

A Life's Work

Oh the places we've been and the places we'll go –
Thank you EL Teachers for much that we know

From 1978 to 2014

A labor of love that was rarely seen -

So many issues and so much to teach
Those people in charge were not easy to reach
You did all of your work with no self-promotion
Yet often you had to create a commotion
Your heart always knew what there was to pursue
Then you did what you did 'cause that's what you do

Long Ho, Ponnareay, Alise and Oukhane
It didn't take long to form a strong bond
Bob Jones and Marie to the refugee's aid
They helped by giving everything they made

Then came our Khmer kids and sadness came too,
What was it that we were being asked to do?
The stories of Khao-I-Dang, of death and starvation
Refugee kids in need of a nation
Refugees here and refugees there –
All we could do is show them we cared

In the midst of it all, the Bosnians came
Life in this country just wasn't the same
Strange language and food, no soccer, no friends
With Serbs and Croats – no easy amends

Adisa and Aila so helpful to all –
Now mothers themselves in this port of call

Just when things seemed to settle a bit –
Mogadishu, Somalia had taken a hit
The Luckys, Mohameds and Ahmeds galore
The Leilas, Aminas and so many more
Waiting and wondering what was in store
For children who had never been to school before

There were new words to learn and people to hire
New boys to teach, new girls to inspire
Who knew how to teach them? What did we know?
What's hijab, sambusa, halwa, injera?
Teach them to read – Macallin
I dare ya!

Glossary

Long Ho, Ponnareay, Alise, Oukhane – Cambodian Bilinguals

Bob Jones and Marie – IMAA founder

Khmer – Cambodian

Khao-I-Dang – Cambodian Refugee Camp

Serbs and Croats – warring ethnic groups in Bosnia

Adisa and Aila – Bosnian Bilinguals

Mogadishu – Somali Capital

Luckys, Mohameds, Ahmeds, Leilas, Aminas – Common Somali last names

Hijab – Muslim head-dress

Sambusa, Halwa, Injera – Somali foods

Macallin – Teacher in Somali

Mohamed, Nur, Abdullahi, Hani – Somali Bilingual

Maya – Hmong bilingual

Jose, Carmen, Maria, Carlo – Spanish Migrant students

Fiestas - Party

How do we teach them, just where do we start?
It's more than just books, it's really an art.
Meeting with families is always a must
Part of building the bridges and building some trust

Mohamed and Nur, Abdullahi and more –
We needed a Hani to come through the door
Now we can help our students read
With magnificent people to plant the right seed

Beautiful Maya helps with the Hmong –
So gentle yet strong while speaking their tongue
She shows all the students just what they need
To open the book to learn how to read!

“Learn English – learn English,” the teacher insisted
But Jose and Carmen they always resisted
Maria and Carlo, their homework completed
Showed the teachers quite clearly they'll not be defeated

The kids who speak Spanish come from far and from near
It can be said with sincerity they often bring cheer
From fabulous fiestas to great tasting food
It's magic they have in creating a mood

A new decade enters the picture, but can the world figure out
Peace, not war, is what we should be about
So once again, a new war begins,
A war in which no one can win

Now the Iraqis have entered the fold
Waiting and wondering what they'll be told
About war and destruction and reasons for such
For these little children it's often too much

Who will be next from far away shores?
To do what they can to escape the wars?

Thanks to you EL teachers, our hopes, our friends,
We've come to this crossroad, but not to the end.
Oh the places we've been and the places we'll go,
You've left a big mark, we love you, you know!

Original poem was written by Cindy Wright (Newcomer EL Teacher in Rochester, Founder of the HAPP program and Newcomer Chess Team). In 2014, this poem was reworked to honor the EL teachers in Rochester, MN.