

TELL ME YOUR



BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

PUBLISHED BY



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PRESIDENT'S REPORT

TELL ME YOUR STORY



Jerry Offor
PGC President

Tell Me Your Story is one of PGC's flagship events for 2021 that highlights and celebrates the cultural diversity and personal stories of over 10,000 postgraduate students. This event was generously supported by the UNSW Division of Equity Diversity & Inclusion. In this e-book, we have included all submitted stories ranging from self-discovery, overcoming hardship and cultural stereotypes, promoting cultural celebration, traditions, and history.

Shortlisted applicants were invited to share their stories at the Tell Me Your Story Cultural Conference with members of the UNSW community and external guests. Each speaker received a certificate, with prize winners judged by our stellar judging panel. A video recording of the event is now made available for viewing through UNSW Postgraduate Council's YouTube account and other university social media platforms.

We are confident that this event has helped to provide a safe and welcoming space for students to share their personal experiences, raise awareness on problems concerning racism, encourage a greater understanding of different cultures, and promote empathy, harmony, and peace.

I implore you to read through all these fascinating stories.

Content Warning: While these inspiring stories are based on real-life events, some stories may contain experiences that may be harmful or traumatizing to some audiences. Readers' discretion is advised.

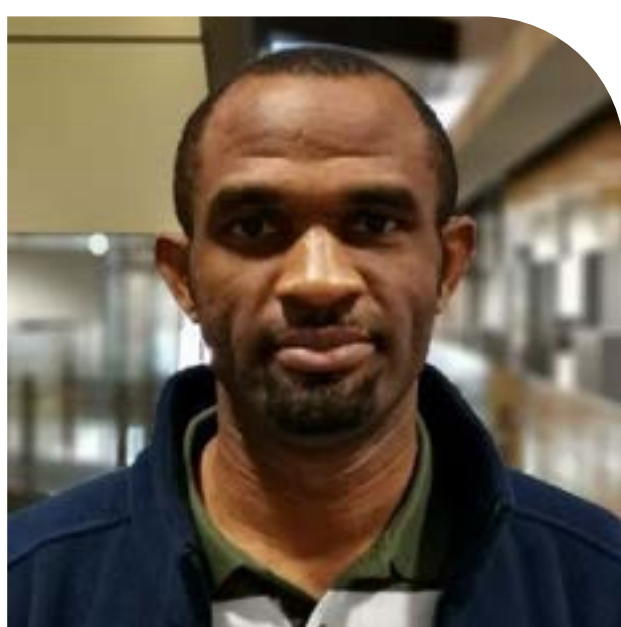


THE EXECUTIVES

TELL ME YOUR STORY



Saltanat Paritova & Rabia Mobeen
PGC Women's Office



Chukwuka Madumelu & Jing Sun
PGC Equity Office



Diana Zhang & Ramanashree Palakshamurthy
PGC Vice-President's Office



JUDGING PANEL



LUCY MARSHALL

*ASSOCIATE DEAN (EQUITY & DIVERSITY), FACULTY OF
ENGINEERING*

Lucy Marshall is Associate Dean (Equity and Diversity) in the Faculty of Engineering, Professor in the School of Civil and Environmental Engineering, and Director of the Water Research Centre. Lucy completed her undergraduate, Master's and PhD degrees at UNSW before moving to Montana State University in 2006, where she worked at the interface of engineering and environmental science. She returned to UNSW as an Australian Research Council Future Fellow in 2013 and is currently Director of the Water Research Centre. She additionally leads the Faculty of Engineering's Equity, Diversity and Inclusion agenda, and was the lead for Athena SWAN 2019-2020.

SHELLEY VALENTINE

CEO OF ARC @ UNSW

Arc is one of Australia's leading student organisations whose mission is to 'create the best student experience'. Arc delivers upon that mission through the delivery of a diverse and extensive suite of services including Volunteering, Clubs, Events, Legal & Advocacy, Wellness, and Sport, as well as through key representative bodies including the Student Representative Council and Postgraduate Council.

Shelley has more than 20 years' experience in student programming, student services, and events and has maintained an ongoing focus throughout her career on creating opportunities to amplify the student voice and enabling student-led initiatives.



MICHAEL KELLY

FOUNDER AND DIRECTOR OF KELLY SPEECH COMMUNICATION

Michael Kelly is a leadership communication trainer, and the Founder and Director of Kelly Speech Communication. A leading body language and speech expert, he holds a Master of Science degree in speech pathology. Michael is also a popular media commentator and writes The Winning Voice weekly blog post on all aspects of memorable listening, speaking and presenting. His clients include PwC, MuleSoft, Commonwealth Bank and Kathmandu. Michael's programs help leaders communicate their ideas and vision with confidence, energy and certainty.



LORI YOUMSHAJEKIAN

PRODUCER AT ABC

Lori is an award-winning journalist and producer covering local and international stories at ABC News. She is a recipient of a Walkley Award for Public Service Journalism and a Kennedy Award for Outstanding Online Video for her work on the #LetHerSpeak campaign, supporting sexual assault survivors to tell their stories under their real names. Lori has also worked as a video journalist at news.com.au and specialises in visual storytelling for digital and TV current affairs. Her tertiary background is in finance and media from UNSW.



ANDRIANA SIMOS

DIGITAL JOURNALIST AT THE GREEK HERALD

Andriana Simos is a proud Greek Australian and UNSW alumni after completing her Bachelor of Media / International Studies in 2019. During her five year degree, she undertook a number of internships at SBS, ABC and NewsCorp Australia, while also maintaining strong connections to her Greek culture and language. She's now a digital journalist at The Greek Herald, where she gets to share the stories of exceptional people from the Greek Australian community and hopefully inspire others to speak out and share their stories too.

**LET'S
BRING ALL
CULTURES
TOGETHER**



Where are you from?



'Where are you from?' This story isn't a unique one, and I've heard and read so many stories of a similar kind – and yet, why do so many of us feel out of place when we feel this sense of diaspora?

There's usually a mental pause in my head. Do I want to give up the short version and save myself the effort or do I spend longer than usual explaining my whole life story?

The worst is when my short answer isn't enough for the questioner. 'Australia', I say. 'But no, where are you really from?', as though they have the answers and authority to my identity.

For a long time, I felt burdened by having to constantly explain my identity. However, I realized recently that it's a blessing that I can choose to fit in and connect with more than one identity. Instead of looking at how I may not traditionally fit into the Western Australian society or my Malaysian Asian background, I actually can connect with both places and in both spaces. Furthermore, I've also created new spaces for any first- or second-generation migrant kids who feel the same way.

So you're not alone – we are complex beings with multifaceted identities that shouldn't be placed or forced into a box, with more to unpack in the problematic assumptions on what an 'Australian' identity is. So maybe the question shouldn't be 'where are you from?', but 'what spaces and identities do you identify with?'.

66 LET'S NGABUBURIT

by Bitu Dwi Rahmani



All Muslim people around the world now are facing the most-awaited month called Ramadhan. It's the month to do fasting, doing more worships and it's the best time to share to others. Many people will do various unique things during this month. In my country, Indonesia, one of the unique traditions during Ramadhan is "Ngabuburit". This term originated from Sunda Language, one of Indonesian traditional languages. "Ngabuburit" means the time for waiting the fasting to break. Usually, the people will do some activities such as praying, reciting Holy Qurán, strolling around, preparing for the meal and/or buying some refreshments and snacks offered by a temporary snack seller. It will be easily found various special dish seller in every corner of the street for sure and they sell the special food which never sold except on Ramadhan month. Therefore, most people will do strolling around in the evening before the sunset to do "Ngabuburit". However, since the pandemic is spread out in all over the countries since 2019, the "ngabuburit" tradition has disappeared and is missed as no gathering people are allowed now. Hope the pandemic will be over soon and I can do "Ngabuburit" with full excitement and joy.

Gift giving and receiving in Chinese culture



by Jie Fan

Gift-giving and receiving are significant means of communication in Chinese society. Being culture-specific, it is an epitome of Chinese social values and beliefs.

Normally, Chinese refuses a gift several times before eventually accepting it. Such a seesaw battle between the gift giver and the gift recipient may take several turns. Nevertheless, it reveals Chinese “face” issue. On the one hand, the gift giver wants to make sure the feelings can be conveyed properly so as to successfully give the present and avoid “losing face”. On the other hand, from the perspective of the recipient, he seeks to maintain the giver’s face and balance between not hurting the other’s feelings by rejecting the present outright and simultaneously not showing greediness by accepting it straightaway. Thus, the principle of balance is crucial in face-to-face interaction, which requires one to meet the interlocutors’ face needs always.

Additionally, two cardinal principles of social interaction are hidden behind the cultural context, namely sincerity and balance, which are advocated by Confucianism to achieve social harmony. The principle of sincerity requires all social deeds to be enacted sincerely as sincerely enacted deeds are intrinsically polite. Thereby, in the Chinese culture, the repetition of apology or gratitude is deemed to express genuine intention. As for the principle of balance, it implies attending to the interlocutors’ face wants and desires as well as the maintenance of a positive image. Failure to recognize these social norms will lead to social-pragmatic failures, such as misjudgment of pragmatic values and principles.

66 STORY OF JOSHUA

by Joshua Karras



I'm an incredibly lucky guy. As an Australian Egyptian, I define my identity by the cultural influences of some of the planet's oldest and newest nations. I am honoured to have the blood of the Pharaohs in my veins, and the inspiration of the ANZACS in my deeds.

But it hasn't always been like this.

Growing up as a brown boy in the Sutherland Shire was not an ideal environment to freely grow and learn about my personal and cultural identity. I did not enjoy the soccer like the other Coptic Sunday School kids, but I also didn't do little nippers with the rest of my school friends. I was a part of two worlds, which meant that for a long time, it felt like I belonged to neither. It was my inaugural trip to Egypt that finally catalysed a change I didn't know I so desperately needed. Standing in the suburb sized shadow of the Great Pyramids of Giza, with the cool evening air drifting from the mighty Nile River perfectly complementing the intense desert sun, two things happened in close succession.

First, I burst in pride and respect for my native country, ancient and established, and a new and more intimate understanding of who I was and where I come from was borne. Second, the adoration and gratitude I had for my gorgeous home Australia, dewy eyes and hopeful for a fair and limitless future was heightened and reinforced. I finally knew what it meant to be an Australian Egyptian and it means the world to me.

A blend of cultures carrying forward



Culture is the summation of different aspects, such as traditions, relationships, history, foods, languages, arts geography, landmark sites, as well as socially transmitted behaviours, patterns and beliefs.

Culture is important to societies, especially for those who travel and live outside their countries, like me. I hold on to certain traditions because they allow me to be back home in cognitive ways sometimes.

Being of French origin, I currently work and study in Australia, and lived in different countries before moving Down Under two years ago. My culture is primarily Western European. However, being on the junction of numerous cultures, I can make interesting sociological empirical research about culture as the key to human's identity. All my observations, lessons and values are more connected to life mood and self-consciousness of four cultures' representatives.

Indeed, I grew up and studied my first master's degree in France, my country of origin. My mother is French and my father is Australian. The latter abandoned us when I was born, but the 'Aussie' culture was present in my upbringing, so that there was a cross-cultural component in my childhood. Those values actually led me to learn English at school and master it at quite an early age, in hope to communicate one day with my father; in vain.



My passion for languages, multiculturalism and international relations studies led me to live in Spain for four years upon university graduation. That unique experience has been one of the most revealing and enriching in my life so far, in terms of cultural awareness and self-discovery.

Spain is a diverse country, like Australia. I met my partner there, who is originally from Chile, and had left ten years before to pursue a better quality of life in Europe. The strong presence of Latin American communities in Spain opened my eyes and curiosity towards that continent, that I later explored solo backpacking for over six months, from the most southern tip up to Central America.

The fact that my partner is Latino and that we decided to create another even better life here in Australia, our life, mixing our cultures and learnings, truly depicts our/my on-going effort for self-discovery and openness. Despite the difficulties of not always 'fitting' or belonging anywhere, feeling nostalgic and geographically far, I am beyond grateful and proud of the cultures that have shaped me so far to tell my story. I have learned to live in four cultures (French, Spanish, Latin American and Australian), speak fluently English, Spanish and French daily, and those are experiences I would not trade for anything. It is not easy, nor is it extremely hard, but it is all about balance. Each person has their own culture, but it does not define all aspects of life. As humans, we must figure out our true selves, and establish values and behaviours. Throughout my experience living in different countries, I have certainly learned a lot about myself and others. Culture is something different to many people, but in the end, it connects us all to create wisdom.

ANCESTOR WORSHIP – A TRADITIONAL CULTURE OF THE VIETNAMESE

by Thao Le



Ancestor worship is a traditional culture of the Vietnamese that has existed for many centuries. The worship involves the practice of having an ancestor altar that is set up in a solemn place in the house to honour family's ancestors (i.e., the passed away family members).

Traditionally, an altar includes an incense burner in the middle, two lamps are on the left and right sides of the altar, a flower vase, and a space for food offerings, although the set up might slightly change with the regions. The photos of the ancestors are arranged behind the incense burner, or sometimes hanging on the wall above the altar. In special celebrations (e.g., New Year celebration and death anniversaries of the ancestors), the Vietnamese will light the incense sticks, turn on the lamps, and offers the flowers and a range of foods as a means of remembering and honouring the ancestors.

Ancestor worship has an important meaning in the spiritual life of the Vietnamese. It means to remind us about our family members who was loving and caring for us when they were alive, and even death can't separate this connection. You may be surprised that almost every household will have an ancestor altar regardless of their religions or whether they believe in life after death or not. Ancestor worship is a way for the Vietnamese to remind ourselves about our roots, i.e., the families, as well as the responsibility to maintain and develop the values that ancestors have created over several family generations.

Beauty in Diversity



I was a fourth-generation South Indian born in Malaysia, a country with a melting pot of cultures, religions and celebrations. Growing up in a country like Malaysia enriched my identity, as I not only identified as Tamil, but as a Malaysian, who celebrated Eid, Chinese New Year, Deepavali and Christmas.

One of my favourite aspects of Malaysia is our 'open-house' concept, where friends and strangers from all cultures and religions are invited to one's house during a festival celebration. There was joy, respect and delicious food shared among everyone during these celebrations. I have seen my Chinese friends cook 'halal' food during these festivals to cater to our Muslim peers, as well as Muslims ensuring that chicken was served during their Eid open house, as our Hindu friends were not able to eat beef. The sense of respect, tolerance and empathy shared among everyone showed me that our differences only bring us closer, and that it is possible to celebrate our culture while embracing everyone else's too. I carried this sense of respect and tolerance towards other cultures even as I moved to different countries for my education, including the United Kingdom and Australia. I made friends from all over the world, and instead of imposing my worldview on them, I learnt to see the world from their point of view. I have had the opportunity to learn so much, share my culture and make so many wonderful memories along the way. Indeed in the words of Maya Angelou, I have come to realise that, 'In diversity there is beauty, and there is strength'.

HOT POT FOOD FOR EVERY MOOD

by Min Huang



Spicy food such like hot pot is an essential component of my hometown culture. Sometimes when I met new friends here and they asked me which city in China I came from, I'd like to mention that I'm from Chongqing, the city in the southwest of China.

However, most of the time they were still very confused which the city is. Thus every time I will immediately continue to say 'This place is famous for its spicy food and is the birthplace of hot pot!' Then everything made sense. I am very pleased that nearly every friend I meet here from all over the world have eaten hot pot. There are also many large and small hot pot restaurants here. I am proud that the food in my hometown is so welcome. In my hometown, there are a total of 30,000 hot pot restaurants. Almost every 100 meters you can see a hot pot restaurant. Sometimes a street is full of hot pot restaurants, one next to each other, and you can smell the strong taste of the condiment. Whenever we don't know what to eat, or when there are a lot of family or friends gathering, we don't think too much and choose to eat hot pot. Hot pot meals can enhance friendship and unite family members or colleagues as several people sit around a pot, talking and eating. The warm atmosphere makes people feel comfortable and relaxed. Everything edible can be cooked in hot pot. Usually, the taste of food can reflect the attitude and status of life there. As a symbol of food in Chongqing, people in Chongqing have the sense of integrity and embrace the diversified culture.

A JOURNEY OF SELF- DISCOVERY





BEAUTIFULLY UNIQUE

By Reem Almasri



As a young Syrian woman, I have always seen my parents struggling hard for me to have a better future and opportunities due to which they urged to migrate. Having left my wounded country, Syria, watching it being wiped away from a distance, left a void in my mind. But that did not stop me. I took it as a challenge upon myself not to allow the difficult situations I was put in to determine the next stages of my life. Just like Shakreyye, an entirely white authentic Syrian dish that we prepare mainly on Eids (Islamic holidays) to bring hope and bright future, I started to look at my life from that perspective.

With that kind of mindset, dedication, and persistence, it became my responsibility to make sure that people in my society have equal opportunities and safer future. I am a young and confident woman who is passionate about bringing an actual change to her community.

As an international student, who has travelled between Syria, Saudi Arabia, USA, Lebanon, and Australia to seek proper education, I have reached a point where I started to struggle with my faith as I always looked different from others, whether this difference is coming from my appearance (wearing a head scarf), behaviour, or eating habits. It was even hard for me at the beginning to involve myself in many social activities. But then, I have realized that being different is amazing, and that all my differences are just making me beautifully unique.

CATERPILLAR TO BUTTERFLY

By Pooja Gupta



Coming from a holy town, Prayagraj in India, I am Pooja. It's a Sanskrit word meaning worship. Hinduism is the only religion where you will find "Pooja" of female deity. For all the major necessities of life such as education, money and power, Hinduism offers separate female deities Saraswati, Lakshmi and Durga respectively. But still the women in India are devoid of basic education, finance decisions and life choices.

I was fortunate enough to be born in a family where they believe not to discriminate between children based on their gender. But as I finished my graduation, the society compelled my parent for my marriage even though I was not ready whereas my brothers were given choice to marry when they want. I was married to a family who initially showed me how much me and my qualification means to them. They portrayed that I am their daughter. After marriage, they always treated me like an outsider. They controlled every aspect of my life from my finances to my clothes. I was feeling trapped in the cocoon of stereotype and orthodox mentality like a caterpillar. But the wings of education made me believe in myself and helped me to transform into a butterfly. Today, I am pursuing my dream in UNSW. In the end, I want to highlight that lately everyone is talking about women empowerment, but it is time to teach ourselves how to live with an empowered woman.



KEEN FOR A SWIM?

By Justin Jos



When I first came to Australia, I was amazed at how bountiful Australian nature was and how most people took advantage of the long coastlines, beaches and the ocean. Locals also enjoyed these blessings of nature. One such way to enjoy is swimming.

During my first year, I met a fellow Australian student who casually asked me whether I'd like to go for a swim? The only problem was I did not know how to swim.

I was almost ashamed to admit it because the very simple act of swimming was so commonplace in Australia.

My friend just stared at me as he awaited a response because I was thinking whether I should make an excuse. I was lost in thoughts of how I did not know swimming, but I also wanted to make new friends and hang out. I told him I am not that great at swimming. He said that I can come and hang out with his friends. He was so kind and understanding.

He asked why I did not learn how to swim growing up?

His question made me wonder how we all make assumptions that others might have the same childhood as them. I told my friend that I grew up in a landlocked area with no water bodies around. And swimming pools were only accessible to families that were wealthy enough to have disposable income.

This day I realised the importance of UNSW's slogan – "Never Assume".

AM I NOT BEAUTIFUL?

By Moein Seyfour



This is me... am I not beautiful?

The guy who is writing this has made me from recycled clay once being trashed. I was first wedged fiercely and then shaped gently into this exquisite form before being exposed to the high firing temperature not only once but for a couple of times. Still, I am beautiful, am I not?

While he deliberately glazed me to be satin white,

I turned out to be attractively freckled, portraying the harsh environment in which I was made. He adores me the most not that I am merely his work, but he sees the resilience, and self-expression with no egoism through me as he gazes at my defective features.

In a world where so many of us are striving to be loved or be understood, we are obliged to start with our very self. To choose to do so is a way of showing resistance to any cranny appearing unwantedly on our surface. As we are all beautiful just because of being imperfect, aren't we?





CRITICAL WHAT? CRITICISE WHO?

By Alisa Tian



Once upon a time, when I was a first-year international student newly arrived in Sydney, I found myself faced with so many challenges. I could not understand Australian English, my exam skills did not work here, even making friends was not easy because I couldn't catch up with the local students in a conversation.

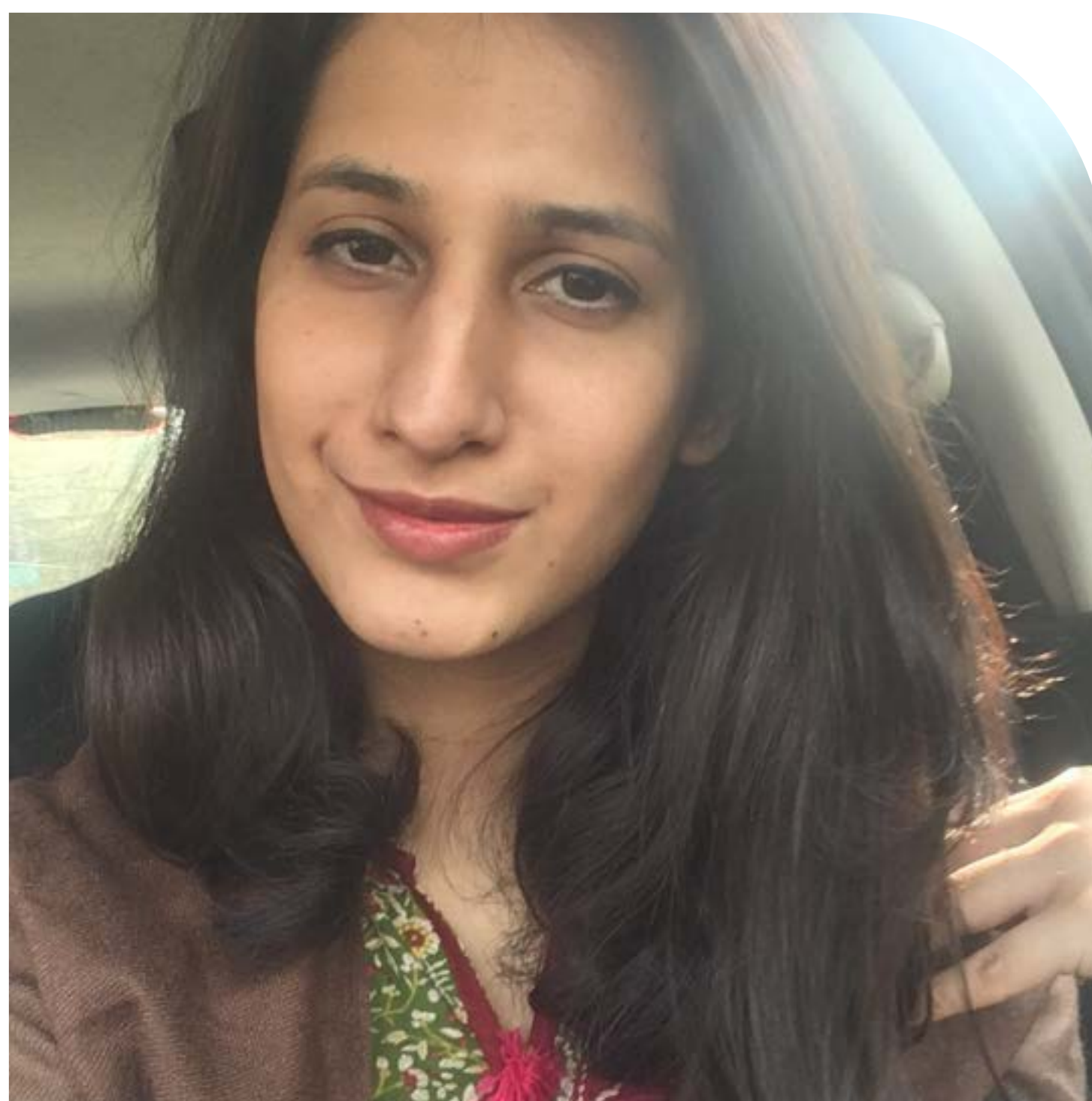
One of my biggest challenges was critical thinking. When I was told by my tutor that my essay was not critical enough, my first response was: Critical what? Criticise who? My prior 18-years education experience in China had taught me to respect the seniors, which included authoritative figures like scholars. How could I possibly criticise their work?

What was even worse was that everyone else seemed to know this notion, which made me feel like a fool. It took me lots of guts and an almost-failed course result to finally ask my tutor: what is critical thinking? And his reply was extremely helpful and liberating. Since then, my critical thinking skill started to grow, and I started to have more confidence in seeking help.

Fast forward to today, I am a translation practitioner, teacher and starting researcher. In my past 16 years studying and working here at UNSW, I have seen too many students struggling and academically frustrated with the idea of critical thinking. My story will aim to deliver strong messages to the students and academics in the community to promote mutual understanding and growth.

ONE SUBMIT BUTTON

By Rameen Zahra



As a Pakistani woman in her 30s, eight years out of school, four years out of work and a toddler in tow I used to think the best days of my life had already passed me by and things would only go downhill from there...but one fine day – like lightning strikes – I found myself fully motivated to turn my life around. It was as if something had changed in me overnight. I still remember I woke up one bright morning in June 2020 and despite things looking abysmal due to the pandemic that had gripped the world, I suddenly saw a world filled with opportunities, lights and colours all blinking like a bright neon sign on a dark, seemingly never-ending road. I knew my stop had arrived and it was calling out for me!

That day, sitting in Pakistan, I applied for a postgraduate degree at UNSW – an idea I'd never found enough courage to execute since many years until that point, but that had kept scratching at the back of my mind all this time. It took me 30 minutes from the start of the application until I pressed the Submit button. I remember I'd kept a positive mindset in the ensuing weeks and like the first ray of sunshine after years of grey skies a day came when I received an email saying, "Congratulations, Rameen Zahra". The rest, as they say, was history. But to be fair, to me that day brought the start of a much-awaited future.



THE STORY OF THREE SISTERS

By Fatima Iqbal



'It's another girl'-made my mother burst in tears and she stayed on mute for years and years. She could speak, but she chose not to. She had a voice but refused to let it out. She was always cursed for giving birth to three girls. My grandfather always wanted son of his son, which made us deprived of his love in our childhood.

My relatives always say this to my father 'why you are sending your daughters to school. Eventually they are going to get married and then it will be a waste of money. Teach them how to cook food or wash dishes and dirty clothes of a man'. I am not mute; I have a voice. I can speak and tell everyone being a girl is not a curse. This story is not about me, this story is of 796 million women who are cursed for being a girl.

I grew up in a middle-class family and knew my father can hardly pay our school fees and bring food for us to eat. We never demanded any expensive clothes, gadgets, not even meccas from him. At the end of every month, when there is still time for his paycheck, we used to eat less so that we should not be out of food. All cursed us that if we were boys, we could help our father in earning money. We knew that studying harder than anybody else was the only chance to get out from the hardships of being in this culture. Me and my sisters hide ourselves behind the books. Hiding ourselves into the ocean of books made us exceptional three sisters in whole family with wisdom and courage. We are proud three doctor sisters and daughters of our proud parents.

I am of the same gender as Joan of Arc and Mary Shelley who are the girls who made history. I am from the religion where Prophet (PBUH) loved his daughter more than his sons and who gave birth to sons like Hussain who made Islamic history. I am from the same country where Fatima Jinnah stood along her brother to make a separate country, Pakistan.

And still people say girls are curse, why do they not put their brains to books instead of good looks. Girls do, more than a perfect body with a pretty hair do. After all we cannot imagine the world without a woman, if she does not exist, the world does not exist. So, a girl child is a blessing to the world and not a curse as she builds the world.

GOING AGAINST THE TIDE

By Toyin Abdulsalam



After my bachelor's degree I was thinking of how I struggled through school up to this point, looking at the situation in Nigeria. Something became clear to me, I had to go against the tide, and it must be something not dependent on Nigeria and I knew this will take an extreme determination to do.

Few years down the line, I found something I was interested in "Bioinformatics and Data Science", with no background in computer science, statistics, or molecular biology, but coming from Agric Engineering background, I began to teach myself computer programming, I started reading and taking online courses in molecular biology and bioinformatics. That same year, my employer employed a new bioinformatician and there you go! Opportunity meets preparation. At this point I had a very good job by Nigeria standard, but I had to make a choice to go the way life has turned out to be or to go against it and take a risk. The next day I turn in my letter of resignation and started this new position and in two weeks I had proved myself and gotten the job. After 6 productive years working as a bioinformatician, I decide I wanted to do a PhD, this was the most difficult decision for me to make. The following year, I applied and got the PhD Scientia Scholarship for a PhD in Psychiatry with specialization in bioinformatics and statistical genetics. I made a complete turnaround in my academics, I went against the norm, I went against the tide.



I'M MYSELF ONLY MYSELF

By Salma Merhebi



Writing is a tool for personal growth, but it can be challenging to write about yourself. Your story begins when you start your adventure in discovering yourself. To know who you are, you must find your belonging.

I was fresh out of school, embarking on my adulthood journey, when I found myself terrified at the thought of identity and belonging. I felt lost, it's not that I've taken a wrong turn on some desolate road, I lost myself. I was drowning into questions occupying my mind. I am Lebanese but I was always looking for my tribe in the Lebanese society.

I am Australian but I don't fully fit into the Australian community.

I love writing and social work, but paradoxically I'm pursuing a PhD in Chemical Engineering. I'm Muslim, I wear Hijab, but I'm kind of awkward to strict religious people and too religiously restricted to non-believers.

I'm pretty into politics, but not enough to become an activist.

I travelled to five countries, and I haven't found myself in any.

My life is full of contradictions and uncertainties: Who am I? Where do I fit?

"What you seek is seeking you." Yes, the answers we seek are buried within our heart.

What if the longing I feel is an invitation to belong to myself, coming home to myself, being secure with myself, relying on my own decisions and beliefs?!

I'm Salma and I'm myself, only myself!

LEARNING THAT I HAVE WHITE PRIVILEGE

By Liam Cheney



I would like to share an ongoing journey of self-discovery. A journey of learning about an element of life that is rarely spoken about between those that have it, and oppresses those without it. I am referring to, white privilege. "Inherent advantages" were the two main words that surprised me when I learnt the definition of white privilege. My parents taught me to accept all peoples' and I was far from a racist. But, I never knew invisible systems were actively conferring dominance of those with European ancestry.

My journey begun with a love for bush walking. As I explored and realised the complexity that created the land, my respect grew for the sensational understandings that First Nation people hold. Over the years I met and heard the stories of many First Nation people. Sadly, I also learned more of their reality. I say "their" because I realised more often than not, we are judged based on a value we cannot control, our race. My white privilege reaffirmed that I was a part of a system that socially include me. I started to notice privilege in a range of situations. In a simple example, whenever I needed a band aid, they were available to match my skin tone.

Today, I realise it is not the job of the disadvantaged to forget their emotions and calmly educate about white privilege. Instead, recognition can begin through empathetic and compassionate dialogue. I would like to start this by openly acknowledging my own white privilege.

HUSTLE TO WIN CHALLENGES





I FINALLY SPOKE!

By Pallavi Srivatsava



Most of my life I haven't talked about this. It's still hard but I have finally gathered the courage to speak up. I'm a childhood domestic violence survivor. I must have been 6 years old when I was beaten up the first time. Throughout my childhood, I was scared to go home from school every day. I would get slapped, dragged and thrown across a room many times, for very silly menial reasons. The hardest one must be when I had my hands tied up behind my back, held from my feet and dunked in a water tank upside down for 10 seconds or so, then taken out and while I was still gasping for air, it was repeated.

My parents didn't do much to save my childhood from this repetitive trauma, my sisters would try to help, and they would get beaten up as well. All this coming from someone I looked up to for guidance and protection. Mental health is not considered important in most parts of India and I didn't realise the kind of impact these experiences had on me my whole life, until recently when I heard stories about other domestic violence victims. I only hope my story can encourage others to speak up as well.

In my case, the main reason behind this I think was very toxic patriarchy, where in my family the men were way superior, they could treat the women of the house however they wanted, and women, including me, would be implored to stay quiet to protect the family honour. I now realise that someone like that doesn't deserve any honour and my mental peace is more important. I'm glad that I got through it and despite having a childhood like that, I am very proud to now be where I am and have made so many meaningful relationships at this point.

I have stayed quiet for a lot of time, but I've learned that speaking up about your trauma liberates you. Hence, I want to share my story to encourage others like me to talk about their life.



SHIP TO UNIVERSITY

By Joshua McCluskey



I was born aboard an evangelical missionary ship in Danish waters, and spent my first 10 years living on the ship as it travelled circa North and South Africa. Aged 10, my family moved to Whangaparaoa, New Zealand. As the son of missionaries, I was raised with a dogmatic set of beliefs. While most of these beliefs were religious in nature, they also extended to Western supremacism and racism.

Aged 16, I escaped an increasingly abusive home and left school to work and support myself. I worked a variety of unskilled jobs for five years and became yet more dogmatic in my beliefs due to the echo chamber I had found myself in. Aged 21, I reached breaking point and was desperate to escape the negativity and anger that my life had become. I enlisted in the Royal New Zealand Navy where I served for 3 years. During my military experience, I worked closely with people with many different ethnic and cultural backgrounds for the first time. I quickly realised that my abhorrent views were not based in reality and determined to leave them behind.

At 24, I left the Navy to attend University. Four years later, I submitted an award winning Honours thesis in Biochemistry, and am now a third year PhD candidate. I feel immensely fortunate to have profoundly enlightened the chemical nature of life. I hope to use my career and experiences to extend that enlightenment to other people trapped in negativity by difficult upbringings.



SMALL GESTURES AND TOLERANCE

By Ria Asih



I am a Muslim woman living for almost 30 years in Indonesia, who had no idea about being highly privileged. I could easily perform congregational prayers, access abundant halal products, and gain public acceptance. The acts of religious persecution toward Christians or other minorities never bothered me because I was not impacted.

Moving to Australia in 2016 made me anxious. I only knew Australia from mainstream media and people's stories. I believed that as a big city, Sydney had ignorant people, intolerant environments, and a vibrant nightlife that did not concur with my belief. There was nothing scarier than losing the privilege I had in my home country.

Yet over days, I kept discovering that Sydney has always welcomed me in the warmest way possible. Friends and lecturers tolerated my praying times, which a test once was rescheduled due to the Friday prayer. After the Christchurch attack, strangers offered to walk with me and guide me while I was praying in public places. I was especially moved by the UNSW students' march in front of the main library to speak against racism. I felt safe and respected.

It put me in shame that I had never done such to the minority groups in my home country. I learnt about tolerance alright, but it was a thing I never applied. I came to realize that it was not enough to not bother. In building tolerance, small gestures do matter.



THE ARDUOUS JOURNEY AND A DREAM

By Md Badiuzzaman (Bodi)



I grew up in a coastal village in a remote part of Bangladesh; it is so remote that electricity reached there in 2016! I grew up in a small house made of wood and Nipa-palm, watching the onslaught of coastal storms. In childhood, I could not buy a football due to my poverty. There was minimal opportunity, but I had big dreams, and to study was the only way to catch them. My downfall was inevitable because I had a severe injury, and my right leg lost normal functionality.

Along with poverty, my physical disability brought more hardship. I was facing discrimination; even the girl I used to like called me lame! I was unable to deal with all of these and ultimately affected my secondary school exam. I passed with an average score, whereas I was a bright student. Then I had restarted my life with enthusiasm, scored among the top 10 in the next exam. Then I started a job and studied together as I had no way to continue studying without earnings. Later I obtained a bachelor's and a master's in engineering. Now I am leading a few organizations where 200 people are employed. It will be a long story I wish to share later.

I believe poverty and disability might be an extra challenge, but they cannot stop the dreamers. People having a big dream and perceives incredible things; they will run, and once will succeed.



KNOCK ON THE DOOR

By Sandi Laaksonen-Sherrin



Everyone's experience and perceptions are different. For me, my biggest fear is a knock at the door.

I'm a military spouse.

When my husband is away with the Australian Defence Force (ADF), which could be 6 months each year, the worst thing someone can do to stress me out is to drop in unannounced and knock at my door. The reason is that in the ADF, if a person is killed in action or in training, the way that families are notified is by a knock at the door. A bereavement team, with a senior officer, a nominated friend or colleague of your loved one, and a chaplain will be standing there to give the family the tragic news.

Over 85,000 Aussie families are defence families. They have similar experiences, not to mention juggling everything back home while loved ones are away. And it's not very well understood by the general public. I'm hoping that by sharing my story today it gives a glimpse into that world: the benefits and costs of serving second-hand. There are impacts on our health, careers, relationships, housing and location. But there's also a wealth of opportunities resulting from this unique community.

A friend recently asked me: "Why do you do it? Why put up with the disruption and stress?"

It's true, defence families are different. We generally don't sign up for service ourselves. Yet, we must serve in a way to support our loved one and the ADF. Let me tell you more...



DAUGHTER OF DISPOSSESSION

By Raisa Islam



My birth and existence are political. Growing up a young Bengali woman in a house where gender-based violence was normalised, being apolitical was a luxury. Interwoven into the microcosm of our family life were aftershocks of a 200-year colonisation and the ensuing brutal genocide, erasing my ancestor's verbal history, song, and culture.

I drowned in layers of oppression outside home life, being an outspoken brown, Muslim woman in a post-9/11 world that rewarded palatable women with proximity to whiteness. At home, I grappled with parents clinging to misogynistic values, residues of colonial rule in a land too fatigued for feminist revolution. Bangladesh was barely coping with wounds post-independence.

I cannot remember a time before my hyperawareness of injustice and suffering in the world. I assumed everyone's upbringing was as deeply wounding as mine. My maturity and self-sacrificing nature was praised, in a time when my peers experimented freely. These unnatural personality traits came from routinely managing my parent's outbursts of rage and tending to the fine cracks in our "happy family" façade, lest the outside world see our shame. My empathy and silence wasn't optional, it was in-built.

The glorification of strength and resilience in brown women detracts from the reality of our suffering. It arises from living in an unjust system made without us in mind. In adulthood, my energy is consumed by unlearning the silence and shame, transforming it into poetry and dance. I'm a proud Bangladeshi woman. A daughter of dispossession, determined to advocate for the vulnerable.



EMBRACING MYSELF

By Kevin Limanta



Last year, I suffered from depression and I am happy to share that I am in a much better place. The year 2020 was definitely a trying year for me as it was the year that I faced the lowest point of my life. Summarised in just one sentence, 2020 would be the year where I started to embrace myself.

I have always had a feeling that I am not really at home. Home here means someplace (or someone!) I can be myself at/with. I later mistook this feeling as the urge to find a partner, and thus began my search for that someone who I hoped would fill in the missing void.

It only became worse to the point where I got suicidal. I sought help but I didn't feel much better. I blamed myself mostly for feeling that way and I started questioning my decision a lot.

Fast forward to one fateful day, everything started to click. I somehow could link my insecurities to my lack of self-love. I demanded a lot from myself that I forgot to have fun once in a while.

I began exploring myself by going to rural NSW to reorient myself. I took a few weeks off to ponder more about who I think I am and ask myself some of the hard questions I have been avoiding answering. I came back to Sydney with a different perspective, and I have been doing a lot of things that I'm happy with ever since.

HUMANS OF UNSW





My First Hour in Sydney

By Vaishnavi Mutha



I landed on the Sydney International Airport – filled with nervousness, excitement, dreams, hopes and homesickness. I was going to take a university provided drop off service to Redfern, where my uncle was supposed to pick me. As I had just entered the country, I did not have a phone number to inform my uncle that I had landed, and the Airport Wi-fi did not seem to work. I looked around and found an Indian salesman at the Vodafone center staring at me. He realized I was a panicked, worried and about to break down. He was courteous enough to come forward, ask me what was wrong and offered to let me use his phone to make a call.

The bus service dropped me a block from Redfern station. I asked some people on the street for directions and started walking towards the station to meet my uncle. I had three suitcases and a bag pack, and I had to cross a signal on my way to the station. While crossing in such a mess with hands full of luggage, I accidentally dropped everything right in the middle of the road and the signal was about to turn green. I was TERRIFIED!!!! An Australian gentleman came forward, helped me pick up my stuff and cross the road. He let me use his phone to contact my uncle and stayed with me till I had safely united with my uncle.

In the first hour of entering the country – 2 people helped me. One from the country I came and one from the country I came to.



Family, Friends and Food

By Rupal Bharadwaj



India is about the 3Fs. Family, Friends and Food. This is not something that makes us different from other cultures, but what makes us the same. I love interacting with other cultures and learn about the language (but I mostly remember the food. Big Foodie Alert!). However, when we start talking about our childhood, teen years, Uni life, family, or friends, we have the same story. For the good or the bad, when we talk through experiences, even with miles between us, we can understand each other. I once met a girl from United states and all we talked for two hours was Mental Health.

It's when I hear news about discrimination and Human Rights violation, I wonder when did we forget 'Humanity' is above all, your religion, your language, your race? And then I learned, it's not just India, every country has their own struggle. And we need to start with awareness, we need to worry, we need to feel sad and then we need to go out, and start behaving the way we want the world to behave.

I am thankful that this generation listens. Every time someone asks me right pronunciation for my name, I am in awe. It is not because I mind people saying my name wrong. But for the fact that they want to learn about me. Because once that conversation starts, we can talk about so many things, culture, beliefs and oh-so-mighty the things we have in common.



Pursuit of Education

By Danladi Yunana



Education is an essential tool that empowers people to access opportunities in life. Little wonder, the promise that education should be a birth right not be a privilege. Unfortunately, cultural traits are making this promise a mirage for millions around the world. My story is a reflection on how cultural traits can bury an aspiration for the pursuit of education. I come from a small village by the River Benue in Central Nigeria. Traditionally, we are a fishing community. There is a perception, and rightly so, that if a child does not acquire fishery capabilities at an early age, they would never be able to do so. So, at an early age, I started helping my parents and building my fishery skills: paddling canoes, hoisting sails and casting nets.

But this comes in the way of attending school. The generational involvement of my family in fishing conferred a cultural trait that resist transition to alternative paths and that includes education. In my formative age, I always swing the lead to stay out of fishing and join my peers to school. My destiny changed, thanks to climate induced shrinkage of the river and depleted fish count that forced my parent to seek new path forward.

My story is not uncommon. A lot of dreams are usurped or stolen by cultural traits including gender preference and nomadic lifestyle. My personal experience inspires me to bring to fore the conversation on dreams buried by the persistence of certain cultural traits in our world.



Write your own story

By Suhyun Kweon



At the age of 13, I felt like my world was so fabulous. I had many close friends and had just met my first crush! Everything appeared perfect, until my parents suggested I live in Australia for a year. I would learn English and experience a whole new world! Without much of a thought, I accepted the move, and one month later, I arrived here in Australia. I still remember the first time I went to a shopping centre, everyone looked so different to me and no one could speak Korean.

I felt alone and feared that people would be racist. I had only just unpacked my luggage, but my mind was heavy with dread at the thought of living in Australia by myself. Ironically, when I went to school, everyone looked after me and cared about me because I was new to Australia. They helped me to break my negative perspective about being a foreigner. They made me feel welcome. During my past ten years in Australia, I have interacted with many amazing people from all different parts of the world. I used to absolutely hate the idea of learning a new language but now, I am so fortunate that I can now speak English and communicate to all these amazing people in a common language. Without testing the edges of our world view through seeking new experiences we'll never know what our story holds. It is up to you to write your own story, and it's up to you to decide whether you want to make it an adventurous, happy, sad or inspiration story.



Being Culturally Intelligent

By Emmy Lau



Studying and living in four countries have made a cultural intelligent person and I love to understand and get to know different people with their different cultural background. I moved to New Zealand alone at age 14 and I did not feel overwhelmed at all as I assume I was too young to feel scared to move to another country by myself. In New Zealand which shares totally different culture with my home country, Hong Kong. Kiwis are very friendly and relaxed, work life balance as their lifestyle. I remembered the first cultural shock happened to me was Kiwis would just walk on concrete with barefoot and it was normal to them just randomly sit on the street, it was so fascinating, and I would share these experiences to my parents on phone calls. Besides, at school we had cooking classes and I noticed my classmates do not rinse the plates after scrubbing plates and cutlery with soaps. I was like is this even possible to eat soap? Later, I have slowly adopted the Kiwis lifestyle and I started to feel more distinct with my home country and at one point I was trying to hide my Asian culture and was completely 'white-washed' as I was living with a kiwi family and all my friends were kiwi as well. This caused a lot of misunderstanding and started developing a lot of issues with my parents as they were quite conservative but I have adopted a Kiwi mind-set. We argued on phone calls and I felt distant with my parents, however, they realized the changes of me and were willing to adopt my way of thinking which I really appreciated as it was totally not easy for them. Through my story I would like to share that do not hide and lose your own culture but instead infuse and combine them.



Learning Australia

By Christine Xab Castor



I belong to a long line of farmers who tilled the flat earth with their hands and grow seeds that sustain many hungry mouths through several monsoon seasons. On the contrary, I seem to have found in my heart a passion to explore the vertical steep earth.

Shortly after landing in Australia for my postgrad last year, I discovered rock climbing. Within a few seasons, I have been welcomed into this community of diverse and inclusive climbers who share the same passion of caring for the great steep outdoors.

After spending a year of climbing, I realise that a certain language unites all climbers from every corner of this world. In the short span of the time I have climbed, I learned that climbers understand 'give', 'take', and 'I got you' as words that bring us through finishing a journey of trust. When climbers leave the level ground, the journey of trusting the rock, trusting our bodies, and most especially trusting our community begins. It really doesn't matter where we are from, we all understand each other through these same calls.

In climbing, I have learned to place my life into the hands of strangers turned friends to catch me safely and softly. Without this trust, it is almost impossible to move forward in a climb. Aside from connecting with others, I have also learned much about access discussions and the nuanced issues that Australia has regarding Aboriginal heritage and respecting the Earth that we all share. During one of our climbing trips, we were confronted into a conversation about respecting the heritage and significance of Aboriginal sites.

Climbing around Australia has brought me closer to myself, to my community, and to the great big Earth that we all share.



Unity in Diversity

By Saurabh Kaura



A Strong Believer of "Unity in Diversity" and "Respect for Cross-Cultural Differences"

Born and brought up in a highly multicultural and democratic country, I have always resonated with the key theme of India which focuses on "Unity in Diversity". India is a country with numerous religions, languages, traditions, backgrounds and cultures. But, what really unites us together is that we are Indians.

This particular notion also plays a vital role in our life. We might have different ideologies or opinions in the same room on the same topic. The discussion should still go on. Any constructive discussion helps us to understand both the sides of the coin. That is one of the key advantages of a balanced and open discussion. It also helps to create an analytical mindset where you start to understand the simple fact that our society exists of different people with different kinds of behaviours.

While having such a discussion, you are free to ask tough questions to others without any fear. That's what helps us to realise our key areas of strengths and weaknesses. In the recent past, India seems to have been losing a healthy discussion to some extent. That's why I always vouch for respect towards all the communities within any country so that none of them feel neglected and are given equal respect. They are not judged by their nationality, religion, race or gender. The main point here is that a healthy discussion should never stop in any country and there should be adequate bodies to hold our work accountable, starting from the level of a Prime Minister/President to that of a clerk working in any organisation.

Glimpses from the night..





Behind the Success

Master of Ceremony

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