



# TALES OF OUR HOMETOWNS

Level 5 Class,  
Belmont UMC ESL

There are so many ways students in each ESL class are different from one another. Their ages. Their families. Their life experiences. Their languages, of course.

But as the weeks roll by in each semester, everyone finds more ways in which they are alike. American foods. TV shows. Music and clothing.

The fall 2021 Level 5 class found a new common bond—the love of our hometowns. As each student and teacher shared their hometown story, it



became apparent that everyone shared a similar hometown story, no matter the country or decade.

We remembered beautiful mountains, flower gardens and deep family ties. We wrote about hometowns with dazzling fireworks on

summer nights. Others recalled neighborhoods so safe that they could play outside all day, right up to the lovely sound of dinner being announced.

Of the 15 stories you'll find in this booklet, none is about Nashville, now our common home. However, one day, a future ESL class might find a story about Nashville, written by Nao Nash Matsuoka. You'll find a story by his mom, Saki, among the stories here.

In December, several class members gathered to celebrate holidays and the upcoming birth of Nao Nash. In January, he arrived at Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

We can only hope his memories of his hometown are just as sweet as these.



## Renata Achar

### *São Paulo, Brazil*

I'm originally from São Paulo city, capital of São Paulo in the state of Brazil.

The city of São Paulo, called "Sampa" for the locals, is ranked as the world's 4th largest city with around 22 million inhabitants.



São Paulo is notable as a cosmopolitan business center with a multi-entertainment vibe like that of New York City, which combines the best and the worst of a modern-oversized-urban-city.

One thing that I most like in my hometown is that you can find everything anytime. This metropole

doesn't sleep! There are many things to do and visit in this multi-cultural city, like museums, architecture, parks, fashion, and for sure, gastronomy from all the world.

I love my hometown because my parents, relatives and friends are there. I am looking forward to returning there to visit them and, of course, make up for lost time in my rushed and noisy "Sampa."



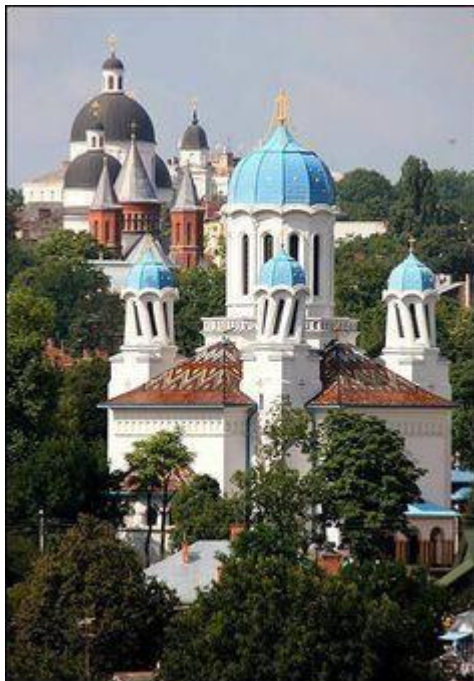


**Sasha Gorkovenko**

***Chernivtsi, Ukraine***

***Pearl of Bukovyna, or Little Paris***

Bukovyna is a historical region located on the Ukrainian-Romanian ethnographic border. Currently, this territory is part of Ukraine (Northern Bukovina) and Romania (Southern Bukovina).



My picturesque little town, Chernivtsi, is in the southwest of Ukraine and shares a border with Moldova and Romania. Historians believe that our city is 613 years old, because the first written mention of Chernivtsi was in 1408.

The population of the city is 266,500 for 2019.

The streets of my city repeat the architecture of Prague and Paris, because over the centuries Chernivtsi has been ruled by many countries, cultures, and religions. That is why my city has so many different churches, temples and synagogues, multilingual schools, and cultural communities.

The most famous building in Chernivtsi is the Yuriy Fedkovych Chernivtsi National University. The university was founded on October 4, 1875, by a decree of Emperor Franz Joseph I as a theological institute that had existed since 1827 with German as the language of education and with separate departments of Ukrainian and Romanian languages and literatures. But now the university has 17 faculties and more than 80 departments.

In 2011, the World Heritage Committee decided to include in the World Cultural Heritage List the central building of the university - the former residence of the Metropolitans of Bukovina. I studied



there at the Faculty of Philology, Department of Foreign Literature and Theory of Literature. It was amazing to walk around this incredible building every day. We call it the Ukrainian Hogwarts (thanks to Harry Potter).

One of the city's main streets is pedestrianized and has the best cafes and restaurants. Thanks to the European influence in the past, Chernivtsi residents try to conform to the culture of Prague, Vienna, and Paris, reproducing this not only in architecture, but also in the design of institutions and organizations of cultural events.



But despite this, we do not forget our Ukrainian origin. For example, we have the largest celebration of Malanka in Ukraine. Malanka is a Ukrainian folk holiday, the evening before the "old" New Year on January 14. It is a New Year's rite with the traditional disguise of animals and folk characters. It's like Halloween but in January.

I grew up there, went to schools and theater there, listened to music and visited art schools, so this city was ordinary. But when I wrote this text, I realized how much I miss my "ordinary" city and that I can talk for hours about Chernivtsi and its small streets, parks, and squares. So, if you ever get to Ukraine, please come to my little Paris in Bukovina.

**Tomo Hirose**

***Kashiwa, Japan***

In my early childhood, I moved several times because of my father's work. When I was in third grade, my family moved to Kashiwa-City, Chiba-Prefecture, and I lived there until I got married, so I think that is my hometown.



Kashiwa-City is a suburb of Tokyo, which is a half hour away by train. Many of the citizens work there as my father and I used to do. The population is 400,000. There is not an especially famous or characteristic thing, but I think it's a convenient and comfortable town because it has both city features and countryside.

On the one hand, young people have fun shopping and drinking in downtown, but on the other hand, families commune with nature in the parks and some people make their living in agriculture and farming.



The picture is of one of my favorite parks, where I sometimes went on a picnic with my family, and we spent all day outside. We enjoyed many kinds of flowers every season, such as cherry blossoms and tulips in spring, lotus and sunflowers in summer, cosmoses in autumn, and violets and plums in winter. I also experienced seasonal fruit picking and harvesting vegetables there. In my country, people value the four seasons, and I learned to also do so through these experiences. Now, I really, really miss my hometown. It's the best place for potato digging!



## Kanako Ihomori

### *Tokyo, Japan*

I was born and raised in Tokyo. Tokyo is the capital city of Japan. There are 14 million people living in Tokyo, more than in New York City. You may have an image of Tokyo as a modern city with lots of buildings. But I would like to introduce the traditional identity of Japanese people through the traditional events in Tokyo.



In Japan, there is an event to see cherry blossoms in spring. This is called hanami in Japanese. In Tokyo, there are many famous cherry blossom viewing spots, such as parks, along rivers and roads, and they are very beautiful. There are also many food tracks and people go to have a picnic there.



In Japan, spring occurs at beginning of the year at school and work. Therefore, in spring we Japanese people experience coming and going. This means that spring is a time of many partings and encounters, and people become a bit sentimental and emotional. Cherry blossoms, especially in Tokyo, always bloom during this season of comings and

goings. For many Japanese people in Tokyo, the cherry blossoms bring back old memories and cheer us up for the next steps.

Next, I would like to introduce a summer event. In the downtown area of Tokyo, a very beautiful fireworks display is held at the end of July. This is the oldest fireworks display in Japan, and about one million people go to see it. Fireworks are not only beautiful, but they also have a special meaning.

The purpose of fireworks is to calm the souls of the dead so that their spirits can go to heaven without getting lost. This fireworks festival in Tokyo started about

300 years ago to appease the souls of those who died of cholera and famine. I'm so sorry that the fireworks display has been cancelled for the past two years due to COVID-19, but I really hope that it will be held in 2022. I think it's a right time to hold this event because of the original meaning of the event.



These events occur not only in Tokyo, but all over Japan. If you come to Japan and see cherry blossoms or fireworks, I hope you will remember that this is what Japanese people think when they see them. Of course, they are very beautiful, so please take pictures and post them on Instagram!



**Reiko Ishida**

***Saitama, Japan***

The name of my hometown is Saitama. It's very convenient because it's located next to Tokyo. This place is both urban and rural. On the one hand, public transportation is well developed, and we can go anywhere without a car. But, on the other hand, it's rich in nature. Japan is an island country, but my hometown doesn't face the sea, so it's like Tennessee. Here are two famous places.



The first one is an area of cherry blossoms and canola flowers in full bloom. The contrast between the pink and yellow colors warms our hearts. In spring, it's especially crowded with tourists.

In fact, there is another reason why it's so crowded—many people want to spread a rug under a tree and enjoy an outside party with alcohol. It's our custom. We have a great time with friends and family not only looking at the beautiful flowers, but also drinking in nature.



The second photo shows another kind of popular flower, the moss phlox. It blooms all over the ground like grass or snow.

You can walk in the garden and feel like you are in a painting.

This pretty flower is native to North America. I like my hometown. I hope you get to see this scenery with your own eyes, not just with photos. You won't find any words other than beautiful. If you come to Japan, please visit my hometown in the spring.

**Hyewon Kim**  
***Suwon, South Korea***

My hometown is Suwon, south of Seoul in South Korea. It was a small town.

There were some houses facing each other along the roads. At that time, there were many children my age in the town.



We played all day long. We used to play “house,” rubber band play, Squid Game, Ddakji-chigi (Ddakji is a folded piece of paper) and Mugunghwa Has Bloomed. (Mugunghwa Has Bloomed is Green Light, Red Light in America.)

Yes, one of the games was *the* Squid Game, like on Netflix. It is not a violent game. The squid games in the movie were inspired by the original game.



By the way, we played all day until we heard sounds here and there. “Hyewon, it’s time for dinner! Sunhee, come here, let’s eat! Jaeho, let’s have dinner.” Those sounds were the warmest sounds in the world. We parted with the promise of playing tomorrow. At that time, we had no worry or concerns.

Sometimes I feel nostalgic for the place where I grew up. It is like nowhere else.



**Kárita Lidani**

***Belém, Para state, Brazil***

I was born in Belém, the capital of Para state in northern Brazil and part of oriental Amazon. Its climate is equatorial, with an average annual temperature of 80 °F, with a peculiar characteristic: it rains almost every day around 2-3 p.m. So, it is very common for people to schedule to meet, saying, “OK, before or after rain?”



Belém's architecture reflects its colonization by Portugal and France in public gardens and theaters. Belém is the host of the annual Círio de Nazaré, one of the world's largest celebrations honoring the Virgin Mary. This festival occurs on the second Sunday of October, when the city welcomes more than one million pilgrims at the main church, the Basílica de Nazaré.

Belém also has a great indigenous influence, especially in food preparation. It is a very especial city to me!



*Basilica de Nazaré*

I lived there for 20 years. After my graduation from college, I got married in this church, and moved to Southern Brazil, to Curitiba city.

**Saki Matsuoka**  
***Osaka, Japan***

My hometown, Osaka City, has about 2.75 million residents. My hometown is in an urban area, so it is very crowded. The area was so safe when I was growing up that I could hang out with my friends not accompanied by our parents.



I lived in Osaka City until the age of 23. When I was 10, my maternal grandfather passed away. So, my family decided to live with my maternal grandmother. She already had a house, so we moved there. It was close to my elementary school.

Osaka City is one of the leading sightseeing spots in Japan. It is well known that the local food is cheap and comes in large portions, so people can be stuffed easily. It is especially well known for food made from flour. Of course, sushi is popular, too.



Osaka city was developed as a castle town by Hideyoshi Toyotomi and The Edo Bakuhu (Japanese federal government headed by a shogun) around 1700. It was called "Tenka no daidokoro" (the kitchen of the world) and was crowded as a big commercial city and a town of merchants.



Even now, as many as 1 million visitors visit and pray for business success every year.

Now I live in Nashville. I want to see all my family and childhood

friends once I go back to my hometown. Osaka City will hold the 2025 World Expo. Please come and experience Japan. I am looking forward to seeing you in Osaka!



**Shoko Nagareda**

***Warabi, Japan***

My hometown is Warabi in the Saitama Prefecture in Japan. Saitama Prefecture is next to Tokyo. I was born and raised there.

Warabi is a very small city. The total area of the city is 5.11 square kilometers. But there are so many people living there. As of October 2021, the city had an estimated population of 75,603 in 40,253 households.



Warabi has seven public elementary schools, three public middle schools, one public high school, and one combined private middle/high school.

There is a machine festival in the summer once a year. This festival started in 1951. At the festival, I bought my favorite food from a food stall, then enjoyed it while

walking around with my friends.

The most famous part of Warabi is the Warabi shrine. When I was a child, I visited here at the end of the year and at the beginning of the year.

Before I got married, I lived there with my parents and brother. My parents and brother's family are still in Warabi. I want to go there next summer.



**Flavia Ribeiro**

***Ourém, Pará, Brazil***

I spent the first 14 years of my life living in two places, on my parent's farm and in the home of my grandmother in a very small town called Ourém three hours from the capital of the state, Belém. My hometown, Ourém, has about 18,000 residents. Everybody knows everybody and people are friendly. It does not have many opportunities such as good jobs or schools. Most people make their living as family farmers and small business owners.



Parents usually prepare their children to live in bigger cities to have a better education. My grandfather gave a farm to my father, and he has been working there for almost 40 years. I grew up in a place with many animals such as cows, pigs, chickens, birds, etc. I love being near to nature; it is so peaceful.

I remember when we went every Sunday to spend the day with my family and friends in our stream. We used to have a big lunch and barbecue. It was so good, and my cousins and I played all kinds of games. I had an amazing childhood.

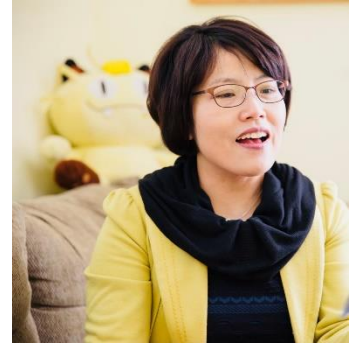


## Miyoung Shin

### *Sunchang, South Korea*

I grew up 18 years in my hometown. Sunchang is my hometown, which is in the south of South Korea. A big river passes through my hometown. The name of the river is Seomjin River. It is one of five rivers in Korea.

The river was my playground. It was a very memorable



place to swim in the summer and skate in the winter.

There is a canoe center, but it is now closed because of COVID-19.

There are many large and small mountains around it. There is one famous

mountain among them. It is called “Gang-chun” mountain. It has fascinating streams with beautiful trees and flowers on its sides. There were the changes of the four seasons. When I was a teenager, I used to go there with my friends.





Also, Sunchang has a very famous food seasoning. The name is Gochujang (red pepper paste). If you go to any Korean market, you can find it, even in America.

My mom made it every year to sell and to give away. But I can't make it. I love and miss my hometown.



**Josiana Sibioni**

***São Carlos, São Paulo state, Brazil***

My hometown is São Carlos, which is in the countryside of the state of São Paulo, Brazil.

Although it is not a big city that has a lot of entertainment, I love it there because most of my family and friends live there. Also, it is the city where I was born and grew up, so my childhood memories belong to that place.



People are simple and nice... We have a “hick” accent, especially talking about words with the letter “r.” That characteristic is easily recognized by other Brazilians.



São Carlos is considered the capital of technology since we have two big universities developing research in technology. Also, because of this, we receive many students during the school year, but on their vacations, we are known as a Ghost City.

In fact, it is also known as Smile City and Climate City, and until I wrote this text, I did not know the reason for those titles. I found that since the beginning, its people were kind and accustomed to smiling at visitors. In addition, its climate was very enjoyable, warm, but not too much, and I must agree with that.



Now, the food is one thing that I really like and miss very much. We have so many



local restaurants that make “homemade food” and a famous sandwich. I am sorry Americans, but we have the best hamburger... My favorite, at least. I am dreaming I can taste it again with my next vacations in Brazil ...

P.S: I had to write an addition because this text is about our hometowns, and I visited my hometown in December 2021. It was so nice to be home again. I saw my family, friends, ex-coworkers

It was even more special because my brother got married. And guess what? Of course, on my first evening there, I went out with my family, and I got my favorite hamburger ... I am already dreaming about it again...





**Juhee Yang**

***Seoul, South Korea***

I grew up in a village near Seoul, South Korea. Seoul was a rapidly developing city at the time, and it was full of people from all over the country.



My parents came to work in Seoul from the central part of South Korea. For half of my childhood, my parents both worked.



I liked reading books with my younger brother at home rather than hanging out outside. When I think back on my childhood, I remember going to the bookstore with my father and brother every weekend morning, as a good memory rather than anything grandiose.

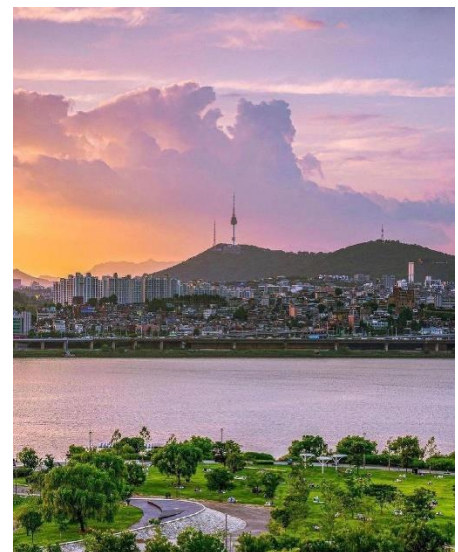
We took a subway to the bookstore nearby, chose a book, and quickly returned home with excitement and read the book to the end at once.

After getting older, I started to enjoy Seoul in different ways. Seoul has been the capital of Korea for more than 600 years and is still an economic and cultural center. Old palaces, the most advanced malls, mountains, and rivers are easily accessible by public transportation.

Thousands of people who have different backgrounds compete every moment, offering better products and services such as tasty food (which is important to me).

That is why many people, including me, love Seoul.

Now that I am a mother, if I go back to Seoul, I want to visit places in Seoul that I fell in love with



while growing up. Those include the mall for shopping, the palace where I took photos, and the Han River where we sat on the lawn and ordered food.

I hope that some of these memories will be happily remembered in the future by children.

## Teachers

### **Dick Bowers**

#### ***San Lorenzo Village, California, USA***

I was born in Missouri before the United States entered the Second World War. A long time ago. Shortly before my second birthday, we moved to the San Francisco Bay area and rented a very nice home in Oakland, California. In the summer of 1945, just before the War in the Pacific ended, my parents bought a brand-new home in a brand-new subdivision in a brand-new town called San Lorenzo Village, which was about 15 miles south of Oakland on the west side of the Bay. It was what we now call a “bedroom community.” I lived there until I was 18 and left for college.

Growing up in San Lorenzo was idyllic. The weather was wonderful. Not too hot and not too cold. We did not have nor need air-conditioning. There were 3 different models of single-family homes to choose from. Everybody was so glad the war was over, and things could go back to normal. In keeping with the



Mexican heritage of California, all the streets had Spanish names – Paseo Grande, Via Media, Via Del Sol, etc. We lived on Via Paro. The streets were laid out in a “U” shape off a central cross street. You would enter Via Paro from Paseo Grande and if you did not stop you would drive around the “U” and end up

back on Paseo Grande. What this meant for me was that there was very little traffic, and the street was available for us kids to play. And play we did.



Our house was at the end of the “U” which meant that we had the same sized front yard as everybody else, but a much, much larger back yard. My dad had a good-sized garden in our backyard full of vegetables and he planted fruit trees --- apple, apricot, peach, pear, and walnut. I loved the fruit we grew. In the front and back yard were nice shade trees and a lot of grass – one of my jobs was to cut it. Inside the house there were three bedrooms and one bath, a small but functional kitchen and a living/dining room. By today’s standards it was small, but for us it was perfect. My parents paid about \$10,000 for our home in 1945. Zillow now lists it for \$900,000. Why did we ever sell?



Everything in San Lorenzo Village was new. We had a new shopping area that had a large parking area in the center. Around it were a grocery store, a bakery, a barber shop, and all the other shops that we would need, including a Post Office and a bowling alley and a movie theater. It took about 15 minutes to walk to the shopping area from our home – and about 5 on my speedy bike. The streets

were all new and led to the all-new freeway that easily took us to Oakland and San Francisco. All the schools I went to were new, being built as fast as they could as the population exploded, as well as a community church built from surplus war materials.

San Lorenzo was a wonderful place to grow up. When we first moved in, it was surrounded by apricot orchards and tomato fields, and there was a lovely, little creek where I would often go to play. All that soon gave way to more houses. But there were never any problems with crime or drugs. It was a very safe place to be, and my widowed mother gave me lots of freedom to explore and “do my thing.” There were tons of kids my age, so I had tons of friends.

Looking back on it today, that idyllic village had a cost. There were no Blacks, no Asians, no Latinx in San Lorenzo. And several years ago, going through old papers from my parents, I found the deed to our home. In a very clear, prominent paragraph, I found that our home could only “be sold to a person of the Caucasian race.” It was one of the ways that the United States used racism to keep our people segregated. Ugg.

**Jane DuBose**

***Tracy City, Tennessee, USA***

I spent the first eight years of my life in the home of my grandparents in a very small town between Nashville and Chattanooga. My hometown, Tracy City, had about 2,000 residents. Decades ago, the main places men worked were the coal mines. My grandfather worked as a miner, but now all the mines are closed. People make their livings as farmers, small business owners, and construction workers. Most people commute to bigger cities or towns for their jobs.



I didn't know any of the demographics as a child. I just knew I enjoyed spending time in my grandparents' hardware store, which they opened after my grandfather left his job in the mines. They sold everything from nails to paint to kitchen gadgets.

The store was my playground as a child.

My mom was single, and she worked at a medical clinic full-time, so the hardware store under the care of my grandmother became my daycare. I used bags of cement as a fort. I stole candy from the candy jar. I learned math by helping my grandmother make change for customers' purchases.

Because this was a small town in the South, the hardware store was a gathering place. Residents visited the store often and stayed a while. Several parts of the hardware-store experience helped me become the person I am today. I learned how to talk comfortably with adults. I learned how to tell (and listen to) a good story. I also learned the value of hard work.



Mid-way through third grade, my stepfather moved my family to North Carolina and Germany, and later to Shelbyville, Tenn., where I graduated from high school.



I lived in Tracy City again for another two years while I attended junior high, but by then I had seen other places. The small town seemed much, much smaller.

When I return today, I love seeing the beautiful hills, lakes and woods that surround Tracy City. The size of the town hasn't changed much, and there are still very few jobs for residents. My grandparents' hardware store is long gone, but the love, support, and hard-work ethic of my extended family lives on.