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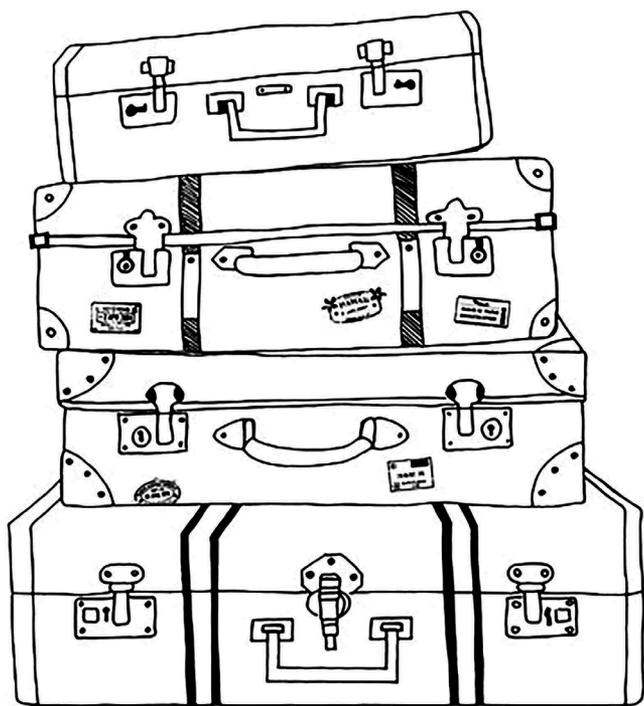
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Fredericton Workshop



Salar Ghatta

Eat, Drink, Write

One early morning in autumn, we sat down in a classroom, myself and fourteen participants, all newcomers having found ourselves in this beautiful, open, cold country at this specific moment — and such a connection (temporary but miraculous in the synchronicity it manifests), especially when it is productive, reminds me always of that mystic force which takes the many million crabs of Christmas Island on a weeklong journey from the forest to the ocean, which culminates in an act of creation and ensures the continuation of life (all to say that, to me, our coming together appeared to have a purpose that was religious without being religious) — all of us speaking English as a second language, all willing to verbalize the strangeness of our moves on this Earth, and we discussed food, food that we knew and food that we did not know, and the discussion brought us, like the labyrinthine corridors of the Cultural Center leading to the classroom — a comparison somewhat cliché but not untrue — to the root of the Root, memories of childhoods, people, homes left behind, where we did not linger long (since food not only carries one back but moves one forward, as on days when nothing can keep the winter blues away and the winter blues keep one away from everything until one engages in the act, no doubt therapeutic, of preparing and eating a warm meal), and we kept going, thinking and speaking and writing about food with familiar concepts and foreign words, but aware that just as food is given meaning by place, it too gives meaning to place, what was thought and spoken and written, although tinted by nostalgia, was never without hope — hope for futures to be met, connections to be made, homes to be built as each one of us tries to replicate the tastes of dishes we know and explore the ones we do not (the meal we shared on that day at lunchtime hopefully one such experience), and the hope, too, that, regardless of the place, wherever we lay down our roots, we may grow.



Pratibha Chaudry

Spices in Life

I walk into the kitchen
For my turn to cook,
Pounding the spices together for the flavour,
Blending together cumin, cardamom and fennel.

The aroma fills my heart,
Its addition to food is an art,
Bringing together the lentil stew and the tomato soup,
Flavours bursting through the pot.

As I stand to serve my dear ones,
The blend of sweet and sour bursts on my palate
Reminds me of childhood's mischiefs,
Struggles with my little sister over scrumptious dessert.

Moving to this new land,
I carry my spice box as an inheritance to cherish my roots.
And as an opportunity to share the treasure with my friends,
Relishing the new delicacies with some old condiments.



Rashel Norouzi

My Dear Guest

I invited you to my house. I have been preparing food since morning; now I am ready to serve you a meal with all these ingredients, plus love, of course. I am waiting for you at the table, looking at the clock; you have never been late. I can feel my heartbeat inside my chest. Yes, I am worried. I remember the time when I was a guest at your house. You used to wait for me to come back from school; I am sorry if I was late sometimes, if I made you wait, made you worry. When I finally got home, you always welcomed me with your beautiful smile. Now I am an adult, I take responsibility for my life, and I have a home of my own and am waiting for you with a frown on my face. Am I able to wear a smile, as you used to when I was a child? The sound which I am eager to hear, the most beautiful, is the doorbell, and the sound of your kind voice. As the smell of food spreads in my dining room, I think of your food, your kindness, and your happiness when you served us a meal. I fly to the door when I hear the doorbell.



Adios

Writing about my relationship with food is a hard topic for me. But I thought long and hard, days on end, about what food means to me, when I think of food, what memories come back to me, whether they are sad or happy memories.

I think back to my childhood, starting with hazy memories of rolling in the mud at the foothills of the volcanic Virunga mountains with soil so rich and dark, to the years we spent in a small town not too far from my hometown (it too, with rich soils, so much to offer and an abundance of affordable fruits and vegetables). Here we sought refuge and settled to restart our lives.

I remember the six-year-old me walking through the market on Saturday mornings, holding onto my father's hand. With smiles we greeted every vendor. There was only a handful of vendors, each with a specific product. After all it was a small town.

“Good morning, Mama Faith. We would like to buy three clusters of your fresh bananas please,” I would say with my little voice. These very sweet little bananas also known as Kabalagala were our second favourite snack. A whole bunch would never last a week in our household — a household of only five people.

Kabalagala, once ripe, was used to make another one of my favourite snacks: pancakes, which later contributed to an embarrassing moment in my early teenage years. . . .

Here I was sitting by the window in English class, fully distracted by the aroma of fried pancakes coming through my window. An aroma every salivary gland in my mouth was and still is very much aware of.

Unable to think straight, I sent a note to my best friend, who conveniently sat in the back. (I was in the front. Definitely not convenient at all.)

As soon as the bell for afternoon break rang, we bolted past the back entrance that stated: “NO PUPILS ALLOWED.” Over the fence we jumped and went on to follow the aroma that filled the air.

And after a while, we walked back to school with a bag of pancakes, smiles on our faces, munching on that sweet piece of heaven, not a care in the world.

“Hurrrrry, ruuuuun,” Joyce, a mutual friend, screamed through the window.

Here we were, hearts pounding, sprinting straight for our classroom only to find the headmistress addressing the whole class about the upcoming final exams. Even now, twenty years later, we still regret our decision (or should I say, temptation) to follow the aroma.

Five years later, so much had changed. We had moved to the city. I was attending a boarding school 380km away from home. Each school term lasted three months, so we (the students) spent three months (sometimes, even more) away from our loved ones.

We were more than delighted — to say the least — when it came to the end of each term. Our favourite school break was the Christmas holidays, the longest holiday of the year. We even had a nickname for the Christmas holidays: Kulisa amaani, “to eat with strength” when translated literally, meaning “to eat a lot.”

The bus rides to school we dreaded, but the very thought of bus rides back home caused a frisson — you know, the kind that sends shivers of excitement through your body.

Yes, I missed my family too, but even more so, that barbequed chicken and plantain at the Lukaya bus stop, the thought of which made my stomach grumble. For 3 months, I had saved some of my pocket money just for that moment. I prayed for a spot close to the bus driver, a nice, cool and kind bus crew, and I prayed to show the right sense of humour to charm them into making that stop.

The moment the bus made that stop — the only stop I had been waiting for since we set off — I dashed to the windows, screaming, “barbequed chicken and plantain, please.” Three or four vendors crowded my window. I scanned through the pieces of chicken and picked one. Dinner was served. Here it was, the long-anticipated moment.

Comfortably I settled in my seat, held my chicken, and took a bite. Yum!

From the hair on my head to my toes, the very core of my being felt the avalanche of flavours — flavours like no other.

For supper, I thought (and yes, there was still room), I would have a rolex: Chapati, eggs, tomatoes, peppers and onions. A delicacy, irreplacable.

Adios for now, till the day I get to taste enkonko ye Lukaya ne Rolex again.

Youjun Fu

At Dawn, You Need to be Ignited

“Please, please, don’t wake me up, mom. Let me snuggle for another ten minutes.”

Every morning, at dawn, when my mother was trying to pull me out of my beloved bed, I would always beg her in some way like this, so sincerely.

I never want to get up early. More precisely, I even don’t want to wake up, especially on some cold Sunday morning. But mostly, I have to.

When I was a child, I lived in a remote small village. Every day, I had to get up early and go to school on time. Just like for many sleepyheads, the “another ten minutes” was an important experience for me. It was all the more enjoyable, because I knew that, in ten minutes, I would be ignited by “the soup” cooked by mom, with love.

The so-called soup has a well-known name: dough drop and assorted vegetables soup. It is probably not the official name, but I believe you can easily find it in any Chinese restaurant. It is also one of the most unnoticeable foods in ordinary Chinese families, because it is always there at the table, the first thing you eat when you sit down without being conscious of it. To me, more than a dish, it has been an igniter for many years, starting me up every new day.

Many years later, I started living on my own. Cooking is an essential skill for anyone who lives independently. For me, too, that was the case. The soup was one of the first dishes I wanted to learn to cook. I surfed the Internet, I asked my friends, and I tried it in all kinds of restaurants. But I did not find the flavour of the one my mother had used to make for me. Until one day, I got it back finally, in my son.

In fact, the soup is very easy to cook. All you need are a teaspoon of plant oil, a small pinch of minced ginger, some salt, a green onion, a tomato, an egg, a cup of wheat flour, a bowl of water, and some chopped leaves from any vegetable you like. For some extra flavour, you can also put in a few drops of sesame oil, and chopped parsley as decoration. Of course, you always need the ten minutes.

Ten minutes with love.

Since the day my son started to go to school, I also started to cook the soup for him. Why? Why would I cook this soup for him? Because it is delicious, it is easy, and it is quick, only ten minutes for something that fills one with warmth. It also contains something essential of which I was not aware at first.

“WOW, delicious, dad! It is the most delicious soup in the whole universe, isn’t it?” my son exclaimed one day.

Amazed by his words, my heart became full of pride. At that moment, I so missed my mom. I remembered myself, as a child, crying for the soup. Also, I realized I was igniting another young heart, or perhaps I should say, I had done so already.

The soup, the love, the sense of a family, which were transferred from my mom, through me, to my son, have been igniting us for decades. I believe they will remain with us in the future.

You must have your own igniter at dawn. Whatever it is, just keep its flame raging forever.



Food and Nostalgia

“What is the first word that comes to your mind when you think of food?” The teacher put this question forward during the session “Eat, Drink, Write — A Life Workshop for Newcomers to Canada” in a classroom at MCAF.

“Mum,” “honey,” “salt,” “nutrition” . . . all kinds of answers.

When my turn came, I said, “hungry.” Everyone in the classroom burst into laughter. For me, it was a true answer inspired by my previous life in my home country. I was not good at cooking, and not interested in it either. I know this is not in keeping with the stereotypical image of a traditional Chinese woman. As a woman with my own career, I used to be too busy with my work to be able to cook. Also, in China, you can easily find delicious food that is to your taste — the food tasting not much different from the one you grow up eating at home. There are so many restaurants. You can order your meal online as well, and the delivery is so quick that the food is hot when you receive it. Sometimes I used to wonder why people spent the whole afternoon preparing a meal and finishing it within half an hour. “Why not use my time towards more meaningful activities?” I often asked.

Then I came to Canada. Everything here was just fantastic: the air was so clean and fresh; people all around were nice and friendly; the summer temperature was so comfortable; the autumn saw so many beautiful colours. . . . There was one thing that I missed, though: the food from back home.

So, the word “hungry” is not enough. I shall add another: “nostalgia”.

Yes, I miss the food from home so much. I miss the dumpling (Jiaozi in Chinese), not only the taste, the nutritiousness, but also the happiness, and the moments of chatting with family members who gathered for a meal, and of course, for preparing it! I miss hotpot. In chilly days, you sit together with your friends in front of the heating furnace and the hotpot. You can boil whatever you like in the pot: mutton, beef, seafood, mushrooms, leafy greens, or even eggs, noodles. You talk to your friends; your laughter gets through the vapour over the hotpot, making everything even warmer!

Now I would like to change my answer to “nostalgia.”

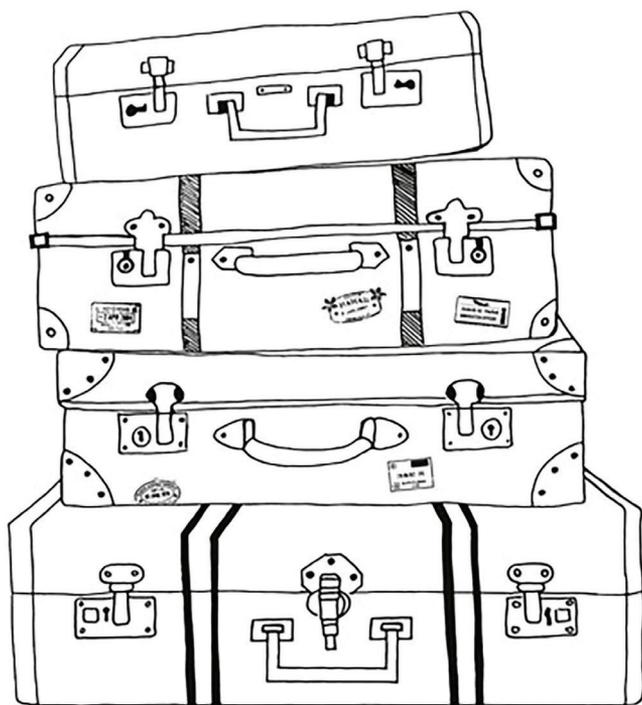
Pupusas

When I eat pupusas, I think about the way we make them back home. We use corn, pork, cheese and beans. Corn is a sacred food because it comes from Mother Earth. We are made of corn, and I believe it and remember the stories I read in the holy book of the Mayan people: the Popol Vuh. We are the people of the corn, even though I am not of Mayan descent, but probably Aztec and Spaniard (and maybe Arab in between because of my long hair and beard).

Funny to remember those times in El Salvador, when I went to work and didn't have breakfast. I was living with my dad who wasn't a good cook at the time. On my way to work, I was thinking about the place where to eat early in the morning. And then, it was there: the pupusería. To my luck, it wasn't very crowded. I had already made my mind: I wanted my pupusas revueltas (with everything: pork, cheese and beans). So I lived for more one day to do the same thing if it was necessary. I knew I wasn't going to learn how to make pupusas, but I could count on somebody else to do it for me. What a lazy life!



Halifax Workshop



Arrivals and Departures: Objects, Memories, and Transitions

On August 23rd, 2019, I was welcomed into a space with 13 participants who were on journeys of their own. During the one-day Life Writing Workshop, titled *Arrivals and Departures: Objects, Memories and Transitions* and held at the Canadian Museum of Immigration at Pier 21 in Halifax, Nova Scotia, participants brought objects with them to embark on the expected writing process. For some, it was a new experience; for others, it was a practice that they thought about and wanted to explore. As we began our introductions, I had a sense that participants wanted to come full circle with the things they had brought to the workshop — objects they had held on to through their travels.

Grounded in contemplative practices of storytelling and story-making, the poems from Halifax in this chapbook offer you a glimpse of our day as we travelled to our inward selves to tell transition stories with clarity from places of authenticity. As our day progressed we pieced together narratives: about a wedding photo of a marriage now just a distant memory; about a beaded bracelet worn so many times its signs of ageing tell a story where words seem inadequate; about an immigrant longing for the Caspian Sea but it is in this longing newness is born plunging her into a life of uncertainty and hope.

What I learned from the stories and communion in Halifax was how memories could give us the resilience we need to face discrimination, pain, hellos and goodbyes, and how things can forge our desire to understand ourselves in some of life's most broken moments. The things we carry with us from one move to another are things that do not make it to the downsized basket — the things that ground us and help us to make sense among the footprints of our lives.

May the memories of objects you hold dear and the stories inscribed in them ease you into the transitions of your life. May you be well, may your troubles all be small ones, and may you always find peace as you search to make meaning of being alive.

Thuy Kim Truc Nguyen

Wish

Is it the biggest and the most important thing in my life?
I don't know
The moment when that longing came
I just wanted to keep it
Have it —
Achieve it —

Not every wish can come true,
I am sure —
I know —
But I still wanted to keep that hope
Obligation or emotion
I had to choose.
Oh! I did not think about it
Because —
Depression and complication
No need for them to come
Again.

And
The rains will wash away the dirt,
Winds will blow away the dry leaves,
Autumn will repel the heat of summer,
And time will cool down hasty desires.

The wetness and the coldness like a hard slap.
Awake the dream —
Pain and bitterness —
I am awakened from the misperception.
Wish!

I even no longer could call it that



Longing

Missing but couldn't meet —
Grandma!

The wise words
I long to hear.
Gentle and virtuous face
I long to see.
Your rounded back
I long to hug.
Your tender smiles
I long to see.
One more time.

The desire is so strong
But the longing couldn't be right.
You were there, not there.
You were teaching me
And you are still teaching me.
In my dreams.

Grandma!
My love is still there.
And your love is still here
In my heart.



Ella W. Dodson

Wedding Portrait

Tattered wedding photograph, creased and dusty,
A pointillist memento of beginnings and changes.
Long ago, she buried the family wedding portrait in a drawer,
Cast aside, forgotten, banished when her husband left.
Unearthed from the detritus in the drawer,
In the annual fall cleaning before Yom Kippur.
The photo rests on a table, perhaps to be discarded,
Jettisoned, like the rest of his flotsam, into the River Lethe,
So, she could forgive him and continue her journey,
Forget the hurt, rage and tears, when he abandoned her,
Leaving her a stranger in an unknown country.
Old eyes consider timeworn Kodachrome, which captured her
 change in path,
The home wedding to a Canadian, and her betrothal to Canada.
In the centre, middle-aged bride in a shimmering sapphire gown,
Cradling a bouquet from her New Jersey garden,
Blush pink and coral lilies entwined with wild roses and trailing
 ivy.
Under a chuppah rippling in the breeze, bride and groom,
 embraced by teenagers,
Two daughters in pastel gowns and one son sporting T-shirt
 with his suit,
The bridal party surrounded by their families,
Celebrating love, toasting with flutes of champagne,
Sparkling with bubbles of hope,
New beginnings in the lush summer garden.
The wedding photograph, a keepsake ticket stub,
Memorializing a change in direction in her life's journey,
Her departure from home country and long career,
Leaving behind a daughter and most of her family, to begin again,
To sew a cross-cultural family quilt with new seams and fabric.
As her hands stroke the edges of the photo, she sees,
With husband gone, his presence faded, the photo reveals a
 pentimento,
The family quilt begun at the wedding, endures,
Patched and bound together by love and shared lives.

The husband's daughter remains by her side, loyal, loving
A mother now, and soon to be a Nova Scotia bride herself.
Her daughter, married now, still lives in New Jersey.
Her son in Canada until last year, moved to New Zealand for
love.

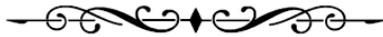
The photo is all of her children together
On the brink of their own journeys as adults through life.
She places the photo in an album, as a reminder,
Life is a journey of arrivals, departures, detours, pauses.
The direction of the journey is guided by love, sometimes loss,
sometimes chance.
The old wedding portrait, a memento,
A reminder of when she was brave enough to choose love.



Reza Omidvar

The Caspian Sea

The Caspian Sea remembers me
of its transparent green and blue.
I remember my father's toe
underwater, when I was a child,
and I could see them when he carried me in the water.
I remember the water was clear and warm
the good memory of my father; nature clear.
They are not available
my father and that nature so clear
where they linger, I may not know
And I miss them.
I cannot do anything for my father
but regretfully I could do something for
nature.
But I don't know anything.
only if the Caspian Sea
can take me
comfort me! heavenly.



Notes on Contributors

PRATIBHA CHAUDRY moved to Canada from Delhi, India and is passionate about exploring new experiences. She is a post-graduate in Business Management with a career in Technology Sales. Her passions are good old classic fiction, traveling and gourmet cooking.

ELLA W. DODSON moved from the United States to Halifax in 2008. She is a New York corporate lawyer who is also a Nova Scotia lawyer. She continues practicing corporate law part-time, teaches law and writes poetry. Her poems were published in *Open Heart Forgery*.

YOUJUN FU is an IT architect from China. He is the father of a lovely son, an adorable daughter, and the husband of a diligent wife. They came to Fredericton in 2018, hoping to enjoy life in a friendly, multicultural community.

YASMIN ABDUL MAJID lives in Bedford, NS with her four children, two cats, and eight fish. Yasmin enjoys many hobbies, and writing poems is a new one. It has been challenging to adjust to life in Canada. With the help of many people, they are happy to be here.

THUY KIM TRUC NGUYEN received a Bachelor in English Linguistics and Literature in 2013. She lived in the United States for three years before moving to Halifax with her family in 2017. For her, language is the key and books are the doors to a new world.

RASHEL NOROUZI was born and raised in Iran. Although her interest was literature, she earned a degree in Chemical Engineering from Azad University. She worked as an engineer, and as a Literature teacher. After immigrating to Canada, she was able to pursue his interest.

REZA OMIIDVAR was born in Rasht, adjacent to the Caspian Sea in northern Iran. Reza graduated from the Iran University of Science and Technology in Civil Engineering. After retiring, he took a trip to Canada where the beauties of Halifax reminded him of childhood memories.

CARLOS MORALES ROSALES was born in Juayua, El Salvador, in 1965. He has been writing poetry since 1987. Due to the political situation, he moved to Canada in 1991. He lives in Fredericton, where he participates in poetry readings and promotes Latin American poetry.

VANESSA SHEGE is a mother to a handsome 5 year old boy and an Educator working at Kinderland Infant Care Center. She was born in Goma -DRC and raised in Uganda. They moved to Canada in 2017. Her passion is working with children. She enjoys hiking, swimming, reading, and writing.

HELENA YANG was an Engineering Director in a multinational company headquartered in Luxembourg in the metallurgy industry. She is the mother of two kids. She is enjoying the change from Beijing, China to Fredericton, Canada with curiosity and is eager to learn new things in her new life.

