DISCOVERIES

The 2018 Collection of Stories
Written by BoulderReads Learners

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BOULDER READS

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LOI KRATHONG BY AAY BRAVIN

The loi krathong festival is an ancient Thai tradition which takes place on the evening of the full moon of the twelfth lunar month, usually in November. It is a beautiful scene, with the full moon shining down on the river, perfect for floating “krathong”. Krathong are round items of varied sizes which are floated down the river. In the past, lanterns were floated as part of Brahmanism to worship the gods Siva, Vishnu, and Brahma. When the Thai people adopted Buddhism, they adopted this ceremony in reverence to the goddess of the Mae Khong river.

To this day, Thai people still keep the tradition. On the full moon of the twelfth lunar month, people prepare natural materials to make krathong. They use sections of banana tree trunks and lotus flowers. As they place these beautiful krathong into the river, people ask for luck in the future and forgiveness from Pra Mae Kohngkha.

Loi krathong is a beautiful religious festival of forgiveness. It is a tradition that has lasted for thousands of years. For Thai people, it is a time to wave goodbye to misfortune, wash away sins of the past year and make wishes for the year ahead.
WHAT CHRISTMAS MEANS TO ME
BY DAVID ALLSHOUSE

What does Christmas mean to you? To me, Christmas means family, friends, and food. It is fun to get together with family for a nice meal. I like arriving at my Mom’s house to help her set up for dinner. It is nice to see everyone because it is hard at other times of the year because of work. There are things we do every year. This makes it easier for my mom.

During the month of December, there are Christmas programs and musicals on TV. My girlfriend Teri and I like to watch them before I go up to my mom and dad’s for Christmas Eve. We like AMC Country Christmas, and my favorite is the Santa Claus movie. I also really like John Denver’s Christmas in Aspen TV special.

On Christmas Eve, we have a soup night with a meat, relish, and a cracker tray. My favorite is my mom’s chicken noodle soup. She makes the noodles from scratch, boils the chicken, lets it cool, then cleans it. It takes all day to make because the chicken has to cook for a long time. We also have potato soup. It has a lot of milk and spices in it, and cornstarch to help thicken it. After dinner, we open presents. When we open presents, my nephews’ faces light up when they open their presents from us. That makes it worth getting them the Christmas presents they want. They cannot wait to open all the presents at once. Then we pick up all the wrapping paper to make room for them to play-they play for a while and then go home.

On Christmas Day, we get up, get ready for breakfast, and watch the Disney Christmas parade on TV. Then we go to the house of my girlfriend’s family to visit and have our Christmas meal with them. After that, we rest, watch more TV, and play games like corn hole together. Then we open presents and have a dessert like pumpkin pie. Sometimes my girlfriend and I spend the night at her parents—we relax more and watch TV before going to bed.

Christmas means many things to many different people. It is a special time of the year. People share their traditions and spend time with each other. My tutor Lindsey and I wish everyone a happy holiday season no matter what they celebrate!
If I could spend my time doing whatever I wanted:

I would travel to Rome and meet the pope. I love to interact with people from different cultures. I would like to travel in Europe and after that, to open my own pottery studio. I would like to make clay jewelry, pottery, sculpture, seed bead jewelry, cook delicious food and then travel around the world particularly to Hawaii. I would like to sleep whenever I want. I would travel, work crossword puzzles, read, try new restaurants, and do volunteer work. I would camp, hike, and read. I would conduct great research, participate in volunteer work, and travel a lot with my wife. I would eat lots of candy and watch my favorite TV show with my friends.

If I could eat just one type of food the rest of my life:

It would be steak because it is the best food. I loved it after I came to America. It would be fruit because it provides important nutrients. It would be oatmeal because it has calories. It would be African food, because African food is so diverse. There are grains, like rice, millet, and wheat that are healthy and taste good. There is meat, fish, lamb, and beef. We also eat a lot of vegetables, like carrots, cabbage, and cucumbers. The best thing about African food is how we combine all the different types of food and make it taste so good. I would eat Mexican food. I love enchiladas, calabacitas, and carne adovada the most. I would eat pasta because of the texture and I love anything with tomato sauce. I love Indian food in general but most of all I love khorma, masala, and benjan served with rice.
SEASONS, HOME, & COMING TO BOULDER:

My favorite time of year is autumn, because nature is a thousand colors. I love it when the leaves start to change colors in the fall and the air smells fresh and crisp. The temperature is cool. It’s easy to be comfortable. Fall is a great time to be outside. It’s good to hike in the fall because the trees are changing, and the sky is really blue. My favorite holiday is Christmas, because I love how all the world celebrates. I love the traditions of my family and my community. Walking outdoors in winter snow reminds me of home. At night, when I look up to the sky, the brightness of the stars reminds me of home. My mother is what I miss the most about where I used to live. Being with my family and doing stuff with them is what I miss the most. When I first came to Boulder, I met very friendly people. I felt welcome. I joined the Boulder Library. I could not wait to climb up into the hills. One of the things I like about my community in Boulder is that many people have traveled to other countries, and many people from other countries come to live here. There are people to help other people in need. I am most proud of myself because I am in America. Peace on Earth is what I hope for the most in the future.
MOM DIES BY DANA WOODWARD

My mom was 89 and dying of old age. She lived with me for about two and a half years, but it was too hard for me to take care of her. So, the family moved her to Sunrise Assisted Living. When she was a little girl she had lived in a foster home in California and sometimes she was locked in the basement and there were spiders. So, she had a phobia of spiders. Unfortunately, there were spiders at Sunrise, so we had to move her in with my brother Michael in November.

Julia, my sister Annie’s daughter, came to Boulder in January to work at a radio station for six months. She wrote stories for the station. One story interview was with me on a bus ride to Louisville. One story was about the Zombie Apocalypse and one story was about my mom dying.

Annie, Julia’s mother, came from Alaska about a week later than Julia. Michael, Julia, and Annie all lived together with my mom and Hospice was taking care of my mom.

When my mom died on February 2nd, all four of her children were with her. The next day Hospice led a memorial service. Lots of friends and family came. We sang, ate lots of food, and saw a video about her.

Nine months later most of our family gathered in Carmel, California to celebrate her life and spread her ashes.
My name is Djenaba Sako. I’m from Mali. I lived in the capital city Bamako. When I was 7 months old I walked! My family was happy. When I was only one year old I walked to my auntie’s place by myself. I walked through the African market outside. I did it every day. People were scared. They screamed when they saw me. People who knew me said, “Leave her alone! She knows where she’s going.” Somebody followed me to my auntie’s place. They saw my auntie pick me up. They said, “Wow! I can’t believe it!”
“The best way to escape from a problem is to solve it.” — Alan Sporta

This is my story. It’s a great story to read. When I have a problem, I learn to solve the problem. I sometimes make mistakes with money. I always forget things.

I had problems learning. Sometimes when I counted numbers I put the formula wrong. My total did not match with my coworkers’ totals. I could do the formula correctly when my co-worker showed it to me, but not by myself. The problem was that I didn’t learn things the first time. Then I learned to focus by practicing many times until I was sure I understood. I solved this problem, so I don’t have any more focus problems.

I escaped my problem of accuracy with numbers. I started on a new job when I was 25 years old. The job was with an accountant where I had to be careful with numbers, but I sometimes made mistakes in the report that I sent out at the end of the month. The first time I thought I did good, but I didn’t check it. The second time I was very careful and checked twice, but I still made a mistake. We could help each other. This problem made me frustrated. I learned that I need people to help me. I made sure that in future I will not have this problem, because now I have the experience to fix the problem.

I always forget things. I am the one to make sure that the product is delivered to the customer, but I forgot to tell the people who work in the factory that the customer needed that product. My leader called me and asked if I told the people in the factory about the delivery and I said, “Oh my God, I forgot.” Then I felt nervous and I had to figure out how to fix it for the customer. Now anytime I need to do something I need to write it down. This can help me because I can see it. I can still forget things, but I have experience and write down more than before.

In conclusion, I need to solve the problem when I make a mistake. I learned how to solve problems. I was getting better. Now I forget how to forget.
When I read the story “The Gift of the Magi,” an anecdote that happened to me with my son Hector came to my mind. My son’s birthday was close, he always had a cake filled and decorated with a chocolate cream, from a family recipe. I thought maybe he would like something different and special, so I decided to make him a strawberry cake.

With great enthusiasm, I bought the most beautiful and fresh strawberries I found and started making his cake imagining how happy he would be to see a different and beautiful cake for his birthday. The cake was filled with vanilla cream and strawberries and decorated with meringue and strawberries on top. Everything was perfect for the surprise!

When he arrived, we all congratulated him, then I placed the cake on the table to sing his birthday song! He was surprised! I looked at him and tried to guess his thoughts. After he blew the candles, he approached me and said…Do you know how much I want my birthday to come just to taste that delicious chocolate? That chocolate cream is my favorite and I don’t like strawberries very much!

For a few moments I felt confused and sad and told him sorry for my mistake. He quickly apologized to me and gave me a hug. I told him that I thought that he liked strawberries and I wanted to surprise him with something different.

When he tried a piece of cake, he kissed me and thanked saying that the cake was delicious and that it was the best gift he had received! Then we both started to laugh! We still laugh when we remember that day! Now on his birthday we just have cake with chocolate cream!
MOVING TO THE UNITED STATES CHANGED MY LIFE
BY IRMA SEQUERA

When I came to the United States, I had no idea how much my life would change. I came from a country with a different culture and language. I came with the intention to stay for a short time to learn the language and visit different places, but little by little life was drawing me to this country!

I knew that learning the language and adapting to the culture would make life easier in the United States. It was not easy, even though I came with a base of the language. It was not easy to adapt to different customs and even more difficult missing mine. I also learned new skills that helped me with new jobs, different from those I had done in my country.

Sometimes I felt nostalgic. I missed my country, my family and friends, I missed food, places, music. I began to remember situations with my family and friends. I missed everything and that made me feel depressed. The telephone was my way to overcome it! I had the support of my best friend. She guided me and helped me in many things, but when I moved by myself and became independent, the situation became even harder because I had to overcome fears and new challenges. I had to solve problems. I had two options: let myself be overcome by fears and problems and return to my country, or learn from mistakes and move forward. When a door closed, another door opened and I found wonderful people who helped me.

Now I feel much better living in the United States since I have learned the language, and day by day I improve it. I feel more sure of myself. I have adapted to some customs and I can continue some of my own. Now I am no longer alone. I have a partner and many friendships and although I still miss my country and family, I am more able to travel and to communicate with my family. The change was very different from what I thought at the beginning, but the important thing is that despite the problems, I’m still positive and looking forward to new experiences!
Hello. My name is Lorena, and I would like to talk a little about the experiences that I have had after coming to this country, a new world for me.

15 years ago I arrived in this country, and every day is a different experience. Many places are known to be beautiful in this state of Colorado; it seems like a dream. I have met very friendly people. At the same time, I liked to learn a little of the traditions of this state. And I’m becoming accustomed a bit to the climate changes here. I realize that there are so many things to discover, learn, and live.

To begin with, I would like to be able to learn English, and I think that thanks to this Boulder Reads program and its wonderful tutors like Linda Murphy, I can do that.

I have always liked to learn something new, day by day, and learning English is an experience that I am very excited about. I think that any change you make in life will always be good for a better future. Besides, I need to learn English because this way I can help my son, who is called Alan. He is 12 years old, and he is also going through a new experience with the transition from elementary school to middle school. I hope to achieve learning English, since I have many goals to do and the first is to learn English. I really liked being able to share a bit of my story.
When I was about ten years old, my brother and I used to go to a small village that was called Avo. We went to get flour from a factory that had a few machines made from stone and big blades of iron that turned the corn into flour. With this fine flour we would make bread for our family.

The building belonged to a wealthy doctor. Everyone in my village would go there. Very often we got into groups and walked together. It was a long walk back and forth, sometimes taking us all day, especially on difficult winter days. We would carry big bags of flour on our heads. When the weather got cold and rainy, we got all wet and could not walk as fast as we wanted to because our clothes were soaked.

Next to the building there was a beautiful river called Rio Alva where children and adults learned to swim. It was very deep and dangerous. Some people drowned there, I was told as a child. In summer most people would spend their weekends in the river. That was their vacation since they didn’t have the money to go anywhere else.

I remember one time my brother and I went down to the flour mill with corn to be made into flour. While waiting, my young brother decided to get in the water, but he didn’t know how to swim.

He almost drowned in the river. I didn’t know how to swim either. I got very scared and started to shake. I did not know what to do. I screamed for help to save my brother’s life. Luckily a young kid rescued him. I was very grateful for this young boy to be there at this special moment. Since this incident, I became very frightened of water. Some of my friends tried to encourage me to learn how to swim but I refused.
HOW BUSY I AM BY MEBRAT FIKAk

In 2017 I was very busy. My first trip was to Dallas for the wedding of my cousin. I went to Seattle after Easter for the wedding of another cousin. It was fun. We saw many friends. After that, I had cataract surgery. One week later, I went to New York to see my niece’s baby. On August 6, I went to Edmonton for my niece’s wedding. Also, my sister came to the wedding from Eritrea. That was so fun. I was so happy to see her. On October 14, my grandson Samuel was born. I stayed with my daughter Simret for two weeks to help with the baby and his two older sisters. Later in October I fell on black ice and I hurt myself and couldn’t work for a week. Then, I went to Toronto for my niece’s baby boy’s baptism and I was surprised to see my sister-in-law and her family from Sudan.

I am still working and still helping my children and still baby-sitting for my grandchildren.

I was so busy. That’s why I took a break from BoulderReads for five months. Now I am back to the class with my tutor Selena. We found a very good book for spelling. I am so glad to be back.
After marrying my husband, he taught me traditional Japanese cooking. I have worked in our restaurant for almost seven years, and I have developed an interest in cooking. I enjoy it.

In the restaurant we have Japanese staff and one other Korean. They speak English to each other. I speak Japanese and Korean, so I don’t usually speak English. I only speak English with some regular customers. The regular customers know that I don’t speak English very well. They understand my incorrect sentences. But, sometimes we still don’t understand each other. For example, if a regular customer that I know well goes on vacation, they tell me about it. Sometimes they go to Hawaii. They tell me about the scenery and the restaurants. Sometimes they tell me what was good and bad, but I don’t understand all the details. Sometimes they speak too quickly, and I only understand the general meaning. When I want to ask the customers something, I cannot make a full sentence. Sometimes the customers adapt their words and speak simply. Sometimes when I prepare a special dish for a regular customer, I need to be able to explain what it is. For example, I need to explain how to eat it properly by wrapping the food in lettuce. If the customer has never seen a dish before, they ask me how best to eat it. Then, I recommend a dipping sauce.
When I first cooked the menu, I used recipes. Then I began to change the recipes. I could adapt them to be tastier or easier. Then I could teach the rest of the staff. I know how much of each ingredient to put in based on looking and using my hands. I don’t write down exact amounts in cups. This is how I learned to cook well with experience. I know the staff works really hard. Some of them learned from me and wrote everything down. Some of them really wrote down every tiny detail. People are all different in how they learn. Some who wrote everything down still cook from the recipe after three to six months. They still don’t remember it. Others memorize the recipes after a few months and can cook from their memories and experience.

Tonight I will prepare mushrooms for some regular customers. Usually, I deep-fry the mushrooms. Tonight I will slice them and dip them in egg with salt. Then I will fry them in a pan.

I will say to the customers, “Tonight I have prepared the mushrooms differently. Instead of deep-frying them, I have coated them with egg and shallow fried them. I hope you enjoy them. Please let me know which way you like them best.”

Other things I may say to customers include:

“I hope you all enjoy them!”
“Please let me know what you like best.”
“Which dish did you like best?”
“Which was your favorite dish?”
“Enjoy your meal!”
You have the skills to become successful. A substantial part of your life will be spent trying to end up noticeably effective. For a few, success is measured by economic wellbeing and riches; for others, success is resolved just by the measure of joy one feels. Everyone has their own set of skills that they can use to do something good in their life. Here are some ways that I use to overcome my fears and find success.

You need to constantly set your objectives higher than others. You need to realize that where it counts you can either accomplish incredible things or bite the dust attempting. We as a whole have heard stories about individuals who when they become old have second thoughts about the things they wish they had done.

Advise yourself that you would prefer not to be old and lament anything in life for the choices you have made. For example, in your relationships do the other people have confidence in you, and make it clear that they support you instead of undermining you? When you know what you want from your relationships, you make it happen; it is your choice and your life. You decide.

You must be sufficiently modest to realize that you have a long way to go. Think of yourself as an understudy to begin with. In the meantime, be confident in yourself. Every time you commit an error, there is a lesson to learn. Rather than concentrating on fear, concentrate on being free. Figure out how to focus on what you can control.
You need to concentrate on what you can influence; looking too long ahead or looking too long behind won’t generally help you. Concentrate on the small steps you can take towards your bigger goal, one step after another to get to your destination.

Trust is a crucial part of any connection in your life. Trust is something that you must build with people that you don’t know by any means. For example, we need to trust instructors to present correct information and review our work fairly. Trust means both giving to and taking from someone when you do not have full knowledge about them and their intentions. Sometimes, it’s all worth it to take a risk in order to achieve success.

Finally, honesty is vital. Shakespeare once stated, “Honesty is the best policy. If I lose mine honor, I lose myself.” From his statement, obviously Shakespeare thinks self-respect is essential throughout everyday life. Trustworthiness is a goodness that is remarkably esteemed by people. In summary, developing these skills will be your recipe for success.
THE POWER OF HOPE
BY SANDRA MANZO

My life has changed since I got a job. I used to oversleep and I did not have anything to do with my time, because I had low self-esteem. I had always thought that I could not achieve anything to feel proud of myself. I thank God now, I have my life back and I know one day I will make a difference.

Having an income has helped me and my family. I can pay my rent, my cell phone bill, and for the necessities I need, such as food and clothes. For many years I could not support my mother the way she deserves. However, now she will have my financial support.

It is fun to have a job. First of all, I have a routine. I wake up early in the morning and get ready, prepare my lunch every day, and take the bus to work. Now, when I am on duty, I interact with so many people that come to Walgreens to buy a lot of different things. Furthermore, I have met new co-workers who have trained me to do my job. We have an excellent team. For example, when I do not know something, I call them and they come to help me resolve the problem that I am having with a customer.

I am also grateful for the opportunity Boulder Reads has given me. I will stay and maintain motivation, because my biggest desire is to achieve a professional career as a teacher, dentist or a writer. This program has taught me to believe in myself again. I will keep dreaming and work hard to make things happen. I am committed to finding time to write and read English every day and to do my homework. Also, I will show up for my class. I know one day my dream will come true, and when that happens, I will say that Boulder Reads was who encouraged me to continue with my education.
I am blessed to count on my tutor Judith for her unconditional support, and for helping me understand words I do not know. She has a gift for teaching.

For me, my faith is the most part of my life. It helps me to persevere with my journey in this world of obstacles, distractions, discouragement, pain, suffering, poverty, and shortage. I know all of these are part of life, but it is all up to us to decide how we face our everyday life. In my case, I have learned that I need to take action because I can say many things and make promises. I would say that now my life is moving in a good direction. I have changed the way I think. Through my faith, I can do anything and make the best of me. My faith makes me who I am. I am an individual who was created with love and who lives with a purpose.
I CAME TO THE USA BY TERESA CEPEDA

I came in 1990, when I was 18 years old, with my ex-husband and my daughter. We had to live with my ex-husband’s relatives, Marcela and Antonio. They had 4 children and they lived in a small apartment with two bedrooms and 1 1/2 bathrooms. Then, they had to give us a bedroom, but we had to share with their 2 kids and my daughter.

The apartment was so dirty. I had to help Marcela to clean and to cook too. Marcela worked so hard in that time. My ex-brother-in-law didn’t work. He used to take care of the kids and he took Marcela to work. But, when I came, I had to take care of their children, and clean and cook for everyone. Especially for the children, getting them ready for school. Because, most of the time my ex-brother-in-law and my ex-husband went with friends to the bars. (That’s why they’re “ex”).

I was feeling sorry for Marcela. She didn’t have a break. Marcela bought all the food. I remember Marcela washed their clothes with her hands in the bathtub, and I had to do the same because I didn’t know how to go to the laundromat. I didn’t speak English. I didn’t drive either.

It was hard. I had to look every morning at my daughter to see if the cockroaches had bitten her forehead! It was crazy crowded. Even worse. But at least they gave us a home. We were there a month and we couldn’t find a job, so we decided to go to Chicago, Illinois to be with other relatives. We found jobs and we could stay here in the USA for a better life.
Henry Ford said, “Obstacles are those frightful things you see when you take your eyes off your goal.” How to keep your eyes on your goal? It is to face your frightful problems and solve them.

I had one problem being social. Can you believe that when you go to a party, there is someone sitting in a corner alone, not communicating. Yes, I was “THE ONE.” Once when I went out with my friend, there was a lot of people who came, too, a lot of people I don’t know. Everybody was enjoying the party. I was scared and nervous. I didn’t want to mess up the mood, but I knew I did. I felt awkward. I was like a turtle staying in the shell. I felt lonely. I recognized that is an obstacle in communication. I had to change it. Now that I spend more time with my friends and someone new, I learned how to socialize. I feel more and am more comfortable. Friends make me not alone anymore!

Another problem was to pass the driver’s license test. Learning how to drive and getting a driver’s license was very important for me, especially in the USA. When I first arrived in this country I didn’t know how to drive. I couldn’t go anywhere. If I wanted to go out I had to ask my family or my friends to take me out. It’s not easy and bothers people. My aunt taught me how to drive. She told me, “If you want to be free, you have to learn how to drive.” I still remember she took me to practice driving every day after work. I was super nervous and scared. My body was sweaty. She laughed, she encouraged me, and believed in me. She gave me a lot of confidence. I appreciate her. I learned how to drive and got my driver’s license. I am on the road now.

There is one more big problem which is to pass the GED test. I have a dream to own a coffeeshop. I have to learn all new things in this country: language, cultures, tradition, and social communication. I want to go to coffee training school to learn how to make coffee. I want to go to college to get a better education and learn business management. But I don’t have a high school diploma. I found this group to help me get my GED certificate. That is hard for me. English is my second language. There are a lot of things I have to learn. I knew most of this information in Chinese. I have to start over again. I am not scared about that. When I read a book, there is a lot of vocabulary I have to search for, one by one. I practice the pronunciation again and again. I am enjoying it. When I use something I learned about, I feel achievement. I learned a lot of things in the GED program. I am grateful, and the GED program helps me lots. I feel I will pass the GED test soon.

Thanks for those frightful obstacles that make me stronger and more independent. When frightful problems hit you, remain calm, keep going, face them and solve them.
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boulderlibraryfoundation.org