



Multi-Cultural Brief

Charlottesville City Schools
Adult English as a Second Language Program
Adult Learning Center
www.adultslearn.org

March-April 2012

Volume 13, Issue 2

Becoming American	1
From the Editor	2
An Election Year in the U.S., 2012	3
Women Can't Drive	4
Car Accidents Increase in Charlottesville: Who Should Pay?	4
Why Did I Change?	5
Should Korean Students Study Hard Like a Robot?	6
Children Who Are on Waiting Lists for Nursery School	7
How Do "Aliens" (Internationals) Become Students at PVCC?	8
Virginia Wines	9
Natural Bridge Zoo	10
Falling in Love with Avocado in America	11
Arab Spring	12
Boycott Celebrating New Year: Losar	13
Calendar Dates to Remember	16

Becoming American

By Elizabeth Samma Ndolo (Congo; U.S.A.)

I am American now.

How about you?
Would you like to become American one day?

America is a country of opportunities. The dream of many people around the world is to visit or to live one day in America, but, for most of them, it is not possible to have a chance to enter this country.

For me, it was destiny that set the plan to live in America. What a big blessing! Why not become an American citizen! The choice was done.

When I first came to America, I found so many people who have been living here for a long time and who did not have the status of citizenship. My

question was: why are these people still



Elizabeth Samma Ndolo, American Citizen

choosing to live in America without citizenship status? They prefer to put other things first instead of solving the naturalization problem.

Then, I decided that, for me, one of the main goals to reach was to solve the situation of citizenship, so that afterwards I could look towards other resolutions and enjoy the same rights and privi-

leges as citizens born in the U.S.

I was so glad to fill out my citizenship application through the International Rescue Committee (IRC). They helped me and directed me to the Adult Learning Center (ALC) for some immigration classes. There, with so many other students, I started learning about the history and government of the U.S. It was a great privilege to practice together in class. I really thank the IRC and the ALC for this citizenship preparation program.

How fearful I was when thinking of the citizenship exam with the 100 questions to study and the whole of American history!

(Continued on page 14)

From the Editor:

Being part of the ALC community is always an inspiring experience that takes us beyond the limits of our own individual worlds. Just yesterday, in one of my classes during a small-group discussion about global warming, one student remarked on how amazing it was that here we were, a group of people from six different countries (some of whose governments currently have or in the past have had hostile relations with one another) being friends, learning about each other, and talking about issues of importance. She said it was as if we were living Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream on an international level.

Because of events happening around the world and their direct impact on students, the writing class this term quickly took a serious turn. We learned more about each

other and what we are concerned about outside of class besides the important task of learning English. Our first story describes the success and relief of one writer obtaining the safe haven of U.S. citizenship and beginning the process of joining the fabric of this complicated culture. A follow-up article looks at different voting procedures around the world. Another student, who had not known what Arab Spring was, later told us that after reading about it in the writing class, every day she looks for information about Syria in the news.

The class had a long, heart-felt discussion about whether we should publish all the articles students wrote: was the content too disturbing or upsetting? Everyone unanimously agreed that we should. One student said, "Everybody has the right to their own opinions, but we need to be able to hear different voices so we have the chance to make our own decisions." It is the policy of ALC to echo these sentiments and at the

same time make clear that (1) views expressed here are the students' own and do not reflect those of the school and (2) all people from every culture are welcome and invited to share their own views. No culture, even the U.S., is immune from suffering. People need to be able to express what is happening so we all can listen and learn from it. We need to remember this suffering so that we can do a better job of living together and not repeat the mistakes of the past. As one student said, "Refugees when we arrive here say thank you! But suffering is still happening there (in countries from which we come). We ask ourselves, what is wrong, what is right? What can I do here?" Another added, "We have disseminated to different countries waiting for someone to help, waiting for world opinion [to bring about change], but people suffer. This is such a big price to get the world stable."

Less intense but also challenging are issues of particular importance to

women. We look at education and work in general, and in particular how women navigate the complicated responsibilities of family, economic pressures, cultural norms, and their own deepest wants and needs. We look at questions of women's rights, even the right to drive. We also explore the accident rate of drivers in general here in Charlottesville and how it impacts car insurance rates for us all.

There are also lighter moments of real appreciation for life here in Charlottesville. After many days of not being able to hear any news from Syria, Yomn Sayadi and her family finally made contact with friends and family, and to celebrate their relief they took a joyful trip to Natural Bridge Zoo. Tenzin Gephel shares his discovery of the delicious and deeply-satisfying avocado. Giselle Azuola-Gerli introduces us to the thriving wine industry of Virginia. So much to enjoy!

With best regards to all,
Leslie A. Furlong, Editor

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This project was funded in part by the VA Department of Education under the EL/Civics Grant. However, opinions expressed herein do not represent the position or policy of the U.S. Department of Education, and no official endorsement should be inferred.

An Election Year in the U.S., 2012

By Giselle Azuola-Gerli (Costa Rica)

The year 2012 is a presidential election year in the U.S. It has been very interesting to follow the presidential "race" in a country different from mine. Although I cannot participate in this election because I'm not a U.S citizen, I feel fascinated to learn about it. In my country, Costa Rica, every 4 years, we choose the President and his/her Cabinet, Congress and also the provincial councils. It is a **direct election** using the **voter plurality system**.

I wanted to share what I'm learning with others who also are newcomers to this country, as it is an opportunity to look closely at what happens in the United States of America. It is not easy to understand, but though comments, research, observation and questions, we can expand our knowledge. This does not mean I'm taking any political ideology. It's just a new acquaintance.

There are many different types of electoral system in use around the world, and even within individual countries, different electoral systems may be found in different re-

gions and at different levels of government (e.g., for elections to school boards, city councils, state legislatures, governorships, etc.).

A voting system or electoral system is a method by which voters make a choice between options, often in an election or on a policy referendum.



Electronic voting booths in the U.S.

Electoral systems can be divided into three general types:

** -1. **Plurality electoral systems**

Also called "first-past-the-post" or "winner-take-all" systems, plurality systems simply award a seat to the individual candidate who receives the most votes in an election. The candidate need not get a majority (50%+) of the vote to win; so long as he has a larger number of votes than all other candidates, he is declared the winner.

2. **Majority electoral systems**

Also called "second bal-

lot" systems, majority electoral systems attempt to provide for a greater degree of representativeness by requiring that candidates achieve a majority of votes in order to win. "Majority" is normally defined as

50%-plus-one-vote. If no candidate gets a majority of votes, then a second round of voting is held (often a week or so after the initial ballot). e.g., Russia and France.

3. **Proportional representation**

Also known as "PR", proportional representation is the general name for a class of voting systems that attempt to make the percentage of offices awarded to candidates reflect as closely as possible the percentage of votes that they received in the election. It is the most widely used set of electoral systems in the world, and its variants can be found at some level of government in almost every country (including the United States, where

some city councils are elected using forms of PR)." -

Currently, in the United States there is a choice of candidates for the Republican Party nominee. The Republican field has been especially volatile this election season with several candidates cycling through the top spot in the polls. In November 2012, a Republican nominee will face President Barack Obama, who currently holds the position. Mr. Obama belongs to the Democratic Party. This term of office will last 4 years.

I am very excited to learn about this interesting process in the United States. I hope to learn much more. I like politics, but I will not be political. I come from a democratic country where we are very proud of having no army and always fly the flag of peace.

God bless America!!

**REFERENCES:

http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/kingch/Electoral_Systems.htm

Women Can't Drive

By Yomn Sayadi (Syria)

"The only bad thing was that women can't drive. In fact, it is illegal for women to drive ... it was crazy for me that I had to wait for my husband until he finished his work to go shopping."

It was three years ago that my husband and I decided to move to Saudi Arabia. Before that, we had been in the U.S.A. A transport carrier from the hospital that my husband works in took us from the airport to a house. He said, "It is a customer's house, and after one week you will choose your apartment with the basic stuff in it." And

after one week, we did.

A month later, we were shocked that we didn't have to pay rent or any bills.

There were no taxes, and the price of oil was like water.

It is a very good place to make money. The only bad thing was women can't drive. In fact, it is illegal for women to drive. It

was nothing to Saudi women because every family was wealthy enough to have a driver and a maid. But it was crazy for me that I had to wait for my husband until he finished his work to go shopping.



Car Accidents Increase in Charlottesville: Who Should Pay?

By Jeongeun Cho (South Korea)

"... The accident rate in Charlottesville has increased over the past five months."

America is a big country, especially to me, a Korean, whose country's area is just as large as the State of Virginia. My husband jokes "An American man cannot live without a car, while he can live without a wife."

We got our 2nd car insurance at GEICO in January, 2011. The contract period was from February to August 2012. Our car is a 2005 sedan. Against my expectation, the insurance fee was raised by about 4% on the exact same coverage conditions as

we had before. To our question to this rise, they replied that the accident rate in Charlottesville has increased over the past five months. Consulting different websites, we learned that car insurance fees are dependent upon the state of car registration as well as driver's history, coverage condition, and so on.

We then checked DMV websites and found out a lot of interesting data there. It shows the number of monthly crashes that happened over the

last ten years. Usually, high accident rate months are May, October, November, and December. It means that the rate increases especially from October to December. The recent trends of car crashes in Virginia has decreased since 2003:

154,848 in 2003,
153,907 in 2004,
153,849 in 2005,
151,692 in 2006,
145,405 in 2007,
135,282 in 2008,
116,744 in 2009,
116,386 in 2010.

Fatal crash rates also show the same tendency of

(Continued on page 5)

Why Did I Change?

By Jiyuan Zhu (China)

New York City, one of the most prosperous cities in the world, attracts millions of people to visit it or to settle in it. Frankly, I didn't like it when I finally arrived in this huge city after driving for eight hours. There are enormous amounts of people in the street, and skyscrapers scattered everywhere. At that moment, I had an impression that I was in a certain city of China. New York is much like Peking, Shanghai, and Shenzhen. I am sorry, I shouldn't say this. I should say these cities are copying New York. Anyway, they almost have the same appearance and give me the same feeling.

Some people might think that skyscrapers, populous commu-

nities, and complicated highways are magnificent, and that they are the symbol of modern cities. They are probably right, but I don't like such a city. Through the skyscrapers, the communities, the highways, I can only see capital, power, hurry and stress.

I have heard that many American young people desire to go to big cities because there are a lot of opportunities there. I used to be like this. I wanted to found my enterprise in a big city; I wanted to be an important person in my company. But now I'd rather enjoy my life than struggle for wealth.

The typical American life in my mind is like this: a peaceful small

town; very kind neighborhood; a small house with a yard in which I can plant flowers and vegetables; some pets (I especially like cats); two or three children; a stable job which can give me a modest income. We can have dinner at dusk, and then lie down on the couch watching TV. I will tell tales to my children, and they may tell me what happens in school.

I heard that there was a glass ceiling in women's career. I used to think that was unfair, whereas now, I often think maybe we women ourselves set a kind of glass ceiling, for once we get married, most of us remove our focus to family life. This is probably our instinct.

"I wanted to found my enterprise in a big city; I wanted to be an important person in my company. But now, I'd rather enjoy my life than struggle for wealth."

"To me, it was strange and even unreasonable that people who live in a city that has a high accident rate should pay more for it."

Car Accidents Increase in Charlottesville: Who Should Pay? (Continued from page 4)

decrease. Unfortunately, no annual statistics for 2011 are available yet, but a news article says last year, Virginia had an increased rate of fatal crashes without detailed

data and explanation. To me, it was strange and even unreasonable that people who live in a city that has a high accident rate should pay more for it. Should I persuade my neighbors

to drive more carefully? Now, I partly understand why insurance companies have to use the state of car registration. But, still America is really a big and strange country to me.

Should Korean Students Study Hard Like a Robot?

By Jeongeun Cho (South Korea)

"In South Korea, many students don't think they are happy and cannot enjoy their lives or do what they want ..."



Were you happy when you were young? Did you like to go to school?

My son, who is in the third grade, is eager to go to school here in U.S.A. He gets only one sheet of homework in math, which he likes very much, and after school, he can play with his friends as long as he wants. But he didn't like to go to school that much in his country, Korea. Even in the first grade, there was a lot of homework, and he had to sit at his desk for 40 minutes in every class from 9 to 12.

In South Korea, many students don't think they are happy and cannot enjoy their lives or do what they want to do even though their parents can support them economically, physically and in many ways. This is because students must study many subjects, especially math, science and English, at school and

in private academies most hours of a day.

Korean enthusiasm for education for children is well known, and parents concentrate on how high a score their children get at school, not their dreams for whatever they want to be. The most important thing for a successful life is to study at a good college and after graduating, to get a job in the big companies. Korean society has high ranking colleges, and the university entrance exam depends on the written test. When students choose the department and college, they can decide their majors at once.

For that reason, young kids should learn English, math, science and Language Arts from 3 years old, in addition to musical instruments, sports and art (drawing) despite their young ages. Korean parents have no choice but to push their children to study.

Unfortunately, Korea is a small country which has few natural resources, like oil, coal, natural gas, and other things like gold and sil-

ver and so on. It means the only valuable resource we have is smart and diligent people whose children will grow up and become educated and successful adults.

For the last 50 years, Koreans have studied and worked very hard, focusing on economic growth, and we have achieved our goal so far. But now, I don't know if Korea can keep developing and join the ranks of advanced nations if students just study hard without any variety or changes of admission standards, not relying on the written test of one university entrance exam.

How do you, Americans, maintain the advanced system of your country as you let children play freely?

"I don't know if Korea can keep developing and join the ranks of advanced nations if students just study hard without any variety."



Children Who Are on Waiting Lists for Nursery School

By Naho Okayama (Japan)

For Japanese working mothers, the most problem is whether they can leave their children in a daycare center (nursery school) after childbirth. This is a big social problem in Japan. There are many children who are on waiting list for nursery school. They are always full.

I have a daughter who is 2 years old. Fortunately, she could enter a daycare center from when she was from 8 months to 15 months old, which was until we came to Charlottesville. We asked and telephoned many schools to see if she could enter and at last secured a seat for her. But it was not full-time but just 3 days a week. The story began some months before she was born.... To enter our child a daycare center, we had to satisfy strict standards. We could leave our child in this special private daycare center or ask a baby-sitter; however, it was expensive and not easy.

Most children on waiting list are from 6 weeks to 3 years old, and they concentrate in cities, especially Tokyo. Although we have a ten-

dency to have fewer children, why we can't leave our child in daycare centers? Why are most of the children from 6 weeks to 3 years old?

There are very few daycare centers per number of children who are under 3 years old. There are two types of schools until 6 years old, when child enter an elementary school: daycare centers and preschool. Daycare centers are for the purpose of nurturing while parents are absent, usually working. It is from 6 weeks, all day. On the other hand, preschool is for the purpose of educating children from 3 years old, 4 hours a day. It is not difficult for children who are 3 to 5 years old to enter a nursery school because of expanding space for children. For working people, this is not convenient. It is clear that places for children from 6 weeks to 3 years old are lacking.

In addition, we can think that this problem has more reasons. Recently, most women work in Japan. Most think that they want to continue working all

along and return to work after childbirth. Some years ago, it was not like this. Many women left their jobs when they got married or had a baby, so they brought up their child at home. But now, because of bad conditions in Japanese business, many women have to go working. (there are many women who have to continue working.

If you live with your parents, or your brother and sister, it might be possible that they take care of your child while you work, but it is rarely the case in cities. Recently, there are very few "extended families" in cities. Most are "nuclear families", which consist of father, mother and children. So, we can't depend on anything more than a daycare center.

That is the reason why the number of children on waiting lists has been increasing.

Concerning this problem, our government is working out various countermeasures: increase the number of daycare centers, and it is trying to join daycare centers with pre-

schools. But we can't see a change for the better easily.

People who want to work can't work, as they can't leave their child in a daycare center. People who want to have a baby can't have one if they work. The phenomenon of a declining birth rate will increase, and women will put off marriage more and more. Will the economic situation of a family get better?

What a vicious cycle!

Editor's note: After reading this article in class, we had the opportunity to interview Cherry Stewart, and ESL instructor at ALC, who gave birth to her third child in December 2011 and returned to work after 2 months' maternity leave. She told us that, according to the marriage and Family Act, women in the U.S. are legally allowed up to 3 months maternity leave without pay. She also told us that, as in Japan, it is difficult to find affordable infant care in the Charlottesville Area, but MAACA is an organization that provides services for low-income families.

How Do “Aliens” (Internationals) Become PVCC Students?

By Jiyuan Zhu (China)

Piedmont Virginia Community College (PVCC) is a two-year, non-residential community college located just outside the city of Charlottesville. I think it is a good choice for internationals to acquire higher education because the tuition is affordable and it does not require as high a TOEFL score as UVA.

PVCC publishes a *Class Schedule* each semester and distributes it around Charlottesville. I always see copies under the bulletin board of our apartment building and used to get them from some ESL schools, so it

is easy for you to find one. For this reason, I will not introduce the courses and majors at PVCC. I would like to focus on one topic: How do “Aliens” become PVCC students?

First of all, you need to find an advisor at PVCC. The telephone number of PVCC Admissions and Advising Center (they also call it Welcome Center) is 434-961-6551. It is located in the Main Building. I suggest you make an appointment first because advisors are busy, and they probably do not have time to receive you when you walk in. An-

other thing you need to notice is that not every advisor can take charge of international students; therefore, you should state your status when you make the appointment.

There is a little tip here: the college is served by limited public transportation, so a car is highly advisable. There are some parking spaces for visitors right beside the Main Building, but usually they are full. You can park in Parking Lots 3 and 4 (follow indicating signs on the right side of the road; you can find it easily). Parking Lots 3 and 4 are for both students and visitors. The only drawback is it is far from the Main Building, so it is wise to set aside ten minutes for parking.

Now, you have already found an advisor, and she will respond to all your questions. However, I still want to introduce some information here for your convenience.

If you hold a H4 or J2 visa, by law you can directly become a student of any college/university without changing your status.

As for PVCC, if you hold an H4 visa and you have lived in VA for more than one year, you will pay in-state tuition. It is \$122.15 per credit hour in spring semester 2012. You need to submit some documents. They are: copies of your visa and the relevant H1 visa, and proof that you have lived in VA for more than one year, such as a lease or your driver's license. As an H4 student, you can attend part time; that means you can take just one or two courses each semester, and you can choose day class or night class. Because I do not know the tuition policy on J2 visa, I am sorry that I can not offer information about that.

If you want to be an F1 student, there will be more restrictions:

First, you need to submit four documents: (1) An application for admission; (2) Transcripts of all academic reports translated into English; (3) A declaration of finances (\$20,000 is required); (4) The result of TOEFL that is higher than 61 points.

(continued on page 10)

Are You Thinking of Attending PVCC?

Do you have questions about career assessment, career planning, placement testing at PVCC, scholarship information, program assessment, and other community college options?

Lynda Smethurst

Adult Career Coach

VA Workforce Center

Adjunct Instructor, Student Development

Piedmont Virginia Community College

434-293-8901; lsmethurst@pvcc.edu

Will be available in the Adult Learning Center Resource Room:

Every Thursday

From 12:30-3:00 p.m.

Also available at One-Stop: M, T, W: 9:30-2:30 p.m.
& Th.: 9:30-noon

Virginia Wines

By Giselle Azuola-Gerli (Costa Rica)

Wine and olive oil are the ancient marks of old civilization.

Thomas Jefferson, author of the Declaration of Independence and later President of the United States, is called the father of American viticulture (winemaking). He planted some of the nation's first vineyards around Monticello, his home here in Charlottesville. He also imported wines from Europe, but he also saw a future when American wines would be equal to and even better than those from Europe. Sadly, he was not to see this in his lifetime.

Today, Virginia is the fifth-largest wine producer in the U.S. and in the country one of the places top-ranked by connoisseurs for viticulture, with over 190 wineries.

About 30 years ago, helped by tax incentives, Virginia farmers began to replace tobacco with a healthier product: grapes. In terms of acreage planted, Virginia has increased wine produc-

tion greatly in the last 20 years. Many people now recognize the potential of the wine



industry in Virginia, and good land for growing grapes is in high demand.

In the late-1950s, the first experimental plantings of *vina vinifera* (wine grapes) in Virginia began to show promise. With the establishment of six new wineries in the 1970s, the realization of Mr. Jefferson's dream was officially underway. A renewed effort to grow a European Chardonnay succeeded at the Waverly Estate in Middleburg in 1973. Then, in 1976, Italian pioneer vintner Gianni Zonin hired Gabriele Rausse to grow and harvest *vinifera* grapes near Charlottesville. He

established Barboursville Vineyards and then helped other vineyards do the same. By 1995, Virginia had 46 wineries, and by 2005, 107. With 192 wineries today, only California, New York, Oregon, and Washington have more wineries than Virginia. The efforts of several generations of winemakers is now paying off. And the vision of Virginia's most renowned native son, Thomas Jefferson, is now a reality.

As another founding father of the United States once said: *"The discovery of a wine is of greater moment than the discovery of a constellation. The universe is too full of stars."* — Benjamin Franklin

Cheers!!!!

For more information and tours: Phone #: (804) 344-8200
information@virginiawine.org

"Today, Virginia is the fifth largest wine producer in the U.S. and in the country one of the places top-ranked by connoisseurs for viticulture, with over 190 wineries."

"About 30 years ago, ... Virginia farmers began to replace tobacco with a healthier product: grapes."

Natural Bridge Zoo

By Yomn Sayadi (Syria)

After driving about an hour and a half from our house in Charlottesville, we reached wonderful, amazing Natural Bridge Zoo.

Although I have visited a lot of beautiful zoos, Natural Bridge Zoo was different because they allow you to be very close to the animals.

You can feed farm animals, deer, and giraffe, and you might have a baby camel kiss or giraffe slobber as a badge of honor.

My daughter enjoyed running after ducks and feeding baby goats. Then, we rode on an elephant and took a photo with him. But this wasn't the most exciting activity at the zoo.

Going on a big tractor for an excursion on the wild side,

and those animals who came to you for food and petting also



weren't the most exciting activity at this zoo.

Taking a picture with a baby tiger and feeding him WAS the most exciting activity at this zoo.

I have always been afraid of dogs, but I felt safe to feed this cute baby tiger and put the bottle in his big mouth. All my family gathered to take a photo with him. It was won-

derful to be in the same room with the baby tiger and to touch him with caution. The zoo keeper told us not to touch his head or legs, and the photo was taken very quickly without a flash.

We spent a lot of money on animal food, tickets, and photos, but we were happy because our money will help the rare and endangered animals to live like this baby tiger. He needs one or more to take care of him, and food and toys, and they cannot leave him with his mother and father, or he will be eaten if they are hungry.

This place is very good for kids to learn and have fun, and my family and I won't forget this beautiful day at Natural Bridge Zoo.

How Do "Aliens" (Internationals) Become PVCC Students?

(Continued from page 8)

You can sign up for TOEFL on the internet. The website is <http://www.ets.org/toefl>. The nearest test center is in Fork Union. It takes 45 minutes by car. If it is not available, you can also choose Glen Allen or Lynchburg. It takes one hour and fifteen minutes by car. After taking the test, you will get the score in two weeks.

Second, you must take at least 12 credit hours per semester. That means you have to attend full time, taking at least 4 courses per semester. It is a heavy task.

Third, you are supposed to pay out-of-state tuition. It is \$313.75 per credit hour in spring semester 2012. It is almost three times the in-state tuition. Let us suppose you plan to take 12-18 credit hours this semester: you would

need to pay \$3,800-\$5,600 in this case.

At the end of this article, I would like to present the address and website of PVCC. The address is 501 College Drive. The website is <http://www.pvcc.edu/>.

Falling in Love with Avocado in America

By Tenzin Gephel (Tibet)

I am a Tibetan refugee who lived in India and came to Ithaca, NY. Almost a year ago, I moved to Charlottesville, VA. I have ended up liking avocado wherever I live in America. It is awfully tasty. While I was living in India, I did not see avocado, nor did I have any idea about it. One time in upstate NY, I ate avocado for the first time in a salad. From that time on, I have been exceptionally fond of avocado. When I moved to Charlottesville, many friends helped me to become acquainted with some areas of the city. A Tibetan friend showed me a place to study English language (ALC). Another Tibetan friend took me to a pizza place downtown. There, I saw an avocado pizza that stood out from the variety of pizzas on display. I discovered that my friend also likes avocado pizza. She told me that whenever she goes to that place, she only eats pizza which has avocado on top.

I am fond of avocado. It is not because it is very nutritious. I do not have any knowledge about that. So the reason why

I am fond of avocado is that I like its rich flavor. It tastes like butter. Tibetans are fond of butter. There are numerous traditional foods and drinks served with butter. One of the unique foods that have been developed in Tibet's high plateau for many centuries is *Tsampa* (roasted barley flour and butter) and "butter tea". Thus, the rich flavor that tastes like butter may cause me to be attracted to avocado.



As far as comparing healthiness between butter and avocado, I believe avocado is much healthier (although, an English expression says, "Butter's Better"). Tibetan people, nevertheless, won't replace butter with avocado when they make butter tea and eat *Tsampa*. Butter and avocado have their own unique functions and tastes to fulfill the wishes of people.

Later, I heard avocado is

healthy to eat. It is free of sodium and cholesterol. Moreover, it contains sixty percent more potassium per ounce than bananas. Potassium is good for the function of the heart, kidneys and other parts of the body. It seems to me that I am fond of the right thing. Hence, it is not only very delicious but nutritious. If you ask me how delicious it is, it is extremely difficult to explain the exact taste with words. I would simply answer, it is very delicious. You may ask a follow-up question for the exact taste, how very delicious is it? I may reply the same way but double "very". Then, it may go on and on like chicken and egg. Eventually, I have to give up and say I am sorry that I can't explain to you. You have to taste it yourselves first.

In conclusion, the buttery taste of avocado is one of the most delicious foods that I have come across. No matter where I go, it continues to be delicious. Avocado is so very tasty that my tongue is almost swallowed along with it. To indicate deliciousness of something Tibetans jokingly say, "I almost swallowed my tongue."

Editor's note: Because of copyright laws, we are not able to publish two very good recipes for avocados. You may find these recipes, however, on the following links: Avocado Salad at <http://allrecipes.com>; and Perfect Guacamole at <http://simplerecipes.com>.

Arab Spring

By Yomn Sayadi (Syria)



Before I tell you about my heroes, I'll tell you a little about my country's history.

Fifty years ago, the commanders of our army took political authority in a coup d'état. Then, one of the commanders, called Hafez Al Asad, killed the other commanders. From that time, one person and one party led our country. His photo and statues were everywhere.

From that time, we forgot everything about democracy, and the name of my country changed from "Syria" to "Syria Al Asad". Over time, he became stronger, and he led the country with a tyrannical hand.

He and his party dominated everything, and they kept us a developing economy. Poverty was not the worst thing. Al Asad's security forces could arrest any person and put him in prison for many many years, or kill him in the name of the government. No

one dared to say a word. He massacred many people, killed women and children.

Finally, he died after forty years. The first few hours, we thought that everything had

"And my heroes in Syria are still struggling in the streets after ten months ..."

changed, but after they had put him in his grave, his party, supported by the army, told everyone to go to the streets and shout, "We love you, Bashar Al Asad (the younger son of Hafez Al Asad)". Immediately, the streets and squares were full of frightened sheep shouting, "We love you, Bashir Al Asad."

Although our law says that the president has to be forty years old and Bashar was only thirty-four years old, they redesigned the law to fit his size.

Anyway, we used to look at him

as a young doctor married to a British woman, and we hoped he would be better than his father. But we were wrong. Nothing changed.

Unfortunately, these bad things were happening not only in Syria. There were many dictators governing near us in Arab countries, and they supported each other. In Tunisia, Bouazizi was a street vendor who set himself on fire in the middle of the street in protest against the army's bad actions, and he was the reason for the Tunisian revolution. The president, Zine El Abidine, ran away from angry people after eighteen days. No one could believe it. This dictator had governed for over twenty-three years.

Actually, Bouazizi became the reason for the Arab Spring. After the successful Tunisian revolution, an Egyptian crowd arrested their president, Hosni Mubarak. Then, the angry crowd in Libya killed Al Gaddafi.

And my heroes in Syria are still struggling in the streets after ten months with their hope of unseating Bashar Al Asad!

Boycott Celebrating New Year: Losar

By Tenzin Gephel (Tibet)

We Tibetans celebrate the lunar new year as a Happy New Year and hope for good. But many occasions in our lives, we have to choose not to celebrate our Happy New Year. One New Year that I did not celebrate was the lunar new year that fell in 2009 because, similar to the Tibetan Uprising against the Chinese occupation of Tibet on March 10, 1959, in 2008, Tibetans mounted a massive protest that quickly spread throughout Tibet in a plea for peace, freedom, and the return of His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama to Tibet. Chinese authorities fired on the peaceful protesters in their sweep across the Tibetan plateau. Many hundreds were killed; more were tortured to death, imprisoned, and disappeared. Nobody knew just how many people perished in the corners of the land where video surveillance and world media cannot reach. Feb. 25, 2009 was the Tibetan New Year. Tibetans both inside and outside of Tibet not only did not observe the Tibetan New Year but also mourned for those Tibetans who were killed and grieved for those who were being tor-

tured in prisons, even to death. In contrast to that, Chinese officials made every effort to persuade Tibetans to celebrate the lunar New Year and even threatened them if they refused to. For example, in eastern Tibet, the head of a Tibetan monastery, Tulku Sherap, was ordered to get monks to celebrate the New Year. They threatened the Tulku that if he disobeyed, the monks would be arrested and the head lama would be demoted from his position at the monastery. Tulku Sherap refused to tell the monks to celebrate the New Year and told the Chinese officials to do what they wished. In that year the idea of celebrating the New Year only intensified Tibetans' sadness. Another occasion to boycott celebrating the New Year will be this year, Feb. 22, 2012. Why? Since 2008, the situation in Tibet has gotten more restricted and repressive. For example, the Chinese gov-

"Tibetans inside Tibet desperately do unimaginable forms of protest to capture the world's attention about what is happening in Tibet."

ernment has intensified implementation of "Patriotic Education" campaigns which require Tibetans to be loyal to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and to denounce H.H. the Dalai Lama. The campaigns have increased the deep pain in the minds of Tibetans. Tibetans inside Tibet desperately do unimaginable forms of protest to capture the world's attention about what is happening in Tibet. For example, Tibetans burn themselves protesting for the justice as a call for help. In different areas, from 2009 to 2012, 24 Tibetans, between ages 17-40, both male and female, consecutively lit themselves on fire to protest China's brutal policy on Tibetans. Fourteen of the 24 Tibetans are known to have died following their protest. Many of them died because of burning or being severely beaten. For example, in Ngaba County, Sichuan Province, a Tibetan, Lobsang Jamyang, in his 20's,

doused himself in petrol and set himself on fire while walking into the street. Police began to kick and beat him with clubs spiked with nails rather than focusing on extinguishing the flame. This was unbearable to local Tibetans who witnessed the scene. The people stood up to armed security and shouted to hand over his body to them. A reliable source suggested that Lobsang lived three days after police had forcefully taken him away.

Strengthening security in a Draggio County town in Karze (Chinese: Ganzi) in the Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture led to these protests and killings. For example, the first day of Chinese New Year on Jan. 23, 2012, a large number of Tibetans protested in Kham Draggio for freedom in Tibet because Tibet could not live under Chinese rule. The authorities opened fire on gathered Tibetan protesters. Three Tibetans were killed and many suffered from injuries. But the Chinese State Media stated that only one person had died. This escalation of cracking down was followed by

(Continued on page 15)

Becoming American (Continued from page 1)

But I was reassured when I came to school. I found wonderful and experienced teachers who could help, and all my fear was gone. There, what you found difficult will become simple. I appreciate the methods they are using to manage the immigration lessons. Students are satisfied when they finish the program.

I have had good times with all those friendly people, teachers and students. The class was excited when we looked at videos showing how people passed the citizenship exam before. So many people could speak English fluently and answer the questions correctly; some of them could not, but they all could pass their test successfully.

This reassured us more and more that we could do as well as they did, and even better. We became comfortable about passing the citizenship exam.

The class took about two months. I had to wait for the exam ap-

pointment for about two more months, and I was afraid I would forget all I had learned. But ALC provided final review lessons when the exam date approached, which helped a lot.

Then came the time to go to Fairfax, VA, the city where the Immigration Administration is located.

It was the greatest day I had ever had in my life. I could not sleep the night before, thinking of the trajectory of my whole life, where I had been and where I was going, and how much my life was going to be changed with this naturalization status: stability of mind, being settled in a land quietly once and for all.

The appointment was fixed for 10 a.m. in Fairfax, but I had to arrive there early so that I could have enough time to rest before the exam. I was so happy to be there. It was a wonderful day with especially cold weather because it had been raining all along the

way when traveling. I knew that all this was a part of the blessing of my exam day.

After an hour of waiting, my name was called by the examiner. It was a wonderful beautiful lady, serene. She started by asking me some questions about my N-400 Application Form, and everything went fine. She gave me some sentences to read, and everything went fine. She gave me a dictation of some sentences, and everything went fine.

Then, she began the biggest part of the exam, which were the 100 questions. She asked me, "What is an amendment?" I answered, "It is a change." She added, "A change to what?" I completed, "A change to the Constitution." Three more questions were asked, and everything went fine.

At last, the examiner wrote something on a paper and told me, "You have successfully passed your exam." I was declared an American Citizen!

After filling out some documents, she asked me if I was ready to celebrate the event the same day. I answered, "Sure! I am ready."

And I went out to wait for the time of the celebration. It was amazing. I was so happy. I could not imagine that at the time I became American, me too, sitting among the other people who themselves had the same emotions as me, wild with joy that could not be expressed at that moment.

Everybody was quiet in the celebration room. A kind of temperature you cannot describe, peaceful, serene, but you can only understand that everyone's heart was filled with a happiness not able to be expressed, just listening to the orator team that was chosen to congratulate the new citizens.

Gifts were distributed to everyone. We were allowed to take some pictures with the team, and we were

(continued on page 15)

Becoming American (Continued from page 14)

told to go and continue celebrating with our families in our cities because it is not given to everybody to become American.

Every one of us received a letter of congratulations from the President of the United States. It was amazing.

I was wild with joy.

Declared an American citizen.

An African American.

A Congolese American.



Citizenship Class at ALC

Learning about the citizenship interview. Practice answering questions. Study U.S. history and government.

Mondays, 11 a.m.-1 p.m., April 9-June 25, or
Wednesdays, 6-8 p.m., April 11-June 27



You need to be a Legal Permanent Resident and have documentation. Assessment and pre-registration are required. Cost is \$25. Call 434-245-2817 for more information.

Free One-Day Workshop at ALC to Prepare for the Naturalization Interview and Test

Saturday, April 14, 2012

Review the 100 Civics and Government questions and answers. Practice writing and reading sample questions. Practice responding to questions about the N-400 application.

You must be a Legal Permanent Resident who has completed the N-400 application for U.S. Citizenship and begun preparing for the naturalization interview OR Legal Permanent Resident at the Intermediate ESL Level. You must bring your valid green card to the workshop. For more information and to register, call 434-245-2817.

Boycott Celebrating New Year: Losar (Continued from page 13)

spreading of leaflets in the area that said Tibetans should not celebrate Tibetan New Year because of numerous self-immolations.

Ngaba has been the heart of these widespread raging protests in the form of self-immolations for more freedoms in Tibet. Thus, the new Communist Party chief of Ngaba, eastern Tibet, vowed to strike severely at hostile forces in order to retain stability in

the region. It is getting more difficult to get information from Tibet. Tibet is locked up isolated from the rest of the world by the Chinese government.

However, the spread of this shocking form of protest, cracking down on unarmed protesters, growing grievances among Tibetans, and the mobilization of massive security forces in Tibetan areas have been witnessed by the British Broadcasting Corpora-

tion (BBC). Both media from BBC and CNN briefly have seen the issue and also received threats from Chinese officials when they enter Tibet. Seeing these fearful situations in Tibet, international communities have an important role to save the many lives of Tibetans. I hope the situation in Tibet won't end up like our slogan, which says, "China lies; Tibetans die."

Finally, these are the years of blood and tears; so many Tibetans self-immolated, killed, tortured, and their whereabouts unknown after being arrested. Therefore, we, all Tibetans, boycott celebrating the New Year against Beijing's brutal policy in Tibet and to honor brave Tibetans with prayers, and share our solidarity. I believe help is on the way from the world.

* * * * *
 * Calendar Dates to Remember *
 * Dialogue Café at ALC. Conversation in a
 * friendly, informal setting. Free. Mondays:
 * 6:30-8:30 p.m. and Fridays: 12:30-2:30 p.m.
 * Every Wednesday: Ongoing Assessments
 * for classes at ALC, 10:00-12:00 p.m. Please
 * be on time.
 * March 22: Voices of Adult Learners Cele-
 * bration, Burnley-Moran Elementary School
 * Auditorium, 6-8 p.m., free; all are wel-
 * come.
 * March 24: GED Practice Test
 * March 28: GED Testing at ALC.
 * March 29: Spring Potluck and last day of
 * classes for Winter Term at ALC.
 * April 3-4: Assessments at ALC. Call 434-
 * 245-2817 for times.
 * April 9: Classes for spring term at ALC be-
 * gin.
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Mission Statement of the *Multi-Cultural Brief*

The *Multi-Cultural Brief* is an ESL newsletter created by students who want to improve their English and is produced as part of a newspaper class offered through the Charlottesville Adult Education program. Its purpose is to provide students with an opportunity to:

- share their experiences of being from another country,
- offer multicultural perspectives on life in Charlottesville,
- help inform people who are new to Charlottesville of issues and opportunities around town,
- build a bridge of communication between the ESL population and Americans living in the Charlottesville community.

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