

A black and white photograph of a rocky coastline. In the foreground, there are large, textured rocks and smaller pebbles. The water is dark, and a single fish is visible swimming in the middle ground. The sky is dark and filled with numerous bright, star-like sparkles. The word "Voice" is written in a serif font across the middle of the image, partially over the rocks and water.

Voice

It was such a beautiful day in May 1st 2001, and there I was, running around in the gym because I was mad. That day I was burning hot, just about ready to kill anything that was in my way. I hated this one new girl who talked behind my back claiming that she beat me up already and made me cry. Actually, she didn't say it face to face, but instead, she told it to someone else and I got mad. By the way, I was overwhelmed by my anger and I decided to beat her up. Well, that's what I said to my cousins and I was hoping for support. Instead, I end up with a lecture and I could feel all those big, bright words coming toward me, permanently glued to my face. During that time, I wanted to cry louder than the super sonic sounds and kill everything that has life. Somehow, I was snapped out of my daydream and I felt so embarrassed because I liked this guy in my gym class named Thai and I thought to myself - *Oh great! Now I look like a klutz.*

Five minutes passed and Dave came in the gym looking around for me. There were two Shoua Yangs, and he was standing there for like ten thousand years but in reality it was only three minutes. He looked really confused so he had to talk on his walky-talky for a while and then he looked down at me as if I was in such trouble. Almost everyone asked him why I had to go, and he just smiled an awkward smile.

Gosh! Why does he walk so fast?

When I reached the office, I saw my sister-in-law (5 months pregnant) standing in the front door. She stared at me with worried eyes and I knew there must be something wrong. So, I ran from Dave and reached up to her. I asked her in a worried way in Hmong as we quickly walked away into the van, "What's the matter? Why are you here?"

She replied in Hmong with an almost choked voice as if she'd been crying for years, "You have no mom, never, forever this lifetime." And then she looked down to the ground.

My other sister-in-law, who was the driver, just sat there with nothing to say. I turned my head slowly toward the window and stared out. We drove away and not a single word came out until we parked at a lot at St. John's Hospital. My two sisters-in-law were saying something and all I did was run as quickly as I

could to where my mom's room was. My cousins with bloodshot eyes stared at me and their lips started to tremble. I looked around and saw my mom, my precious mom, lying on the bed. I was shocked and didn't notice that I was crying badly until someone held onto my shoulders hard and shook me. I realized immediately that it was my sister, Mai. She gave me a hug and comforted me to stop the crying. I couldn't see with all those tears in my two eyes.

Why! Why are they staring at me like that? Are they blaming on me for my mom's death? Are they? No! It 's not. It mustn't be.

"Shoua, now that your mom has left this world, you must be a good girl and listen to your older brothers' and sisters' opinion," said my aunt Ger Se Yang, sobbing after every couple of words. "You must not disobey because your mom is not there for you anymore."

Two days seems like forever, but I just walked to school in the afternoon when school was just over. I was about to walk inside to look for Miss Ly and ask her to help me tell the principal, Mr. Rupert, that my mom has passed away, but she came outside with the girl I detested so much. I quickly jogged up to her and said that I needed to talk to her. She gazed at me and asked, "Are you okay? Why do you look so pale?"

"Um... I really need to talk to you. Could I?" I asked her knowing that if I talked longer, I'd just cry.

Ms. Ly and I opened her office door slowly and sat in her office and started our conversation.

"Um... m-my mom... sh..." and then I burst in hot, burning tears. I wiped off my tears quickly and saw that Ms. Ly had her hands around me with an "Oh, I'm so sorry, Shoua."

I continued my sentence in a voice that sounded like I was screaming as one tear ran down my eye. Tear by tear. "My mom died!"

"Shoua, I-I'm so sorry to hear that! I know I've never been in your shoes but..."

"I can't help it! I miss her so much and..."

"So how did this happen? Did she have a cancer or some kind of disease or something?"

"No! She does not have such things! She was healthier than me!" I said as my voice raise higher. "She

died because my dad came back to take her with him." I slowly looked down at my shoes and continued, "Now I have no mom, no dad."

Mr. Wilson came in and opened the door quickly and looked at us. He opened the door so fast that I could feel the wind rushing against my face. He stood there, one hand holding the door and the other on his high waist that was almost up to my shoulders. Then he glanced at me and then looked at Ms. Ly. He asked her, "What's the problem?" He acted like he has no sympathy that I was crying so hard even though my eyes were about to pop out.

"Oh, her mom passed away and she came to tell me," said Ms. Ly looking at Mr. Wilson. Her face gives me the feeling that she was going to cry with me.

Then he replies in a reaction that no one could tell the truth in his heart, "Oh, I'm sorry to hear that."

Anyway, I felt happier now. All I wanted was someone to say something that could take me free from such a sad world I was put into.

Mr. Rupert, our principal, opened the door in a sneaking way. We all stared at him and he stared back at us, one by one. He finally asked Ms. Ly, "What's the matter?"

"Her mom has passed away a couple of days ago," said Ms. Ly in a sympathetic way.

"Um... I just want to say that I won't be in school until Tuesday, the 15th because in our tradition, girls must stay home to help serve for others," I said and sighed. "Will that affect my school grades?"

"No. No... Not at all," replied Mr. Rupert, sounding as if he were surprised at what I said.

"She's a very good girl. Very succeeding girl." said Ms. Ly.

"I'm very sorry about your mom. Sorry to hear such news. Don't worry about your grades. I'll tell Nancy to put you in a good excuse so you won't be flunking," said Mr. Rupert, walking toward the door and slowly twisting the doorknob to pull the door open.

"Thanks for everything, Mr. Rupert," I said quickly before he left the room and forcing a smile to show that I thanked him in many ways.

Mr. Rupert turned back and waved once at all of us and left the room. Mr. Wilson followed him out the door and closed the door smoothly.

For a while, Ms. Ly and I didn't say a word so I told her that I have to go home and start my duties.

We both said goodbye to each other. She followed me to the front door and gave me a warm smile and told me to be careful on the way home. I bit my lower lip and nodded to show that I was listening to her, but actually I wasn't really listening to what she had said.

One week was like million of years and I looked at myself in the mirror, noticing that I was getting older. However, my cousins and friends describe me as pole looking and skinny skeleton when they saw me at my mom's funeral. All that I did was look at my mom and when my sisters cried, I cried. I felt so stupid because I cried whenever my sisters cried and that made me feel like I have no heart. I also helped serve water for the people too, so they won't be thirsty to death. Actually, I only served the first day, Saturday. On the second day, I went home to take a shower in the morning and came back to watch my mom. I did that with my sisters because some of my cousins said that there were vampires who came to the funeral, and disguised themselves like humans. First they pretend to cry, and then they'll slowly bend their head toward the corpse and suck the fluid from the decay parts. If you're not careful and watch who's touching the corpse, you might end up seeing the corpse all flat. The other cautioning story is never let anyone poke a needle into the corpse's body or else you'll have babies that are dead when they are born. Otherwise, the baby might be born abnormally.

During that second day at night, my two nieces told me that this weird guy was asking for my name and my phone number, but they refused to tell him because they were scared that I might get mad at them. Later on that hour, he came and asked me, "What's your name?" I was freaked out even though he has that good look in himself. I answered him, "Sorry, but you've made a mistake because I'm married." Well, I'm not married yet, but it's just because I wasn't in the mood to talk to guys and flirt.

He blushed and apologized to me, but I said it was okay. Then he walked away; slowly at first and then sped up a little.

Suddenly, I heard my aunt crying, holding a little bowl of rice with a piece of chicken toward my mom. I quickly walked toward my mom and listened to what was happening. She chanted to my mom, saying something like, "O, sister, you've

come to my dream saying you are hungry. Here's your food. Wake up and eat until you are full. Don't worry that we won't feed you. If you want anything to eat, come to me and ask me for food. I'll always have something for you to eat." She chanted on and on while crying and putting the food on my mom's chest. I saw this, and I start crying because I saw my sisters, Mai and Zoua crying.

The third day was the last day, which my mom was buried. That was the time I cried the hardest because I knew that it was the last time I was going to see her. All that I saw was blurriness because of my hot tears rolling down my cheeks. Dizziness invaded, and the sun's energy was a disaster causing me to almost faint, but I couldn't because I wasn't that weak. The more my cousins talked to me about not crying too much, the more I cried. I guess they figured that out because they just stood there silently and said nothing to me afterward. Whenever I cried, my two nieces, Pa Houa Yang and Pa Foua Hang, cried.

After we buried my mom and went home, I slept in my bed from 3 p.m. to 3 a.m. I was scared to stay up during that night, but I assured myself that I needn't be scared of anything because it was only my mom. Somehow, the thought of my mom resting in peace forever came flooding all over my mind, and I was happy that she was no longer in such a stressful world like she had survived through.

Teacher Talk

Shoua Vang's strong sense of voice is enhanced by her fluency. This piece has the detail of a movie script as she narrates the events that surrounded "the day." Her voice is further amplified by descriptions of her emotions and by the freshness of many of her expressions.

Fluency is a goal for all developing writers, but is an especially challenging goal in working with ESL writers. Here are some tips and suggestions gathered from George Mason University and the University of Arkansas:

- First consider the paper holistically, as you might with any piece of writing. Consider content and organization before moving on to sentence structure, grammar, usage, and spelling.

- When looking at errors, focus on grammar rather than style. As you would with any writer, allow students to write in their own voice as much as possible.

- There is compelling research that indicates that directing attention to grammar errors does not have much of an impact on their future work. This research has been

About the Author

Shoua Yang is an orphan who lives with her three brothers since she was born. They live in a house in the East Side of St. Paul, Minnesota. Shoua's father died in the Vietnam War, sacrificing his life for his people. (Shoua was only a couple of months old and never had the chance to see how he looked, but only saw the picture hanging on the wall, in a frame.) Her mother died in May 1st, 2001 at 10 o'clock in St. John's Hospital. Shoua's mother slept for three days straight without waking up or opening her eyes. No one knew exactly how she died, but her cousins said that her husband came back to take her.

In 7th grade, Shoua started writing three tremendous stories about her mother's death; however, she has not published them. "I want to finish my story in the year 2005 because I want my books to be novels and I'm still learning how to make my grammar superb," said Shoua.

As a great poet in her family, she had written poems that expressed her feelings. Usually, her poems are about her love life and interference of her family members.

Whenever Shoua feels betrayed, everyone notices that she has raised her anger up to the hottest, spiciest, and the reddest pepper that no one dares to say or look at it. Often times, her knowledge in stories and poems has inspired many readers.

duplicated with ESL writers, with the same results. One counter-argument to these findings is that the improvement takes more time than was allowed in the study. In any case, students often expect feedback. In that case, look for patterns of error. Limit your correction to two or three per draft. Make sure students understand that these are not their only problems, that this is a step-by-step approach or they may feel cheated that even when they fix the errors, they do not see instant improvement.

- Read for what isn't there. Sometimes a paper may be error-free because the writer makes safe choices. The writer may limit vocabulary choices to familiar and easy to spell words. Or there may be no fragments or dangling modifiers because there are no attempts at complex sentences.

- With their lack of experience with idioms and clichés, non-native speakers can often be refreshingly original in their images and descriptions. As with any developing writer, celebrate the strengths of each piece.

Sandy Hayes, Becker Middle School

There's More to My Life Than the Size of My Rear End

Aryn Arnold, Winona Senior High School, grade 11

It's three in the morning. You've finally drifted off to sleep, and are barely tickling the concept of rapid eye movement, when a whiny yell from the next room slams itself upon your ears. As the only hearing counselor, it's your obligation to go see what is wrong. Groggily, you meander into the camper's quarters only to realize that Julia's catheter has fallen out again. After hauling the two hundred and fifty pound woman into her wheelchair, you embark on the thirty-minute drive to the emergency room. Occurrences like this happen often to the meagerly paid staff of Camp Courage North. Surprisingly, the devoted staff still returns the next year, to face the same battles with autistic kids, the language barriers with deaf children and the fragility of the hemophiliac kids. If asked, most of them would gladly work there with no monetary compensation, purely for the privilege of being a part of Camp Courage. It was witnessing the strength and love of these counselors that changed my life.

Before my summer at camp my spirit was in a state of vexation, but I concealed the pain behind my over-achieving, perfect student-athlete persona. I put on a facade of perfection to cover up the dying person who was inside of me. The low-point of my life came two summers ago while my family was in the midst of moving. New and unfinished, our house left us stranded at my grandpa's residence for a month. As one often does at a grandparent's house, I stuffed myself like a Christmas pig. Thanks to the full stomach and a slightly concave mirror, I decided that I was fat. The next thing I knew I was perched over the toilet with my finger down my throat. I gagged, but then withdrew quickly into a lifeless pile of scum on the floor; I couldn't even do this right. I was such a failure.

I was nervous about transferring to a new school, making friends, perpetually maintaining my 4.0 grade-point average, and excelling in my

sports. I always had to be the best at everything. Third place at sections track in the 400 meter dash, as an eighth grader, was still one place away from state. None of my achievements were ever good enough for the unattainable standards I set for myself. On top of those stresses, my parents' twenty-four year marriage was falling apart, and my closer-than-close sister had just left for college. All of these things were too overwhelming; I couldn't handle them, and this was the answer. After the incident at my grandpa's, I went through sporadic phases of starvation and over-consumption. I tried to make myself vomit at least a dozen times, never going through with it, and always swearing this time would be the last. Although I never became emaciated, the obsession was always there. The numbers of my caloric intake incessantly ran through my head, rubbing my face in the fact that I wasn't normal. I'd feel inconceivably stupid and shallow when I didn't eat, guilty and afraid when I did. I would tell myself that I was in control of it, and that I wouldn't let it go too far. If I hadn't gone to Camp Courage, it might have.

The camp forced me to regain the perspective I had lost. Camp Courage North is a place where anyone can be him or herself. The welcoming staff became my family. It takes inordinately exceptional people to do the work that the counselors do, especially during PH (physically handicapped) camp. They feed people, wipe bottoms, give enemas, wake up hourly in the night to rotate the paraplegic campers, and change adult diapers, all without a second thought. The female counselors were shaped more like Maya Angelou than Cameron Diaz. If they had been fruit they would have been pears, not bananas. I was merely a kitchen girl, but it was enough to see them and the love that they so willingly gave out.

It wasn't just the counselors who hurled me back into the world of reality. The campers opened a new and unimagined world to me. During physically handicapped camp there was one woman who had suffered a traumatic brain injury in a car accident when she was sixteen years old. Sixteen. That's *my* age. She was completely gone; shouting things at inappropriate moments, rude, blunt, no trace of her former self left. That could so easily happen to me, to any of us. Other campers had gone from total use of their bodies to paraplegics overnight. There were car accidents, strokes, deep dives into shallow pools—everyone had a story. They were survivors; people who had faced true life traumas and lived to tell about them. I had endured none of these life-altering contingencies, yet I wasn't enjoying my existence half as much as they were.

Across the summer I began to realize I was dying inside, losing myself, and I gradually released the vain obsession which had for too long infringed upon my life. I still deny myself food occasionally, when I'm exceptionally stressed, but never to the extent that I used to. Actually, I haven't felt that coveting desire for hunger since I started writing this paper. It was still a secret until the moment I handed my piece of illegible, chicken-scratched parchment to my English teacher. Since then I sent the essay via e-mail to my sister to make corrections; this wasn't the way I had imagined her finding out, but it was sufficient. My life can truly move on now that I've dispatched this weighty arcanum.

I'm happy now, because there is more to my life than the size of my rear end. Two short months at camp taught me to absorb my mind with thoughts of my family, church, academics, and sports rather than my waistline. I've found some talent in art and now focus my negative energy into creativity. Life is such a roller coaster, it would be convenient if it could just be like hair sprayed into place. A few spritzes from an aerosol can, and it would remain permanently stuck in one of the more euphoric times.

It can't.

Camp Courage screams the message that as humans we have absolutely no control over the extenuating circumstances which constantly intrude upon our existence. All we can do is change the way that we react to those circumstances and remember that God will never give you more stress than you can handle. As I was driving to school today, the bumper sticker on the car in front of me said it all: "Relax ... God is in control." Your entire life can change in the blink of an eye, so live it well before you are no longer able to.

The Color of Emotion

Our classroom received a grant from the District 279 Foundation that was awarded specifically to work with Jude Nutter, an internationally recognized poet and scholar of ekphrasis.

Her four-day residency provided an invaluable writing experience for our students. They enjoyed the opportunity to meet and work under the inspired guidance of a published author, and students eagerly accepted new approaches to creative writing. Each day of the residency, Jude generously read and personally responded to 100 pieces of student writing. Students were impressed by her sincere interest in their work and were very proud of the validation she gave to their ideas, talents and insights.

I appreciated the chance to observe how my students interacted with a visiting instructor. With her calm demeanor and sophisticated British voice, Jude coaxed them to write in a way that I could not. They looked carefully into the emotions and narratives of paintings and sculpture, and they responded by creating masterpieces which employed persona, voice, and sensory images.

The residency allowed me to see the writing process from a new perspective and to enjoy the fruit of another teacher's labor.

Stephen Smarjesse
Osseo Area Learning Center

Purple

I am the color that's not so much noticed
I am the color of lilacs on a good day
I am the color of the sunset over the ocean in the evening

I am the color of true beauty
I am the color purple
The color that wants to be noticed more

Emily Heithecker
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 10

Blue

I am the endless vast of blue sky
I am the blue pen dancing about your paper
I am the blue ball bouncing about
I am the deep dark blue ocean
Waiting to swallow up everything in it
I am the blue truck that drives past your house
I am the blue jeans you walk about
I am the bright blue flame burning in your fire
I am the color blue

Matt Simonson
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 12

Blackness of Souls

The blackness of souls.
Black is the color that shows loneliness.

The uncolored brings destruction
down upon humanity.

The dark evil spirit
wearing black with no remorse.

The hateful sacred black crow
easing slowly with impure souls,
flowing into the blackness of hell.

Mai Song Yang
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

Cardinal

A white robe turns red with blood
Red is mysterious,
It makes love turn to anger, hate, and rage.

If I were red I would be the cardinal
I am beautiful,
But inside I am full of sorrow and jealousy.

I wish red would fly free and turn yellow
Like a canary,
Frolicking in an abandoned cornfield.

If the canary could be anything
She'd be light blue,
Like the wind rustling through trees.

Carefree and full of numbness
I am numb,
Sky blue and full of shame.

Erica Overlie
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 10

Blue

When I met my boyfriend of two years
that was the color that he was wearing,
blue

The way that his clothes hung off his body
like clothes hanging from a clothes line.
It was so beautiful.

When we met for the first time all my
insides were melting.

Erica Olson
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 12

Blue

I am the color blue
Like the color of the ink
That is rolling out of this pen
Onto the paper.
Blue is a lot of people's favorite color.
Most of the time
Blue is stuck with the feeling of sadness.
That confuses me immensely
Do people like to feel sad?

k.t. Moorhead
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

The Grey

4-17-02 12:04 p.m.
(After the picture: Fragments of Dream)

What is the grey
From that which I see
Behind the lids from which I sleep
The grey from my eyes
Or the grey from my mind
Grey upon grey
Swirling, spinning
Mixing and twisting
Maybe the grey
Is from my heart
The loves I have lost
The pain I've been dealt
Whatever this grey is
It most definitely is grey

Serena Lucky
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

Color of Red

Red is the color of a burning forehead from a blistering fever
It's like a beating pulse from a furious flowing vein
Red is the stinging bloodshot eyes that are desperate for Visine
It's the petals dropping from the dangling red rose
Red is the scarlet red dress drowning the lanky woman
It's the dripping blood dangling from the bear's sharp fangs.
Red is the flaming red lipstick sitting on the woman's plump lips

Lindsey Eng
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 11

The Color

The color of pain is red.
Hearts are red and hearts are broken every day.
It feels like a jagged knife going through my chest.

Red is the color of tears I cry when someone I love
walks away with a bad goodbye,
or no goodbye at all.

Red is the color of all the sad country songs
I hear when I'm sitting in my car
with my ears ringing because it's so quiet.

Red is darkness and so is love; it can be a dark cold night.
Until you close your heavy eyes and fall asleep
and forget everything that's wrong.

Sondra Knopik
Osseo Area Learning Center, grade 12

Socks

I do not like
These things called socks
They seduce the feet
Of people and then
Make rancid smells
Their fluffiness
Is deceitful
And their caress
Is often vulgar
They steal the soft touch
Of the morning grass
From tiny toes
And soft carpet
Is not felt
They keep your feet
All toasty
A perfect place
For multiple bacteria
I think
These things called socks
Need to go

Bryan Knipfer
Osseo Senior High, grade 10

Walking through the Woods

Walking through the woods
Listening to the bird song
Mingle with the songs of the trees
In the wind
The grass and leaves and mushrooms
Beneath my feet
A squirrel darts up a tree and waits,
Hanging on to the rippling bark
That covers the old oak
A doe and her fawn, grazing in a clearing
A chipmunk gathers nuts and stops to chew
On an acorn
The mosquitoes buzz around my head
I hear the music of their constant drone
The ticks that live in the woods, ready
At any time to nestle in my hair
The fear of Lyme Disease as I stare
At these buzzing insects
A skunk, appearing out of nowhere,
Raises its tail
I leave the forest
I will spread animal repellents
Around my yard
The deer fence, the plastic owl, the Dog-
Be-Gone packets,
The mole traps, the bird nets, the insect
repellents
I love nature—from a distance

Sarah Anderson
PACT Charter School, Anoka, grade 11