day she was delivering some milk to her long time friend Carol who had lost her electrify during one of the spring storms. That same morning she had delivered the stories to Peggy to start editing and typing for this book. Carol asked Mary Jane what she had been doing that day and she mentioned Peggy. Carol knows Peggy through her friend Karen. Mary Jane mentioned that she was having difficulty finding someone who could translate the stories that had been written in Chinese. Carol said she knew someone.

Several years ago a widowed Chinese man and his young son lived in Nashville. Karen helped the man and his son with tutoring and parent teacher conferences. Karen has stayed friends with both of them. The young boy, Muye, grew up and moved to work in Chicago. Carol said she would ask Karen to find out if Muye would help. He said yes! Muye translated 3 of the stories including the one by Yong Ling. When Mary Jane told Muye some more of Yong Ling's history in Nashville, he said he knew about her.

So Mary Jane knew Carol who knew Peggy who knew Karen who knew Muye who knew about Yong Ling's family. Count the connections. There are 6. Muye was honored to be able to translate the stories and enjoyed it. He is thinking about helping people learn English. He would be good at this.

