

WTB “American Dreams” Monthly Meeting Minutes

Sunday May 22, 2022 Jowonio School

A group of about thirty women and men gathered to perform and be witness to “American Dreams,” a series of monologues written by Linda Britt in 2018 depicting a wide variety of immigrant and refugee experiences. Immigration has been a focus of WTB programs and projects during our 2021-2022 program as Syracuse has been welcoming refugees from Afghanistan and other nations this year. Chairs were set in a semicircle before a table and microphone; unfortunately, we were not able to Zoom or record the meeting. Sue Savion did record parts of several presentations. Refreshment chairperson Cindy Rahrle offered individually wrapped snacks, home-baked sweets and varieties of water. Everyone masked unless speaking or eating.

President Barbara Bova called the meeting to order at 3:05 pm, warmly thanking everyone for coming, especially those taking on roles. She then introduced Sue Savion, director and MC for “American Dreams” today. Author Linda Britt has given wide latitude in how her play is performed and which monologues are included. Sue announced that several cast members were substituting monologues they had written telling their own personal immigration stories; several would present more than one monologue.

Sue began by sharing her Swiss heritage—illustrating many traditions from her family’s ancestral village in the Alps that continued in the Swiss-settled small town in Illinois where she grew up. Betsy Nash powerfully enacted the story of Selma, 48, from Bosnia whose story highlighted how the Croats had destroyed an iconic Muslim bridge in Mostar even though it had no strategic value. She brought a picture of that bridge in for us to see. Julie Sydorowych shared her poignant and beautifully written monologue about her own family’s horrific escape from Ukraine during the last war—she ended her powerful remembrance with, “And now it is happening in Ukraine again.” Garang Ajak, one of the “Lost Boys” who settled in Syracuse, had us all laughing with his reading of “Shaking Hands”; in this reading, Wilson, 33, from Sudan muses about the ubiquitous American custom of shaking hands, revealing that his own hand had been mutilated in Sudan. Cindy Rahrle read the emotional story of Ariana, 33, child of undocumented workers from Guatemala who enlisted and served in the US military because it was a way for her to get US citizenship and to give back to her adopted country.

Judy Antoine portrayed Manuela, 42, who told of her dangerous journey from Cuba to Miami in a rickety boat during the Mariel boatlift of 1980. Garang’s friend Kuir Ajang JiBol (himself from Sudan) read Victor’s story of an 18-year-old undocumented migrant worker; if caught and deported, he would have “Nowhere to Go” having lived in the US since age one.

Kate Farrar shared her personal story of coming to the US from England many years ago, describing some humorous mix-ups around American-English and British-English language differences. Lina Alfasadi spoke of her long journey from Jordan to Syracuse, always hoping to end up someplace warm and sunny! Joy Pople portrayed Marta, 29, an Argentinian woman being deported for lying on her naturalization application; her monologue makes it clear that an applicant must report having *ever* done *anything* questionable – a difficult standard to meet. David Rahrle read “Lucky”—complete with Irish accent! —the story of man who fled Derry during Ireland’s time of “The Troubles” in order to escape the violence. Betsy Nash vividly portrayed Isabel, 12, from Honduras who was separated from her mother by

US authorities after they had crossed the US border; this confused and terrified child is not told where her mom is or if she will ever see her mom again. Jennifer Crittenden read the powerful story of Isaad, 44, an interpreter for the US Army in Afghanistan waiting years for paperwork for his Special Immigrant Visa (SIV) to be approved; he's in daily danger of being killed by the Taliban as an enemy collaborator. Carol Lipson (who herself immigrated here from Canada and shared some of her own immigration experiences) read the story of Carol, 25, a Canadian living and working in the US on an expired visa who doesn't worry overmuch about deportation since she does not look "foreign." Judy Antoine (who lived in Chili until age 13) convincingly read "American Dreams"; in this story, Alicia, 31, a legal immigrant from Nicaragua, challenges those in the US with *El Norte's* exploitation of indigenous peoples and asks, "How did *you* get here? What did *you* do to earn what *you* were born with?" Ann Port read the story of Amanda, 29, whose family was split when she and her mom fled Cuba on the boatlift while her dad stayed in Cuba; her life is finally on the upswing with her owning her own Cuban food truck. Diane Lansing briefly shared that her family members were holocaust survivors. Diane read "Miami Mama"—the story of pregnant Natasha who pays \$50,000 for "birth tourism"; her baby born in the US will return with her to Russia as an American citizen.

Garang portrayed Javier, a young man from Puerto Rico who is taunted to "go back home" because of his accent—Americans don't seem to realize that Puerto Ricans are US citizens by birth. Kate Farrar read two monologues of "good immigrants"—from England and France—asking why they are more accepted here than are people from other nations. Karen Stearns, who is currently tutoring children from El Salvador, portrayed Isabel, a DACA (Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals) child whose parents came here illegally years ago fleeing violence in El Salvador; her story involved the unfairness of being considered legal for a few years, then illegal, then legal, and how that uncertainty destroys lives. Ann Port updated "I Will Tell You This"—the warning of Josephina, a 79-year-old German Jewish woman whose parents fled Germany in 1938; Josephina compares what Hitler did then to what is happening in the US now and warns that "we will be as complicit as they were" if we do nothing to stop it. Barb Bova ended the program with a story similar to that of her own niece—a young woman adopted from China as a young baby by American parents. She displayed the photograph of her cute, smiling Chinese niece.

Rafsun Alam, a student from Iran, eagerly wanted to participate in our play. Unfortunately, however, he received an on-call at St. Joseph's Hospital that he had to go in for as a requirement for his nursing school. He had been looking forward to playing the role of an immigrant from Iran and the role of Rafiq from Syria.

We ended the last monologue at 5:00 pm, so unfortunately there was no time for discussion as part of the meeting. However, after the meeting was adjourned, some people were able to stay to discuss many issues raised by these personal stories and America's immigration journey.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Bova,

Substitute Sunday Secretary