

The ARNIC Observer

The English-Speaking Union of the United States (ESUUS)

Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center (ARNIC)

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“The contribution of immigrants can be seen in every aspect of our national life. We see it in religion, in politics, in business, in the arts, in education, even in athletics and in entertainment. There is no part of our nation that has not been touched by our immigrant background.”

— John F. Kennedy

June is the Immigrant Heritage Month

I Learn America

THE USE OF WELL-CRAFTED STORIES has become a powerful force in society, believes Jean-Michel Dissard, filmmaker and I LEARN AMERICA project leader.

On May 30, June 7 and 14 Jean-Michel facilitated three workshops for the Andrew Romay New Immigrant Center (ARNIC). Drawing inspiration from the stories from the I LEARN AMERICA film, participants told their personal stories during community workshops to build bridges between themselves, their communities and their new land.

Participants learned how to structure their stories, - how to set a scene, describe their challenge and goals, and how they felt during the process.

The stories came out different: intimate, alternately humorous and alarming, and ultimately hopeful. With the right strategy, these stories have the potential to help people – teenagers and adults alike – connect with one another and help support a new generation of engaged new Americans.

For many participants it was the first experience of narrating their personal immigration story in front of an audience.

“First, I thought I had nothing to say, but once I started telling about my journey I couldn’t stop”, said one of the workshop participants.



During I Learn America workshop



Jean-Michel Dissard, filmmaker

Film protagonists Brandon and Jennifer from the I LEARN AMERICA documentary joined ARNIC members in sharing the process of making a film based on their personal stories.

After newly-minted storytellers recounted their stories with the assistance of family photographs, objects, memories, and to cheers and applause from other workshop participants, they were able to post their stories on www.immigrant-nation.com. There you can read a number of immigration stories across the years and centuries.



ARNIC members after the workshop

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 The English-Speaking Union
Andrew Romay
New Immigrant Center

More information and the stories are here: <http://www.ilearnamerica.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/ILearnAmerica> <http://www.immigrant-nation.com>
<https://www.facebook.com/ESU.ARNIC>

Sometimes reality is too complex. Stories give it form. — Jean-Luc Godard, French filmmaker

I REMEMBER THE DAY WHEN I was leaving Colombia for New York. Luggage was already packed, piled near the front door. And I slowly walked around my apartment to say good bye to things I’ve loved for years. I saw my CPA license on a kitchen table. “Why bother taking it with me to a new land? It doesn’t mean anything there,”- I thought.

Suddenly my mother looked at me as if she could read my thoughts. She took my license from the table and handed it to me, “You are an accountant. Take it with you and don’t forget who you are.” I didn’t think to take it at first, since I was not sure I can be an accountant again, but then I realized that the license was my achievement, part of my identity, so I brought it here. Now I am very happy to have recently found a job as an accountant!



Patricia Zapata (Colombia)



Mohamed Berrakaoui (Algeria)

WHEN I GOT A GREEN CARD, IT WAS an amazing day and I felt so happy. But when I showed the passport to my father I saw his face. He was not happy at all! Many years ago he tried to immigrate to France and work in Europe but it was not a very good experience. “You are wasting your time. You are wasting your life!”, he said. He was trying to convince me to stay home. “You have everything here. Go get married and continue working as a school teacher. Why do you need to go to another country and another culture?” He didn’t believe that I

would thrive here in the U.S. But I told him, “Please let me make my own choice. Let me have my own experience.” And it was difficult for me. But that was my dream to come here. I will never give up. Now, I have been here for two years. I have so many friends and I always learn new things. My father and my mother are so happy for me now. Sometimes I call them and tell them about my experience in America. I am also working on restarting my career here, and I hope to become a teacher again...

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Editorial

The persuasive power of stories

“IT’S LIKE EVERYONE TELLS A STORY about themselves inside their own head. Always. All the time. That story makes you what you are. We build ourselves out of that story.” — Patrick Rothfuss, *The Name of the Wind*.

Storytelling is like sculpting a multi-dimensional portrait, using metaphors, perceptions, images, and emotions. Storytelling pulls your listener into your world, sharing experiences and memories, and creating a common reality.

Storytelling is one of the most powerful techniques we possess to reflect on our lives and communicate our unique sense of time and place to other people.

Scientists say that all regions of our brain become activated when listening to a story, not only the language-related ones. Researchers from Emory University reported recently, “Metaphors like ‘The singer had a velvet voice,’ and ‘He had leathery hands,’ roused the sensory cortex....Then, the brains of participants were scanned as they read sentences like ‘John grasped the object,’ and ‘Pablo kicked the ball.’ The scans revealed activity in the motor cortex, which coordinates the body’s movements.” A story, in effect, engages all of our being.

Coming to a new country and rebuilding a life from scratch involves creating a new personal narrative. A story helps newcomers lend meaning to the unfamiliar environment and define a place in it for themselves. Storytelling is a skill that anyone can master. Learning how to create and tell your story so that listeners are not only engaged but also active participants in your discoveries makes for a remarkable interactive experience. Also, storytelling is a great skill for building a mutual supporting community, where you make new friends, network, search for work, and, above all, fashion your new world.

MY MOTHER SELMA was born in 1918 in Pinsk, Poland. Her mother had left for America in 1920 when my mother was two. Selma adored her grandmother. When Selma’s mother called her to America in 1929, my mother bid a sad farewell to her grandmother, who she knew she would never see again.

She was 12, and sailed on the *George Washington* for ten days to Ellis Island all by herself. Selma was nervous when she arrived in America. She knew Yiddish, Hebrew, Polish, and a little Russian, but no English. She had difficulties with being reunited with her mother whom she had not seen for ten years.

My mother had a bookcase that was always overflowing with books. She was a voracious reader and she took great pride in assisting me with my homework. As I look back now, I think that because her childhood was so hard, she always would say, “You don’t have to do it if it’s too hard.”

Marsha Wagman, English in Action tutor, and her mother Selma (left)



Whenever I visit my mother now, I bring her interesting articles. Her memory is spot on. She remains so articulate and is real wordsmith. She once corrected me when I said, “It’s an epidemic.” She said, “No, Marsha, you mean a pandemic.”

She can remember names better than I can. She’ll comment about how my hair looks, about my love life, about her grandchildren and great grandchildren.

...What a journey this 12 year old has taken and is still taking.



Selma and her husband

Welcome.US

BY WELCOME.US Team

IN THE UNITED STATES, with a good idea and enough hard work, anything is possible. The entrepreneurial drive and spirit of our country is built on our diversity of origins. It is what drew the first people to the U.S. and what continues to drive American business. American success is a result of our many distinct experiences, not in spite of it.

Welcome.us, a new non-profit organization, is dedicated to celebrating a United States that is fueled by immigrants from around the world. Immigrants past and present – and their subsequent generations – have always been united by the common cause of building a better life for themselves and their families.

Our goal is to encourage as many Americans as possible to tell the story of how they first felt welcomed to the American experience. Our history and stories will help determine our future—at Welcome.us, we want everyone here to be a part of that history.

Through a campaign driven by social media, earned media, partnerships, and outreach, we aim to help our nation remember and celebrate the richness of our immigrant history –

the source of our greatness. We are a charitable, non-political organization supported by FWD.us, which was founded by Mark Zuckerberg, Marissa Mayer, Reid Hoffman, Bill Gates, Padmasree Warrior, and other tech leaders. Led by Tolu Olubunmi, an immigrant and DREAMer, our organization will be focused in the coming months on launching the Welcome.us campaign as well as establishing Immigrant Heritage Month to honor the ways in which America and the immigrants who have built our country are linked in a shared,

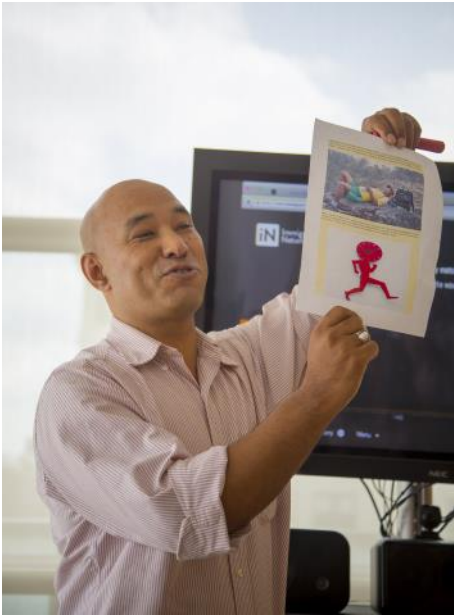


productive history. Welcome.us is assembling a diverse honorary board – made up of business leaders, including Mark Zuckerberg and others; policymakers, including Congressmen Valadao, Crowley, Honda, Polis and others; athletes; faith leaders; media personalities and celebrities, including Jared Leto, Russell Simmons, Jamie Lee Curtis, Michael Bolton, Kenny G, and more – to help elevate the work of Welcome.us.

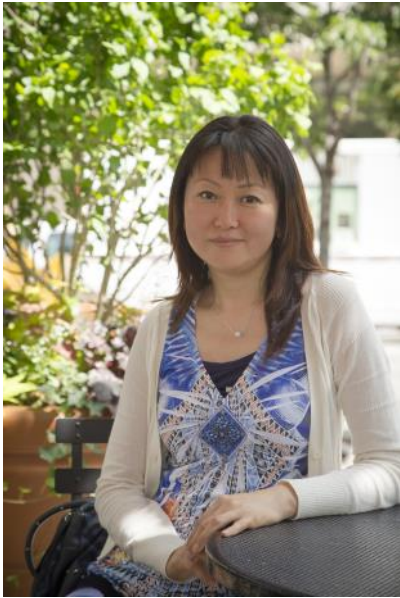
All great literature is one of two stories; a man goes on a journey or a stranger comes to town. — Leo Tolstoy, Russian writer

I GREW UP IN A REMOTE VILLAGE in the mountains. I did not have any time-telling clock during my childhood; therefore time for me was not a big matter. In Nepal, like in so many other countries, we live by a day and an hour basis in the cities.

When I moved to New York, I realized I have to live by a second! This was a big challenge for me to change my mindset from a concept of slow flexible time to a concept of very precise second-by-second time. I use a clock as an object that illustrates my immigration story.



Ngima Tamang Pakhrin (Nepal)



Olga Shin (Kyrgyzstan)

WHEN I REALIZED I COULD live in the U.S., hundreds of thoughts came to my mind simultaneously. The process of moving itself was very painful for me, saying goodbye to all the people I have known for years was not easy. They told me that it would take a couple of years to understand the culture, people, style of life and they were right.

My first feeling after arrival here was diversity! So many different people, different ideas, thinking, places. I believe, this is a country of opportunities and freedom.

I would like to thank all the people who helped me in my first years here, their advice and time were so valuable for me.

Your tale, sir, would cure deafness. — William Shakespeare, The Tempest



Henry with his favorite women

WHEN I CAME HERE a year ago I couldn't speak English at all. Back home I was raised by three wonderful, loving women, my mother, my grandmother and my aunt. I miss them with all my heart. I still remember how my grandmother used to wake me up and brush my teeth herself!

I got my Bachelor's degree in engineering and my Masters in Construction Project Management and worked for a while in my country then I decided to move to the US where my father lived. It was tough to go from my loving family to my new father's family – people I don't know. We are still trying to adjust to each other, but my dad and I are becoming good friends... I miss my family in Venezuela but I am blessed by having two wonderful families, and an opportunity to test myself in New York! I am now working in the Four Freedoms Park Conservancy on Roosevelt Island as a Ranger, an amazing experience, but I am still working on getting a position in engineering.



Henry Torres (Venezuela)

I AM AN IMMIGRANT TOO! I am a friend of Andrew Romay. Both of us are Holocaust survivors. That's why we've been immigrants several times.

When the Germans entered Paris, where I was born, my parents were seized by the Nazis. My mother Magda was sent to a forced labor camp. Two years later she managed to escape from the camp, but she couldn't recover from illness and died.

I went from France to Hungary, from Hungary to England, from England to Austria, from Austria to South America. And after all this travel I ended up here, in New York. So I know about being an immigrant. I wrote a book "Magda's daughter" where I described my experience. People should remember those things. England was very welcoming to immigrants after the War, but I was in an orphanage. I have memories from Hungary which are not very good. The easiest country for me for immigration is America. I was lucky I knew English.

Should I tell you how old I am? I am 75. Now I am a tutor in English in Action. I love all my students. I would like to tell them, "Don't be depressed, stay the course, in the end you will find a real home here. You don't have a choice!" Either you do it or you fall down!

Once you've survived the Holocaust you can survive anything. It's very hard to be an immigrant, that's why we are here to help a little bit..



Evi with her mother Magda

Evi Blaikie, English in Action tutor



Olga Malamud-Pavlovich (Russia)

MY HUSBAND DIED seven years ago and after that my only son went to the U.S. to study. I visited him four years ago in New York City and while staying there I met a nice man who proposed to me. I believe it was a good omen for me to change my life.

I remember the day when I left Russia. I cleaned my apartment and got it ready for renting. I packed two suitcases, closed the door and stepped into my new life. It was totally an unknown future ahead of me. Usually I am very pragmatic and think far ahead. I don't act rashly. When I think about that moment in the past I can't believe I could take such a risk and decide to move to New York. I believe it was a destiny and it totally changed my life. When you get into new circumstances new opportunities appear too. You just have to see them and follow them. You can discover even your hidden talents. Back in Russia I worked as a professor of chemistry in the University. Now I am a student again, and I started painting. Yes, it was very difficult. But I have a nice life and I am happy.

MY PATERNAL GRANDPARENTS were both born in Russia. I remember sitting at my grandfather's knee and having him tell the story of how the Cossacks killed his father. They were at home and the Cossacks burst through the door, one of them asked my great-grandfather to shine his boots and after my great-grandfather refused, he was shot on the spot. My grandfather was a very young child, about 7 or 8 years old. That story always stayed with me and I thought how horrifying it was for such a young child to see such a thing happen in front of him. My grandfather and grandmother emigrated to the United States many years later and settled on the Lower East Side and then moved to the Bronx.



Jane Berman, English in Action tutor



Anand Deo (Nepal)

I NEVER IMAGINED coming to America until I won the Green Card Lottery. In my country, I was a banking professional, an auditor, yet I assumed that my chances of receiving a visa were slim. I guess it can be like for an American winning a lottery for a trip to the Moon.

I had to fly about 8000 miles across the oceans to the land of opportunities, yet there was uncertainty for me, as I had no close relatives here to guide me. I managed to find a relative of my friend who lived in New York.

My family came from my village to Kathmandu and stayed for several days to say goodbye before I left. I felt challenged to explore the world, make a better life and earn money, so my family decided to send me in spite of their fear of me being so far away in this enormous land. My friend's relative told me that he could only pick me up on a Monday, as he was very busy. I arrived, and stayed at his place. I hurried to get a cell phone, a laptop, and a bed. I quickly ran out of money. My friend helped me to get a job in a restaurant. Within two weeks I was promoted to a waiter but I have to try to find some new work where I can apply my skills to contribute in this country.



*My father used to say that stories are part of the most precious heritage of mankind.
— Tahir Shah, In Arabian Nights: A Caravan of Moroccan Dreams*



Erick (Central African Republic)

I'M THE FIRST PERSON from my family to move to the U.S. My past work as a Human Rights activist pushed me into a position that didn't please the government and I was persecuted, received death threats and even kidnapped and detained. I was able to escape from that frightening situation and came to the U.S. seeking asylum. My goal was to find political and economic freedom. When I was leaving, none of my family members were able to come with me to the airport because of my situation. It's very sad but I'm glad that I did that to protect them.

I'm glad and humble to meet great New Yorkers who help me learn America. Waiting for my asylum hearing is one of the most challenging feelings I've faced. It's already taken more than two and a half years and then it has been rescheduled for two more years ahead. The good part is I'm able to live and work legally in the US while waiting. I live with a friend who became very close to me like my family and I don't feel alone here anymore since I met him and his relatives.

The biggest fear surrounding my coming to United States was: "could I leave the Departure Airport safely or would the government stop me?" But once here, the biggest challenge is the language, food and culture. My message is just simple: "I'm coming too far to give up on my dream which is having a better life and being able to help others."

FOR MANY YEARS IT WAS OUR DREAM, mine and my husband's, to come in America for a better life and for more opportunities. This dream came true when we won the green card lottery in 2011. When the time came it was not only us, but also our two teenage sons. It became very important to prepare our boys for this big change of moving to a new country. We convinced them saying that we are going in New York City, the "capital of the world", and the most beautiful place. They seem excited about this new adventure. We organized a goodbye party for them and their friends. Our sons got presents and a lot of wishes of a good luck in "the Promised Land".

It was July 2012 when our family moved to New York. The beginning seemed to be good. We started looking for jobs, a house, and a school for kids. Everything surprised the children. Despite the beautiful things we showed them, they started feeling down and missing their friends, their teachers, and relatives. That time of transition was very hard for us, seeing our children really sad while they had to adjust to all things new. I will never forget when my little one said with tears in his eyes, "the sky is bluer in Italy". Watching them struggling made us suffer because we understood it was not their choice to come here.

Stiven, Edlira, Diell and Calvin (Italy)



I LEFT MY HOMETOWN nine months ago. My husband came here two months before me. I was travelling alone. My sister and brother-in-law saw me to the airport. It was difficult for me because my sister and I are very close. I felt something in my chest and heart. I couldn't keep my tears back and I didn't stop crying during the flight.

When I arrived in the airport I met my husband and his relative. In those first moments I was thinking about a lot of things because my life had changed forever. I left my past behind and a new life was beginning for me. At the same time I was happy that I met my husband after two months, but I was very angry and sad at the same time because I had to leave my family, my mom, my sister and my little nephew.

New York City is a dream for many people, as it has many opportunities and possibilities. I think it's different from the other countries because everyone can find a piece from their country in New York.



Elida Gaba (Albania)

MY FRIEND FILLED OUT A GREEN CARD lottery application for me and, unexpectedly, I won and got this chance to move to the United States in 2011. I had been in college studying Econometrics for some time in Casablanca, but did not see any real opportunity for me to work after my studies. All of my family encouraged me to go and discover a new place. It wasn't easy for me specially the moment when I left all my friends, my parents and my childhood behind.

However, when I arrived and no one was here to meet me, I was not exactly happy.



Khadir Lazar (Morocco)

I had no place to stay and did not know anyone here. Every day I had to learn from my mistakes through trial and error. But comparing those times and now, I feel much better. My English has improved a lot, and I have been accepted to a college here. Because of my English I will start with an undergraduate degree, but I have motivation and I am eager to get my PhD eventually.

Juan Carlos Narvaez
A letter to my future grandchild about immigrating to New York

June 17, 2014

Dear grandchild
(I don't know your name yet!),



I want to tell you how my first seven months have been in New York. It's hard to start a life in a new country. When I arrived to the city with my wife, my mother and my sister met me at the airport. The weather was so cold for me, it was a shock. On the second day we started looking for a place to live. All the apartments we saw were pretty expensive so we stayed with my mother at her place. One month later I found a job as a medical assistant in a doctor's office (OB/GYN).

The weather is much better now in summer, and we can enjoy the city. There are a lot of activities like summer concerts and parades. Last week, I went to the beach and the day went by very nicely. New York is a wonderful city. Though the weather is hard in winter, in summer everything changes and I feel so much better. I hope to get my medical license soon to become a doctor again and to get my own apartment."

With love,
Your grandfather Juan Carlos