

WESTCHESTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE
VALHALLA, NEW YORK

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internacional

international

internationaal

international

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Voices

международные



All Westchester Community College students are invited to submit their own writing or artwork for the next edition of *International Voices*. Faculty members are also encouraged to recommend exemplary student work for publication. All writing and artwork submissions are considered although priority is given to material with an international or multi-cultural theme.

submission guidelines writers

use MS Word, plain text, or RTF format
with minimum custom formatting

artists
digital images in
.psd, .tiff, or .jpg format
resolution should be 300 ppi

please submit your writing and/or
artwork by scanning the code:



deadline for *International Voices* 2026
January 31, 2026

International Voices is an award winning annual publication of the writing and artwork of Westchester Community College students. As always, represented here are just some of the many diverse perspectives of the Westchester Community College community.

I cannot recall a time in my career when the voices of marginalized groups felt more threatened. It is astonishing and profoundly disheartening to see decades of progress slip back into the demonization of the “other” that was so comfortable for so long. When the public narrative is controlled by this destructive impulse, it is more important than ever to lift the voices of the most vulnerable among us so that all can hear.

Hearing those voices benefits everyone. It creates empathy despite difference. Negative stereotypes about groups of people melt away when perspectives are shared through art and writing, showcasing that these are HUMAN voices that deserve to be heard. Our shared humanity is often lost in the labels we put on people and the boxes we put them in. Yes, we have differences, sometimes profound ones, but these differences are what defines our shared humanity. History has shown us many times the severe consequences of dehumanizing people who are different from the majority—displacement, violence, oppression, and even genocide. What we don’t always understand is its effect on the perpetrators: the act of dehumanizing another dehumanizes oneself.

As you read this issue of *International Voices*, I hope that you enjoy the creative expression of our amazingly talented students as I have. Moreso, I hope some piece of this publication speaks to you in a way that is new or unexpected, that challenges your thinking and opens your eyes to new ideas, and maybe even inspires you.

Sincerely,

Kent Trickel

international voices 2025
an annual publication
of the writing and artwork
of international students
Westchester Community College
Valhalla, New York
writing editor
Kent Trickel
art editor
Diana Romano
selection committee
Kent Trickel, Judy Marano,
and Ava Drutman
special thanks
to all of the students who
submitted their work to this year's
issue, to faculty, counselors, staff,
and administrators who encouraged
students to submit their writing and
artwork & supported this journal by
posting and announcing the call for
submissions, to those who have
provided a wide audience for our
artists and writers by distributing past
issues of *International Voices* in their
classes, the library, the Academic
Support Center, and various offices &
buildings on and off campus



ADAM SELIGMAN

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SPANISH
Is studying filmmaking at Westchester Community College.



TSISNAMI SISSY SAKVARLISHVILI
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GEORGIAN | RUSSIAN
ITALIAN | ENGLISH
Plans to become a well-known writer in the United States.



ADIEL I VANEGAS-ROBLES
EL SALVADOR
SPANISH
Plans to pursue a career in cybersecurity and continue their education at four-year college.



JÚLIA MACIEL ESPOSITO
BRAZIL
PORTUGUESE
Plans to complete their degree and begin their career in nursing.



MIRILAILY REYNOSO ESPALLAT
DOMINICAN REPUBLIC
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Plans to create a space where people feel heard and supported without fear of expressing themselves.



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Plans to enter the Radiologic Technology program at WCC and pursue a career as a Radiology Technician.

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Plans to pursue a career in nursing to help people and solve real-world problems.

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Plans to complete their degree in Graphic Design, work in media production and spread awareness of Spanish culture.

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PORTUGUESE
Plans to develop their career through education in the United States, grow their company and become a mother.

DAPHNE MEJIA
ECUADOR
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Aims to create beauty and space for a moment of deeper connection and reflection through their art.

AXEL HERRERA
MEXICO
SPANISH
Plans to become an illustrator and comic book artist and be an inspiration for other artists.

ANDREA PERALTA AREVALO
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Plans to complete their degree in Psychology and pursue a career in mental health support working with diverse communities.

SHARON CUATECO
MEXICO | ECUADOR
SPANISH | ENGLISH
Plans to pursue a master's degree in medicine and become a future radiologist.

ADAM SELIGMAN
UNITED STATES
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Plans to continue their education in Media Arts and Communication at a four year school and pursue a career in photojournalism.

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Is pursuing an Associate of Applied Science degree in fashion merchandising.

SALMA OUMERJAL
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Plans to continue their studies in Nursing, explore new opportunities in their career and travel to explore new cultures.

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ALBANIA
ALBANIAN
Is studying engineering science at Westchester Community College.

GIFTY ABBEY QUAYE
GHANA
TWI | ENGLISH
Is studying at Westchester Community College to become a nurse.

CHAINS

ADIEL I VANEGAS-ROBLES

I was three when I crossed unseen borders,
Small hands clutching dreams I couldn't name.
Feet planted in a land that whispered promise,
Yet shadows of papers ruled the game.

A single sheet, thin as breath,
Yet heavy enough to cage my flight.
Stamped with limits I never chose,
A wall between my dreams and right.

In school, I pledged with hopeful hands,
Spoke of justice, land of free.
Yet silence followed every question—
Was this home meant for me?

Not here, not there, caught in the seams,
Too foreign for one, too faded for the other.
A tethered soul, a nameless place,
A child of two lands, yet claimed by neither.

I dreamed of badges, of justice served,
A shield upon my chest.
Yet ink and laws denied my path,
No matter how I tried my best.

But paper bends, it does not break,
And chains are meant to fall.
I carved new roads in circuits and fire,
Built my own bridge, stood up tall.

Now I fight in different battles,
Guarding walls you cannot see.
Not a soldier, nor an agent,
But a warrior digitally free.

My dreams were not erased, just rewritten,
My story mine to tell.
For no paper, no law, no fleeting ink
Can cage a soul that dares rebel.

SHARON CUATECO



STRAWBERRY DREAMS

THE PRICE OF PERSEVERANCE

TSISNAMI SISSY SAKVARLISHVILI

I was 16 years old when cell phones were the hottest trend in Georgia. In my village, Vachnadziani, nestled in the eastern part of the country, owning a cell phone was the ultimate symbol of coolness—not just in our village but in the entire municipality. Brands like Motorola, Nokia, and Siemens were the envy of every teenager. For my 16th birthday, I dared to ask my parents for a cell phone as a gift. Deep down, I knew it was an impossible question. My blind, adoptive parents couldn't afford such a luxury.

But I was determined. If my parents couldn't buy it for me, I decided I would earn it myself. The only opportunity available to me was strawberry picking—a backbreaking job that paid one Georgian lari per bucket. That was roughly equivalent to 50 cents in U.S. dollars. It was late May, the start of the busy harvest season in Kakheti, when farmers desperately needed cheap labor to collect their crops.

I was an honor student, far removed from the physical labor of farm work, but I used all my charm and confidence to persuade a farmer to hire me. I even encouraged a few of my classmates to join in.

Each morning, I woke up before the sun, around 5 a.m., washed my face, and dressed in long-sleeved clothes and pants to protect my fair skin from the harsh Georgian sun. My grandmother's old sunhat

completed the ensemble. By midday, when the temperature soared to 36 degrees Celsius (nearly 97 degrees Fahrenheit), I would be boiling under those layers, but I had no choice. Back then, sunscreen was unheard of in my corner of the world.

I left home with pride each morning, crossing the village bridge on foot to reach the strawberry fields. By 6 a.m., the work began. Picking strawberries was grueling. My back was hunched over for hours, my hands constantly moving to fill the buckets. The faster you worked, the more you earned.

By noon, we had a short break for lunch. The farm owner provided a humble meal: Georgian bread, boiled potatoes, and fresh green garlic. On rare days, there might be a can of fish or, if we were lucky, a piece of cheese. We all shared one loaf of bread, and the garlic smell clung to us like a second skin. After just 30 minutes, we were back at it, enduring the scorching sun and the relentless labor.

By 3 p.m., the heat was unbearable. I was drenched in sweat, my clothes clinging to me like a second layer of skin. I smelled like a mix of garlic and exhaustion. My knees ached so much that I often lay flat on the ground, letting my hands continue the work. But I didn't stop. I couldn't stop. I had a goal, and I was determined



to achieve it. Every day, I was the top picker, filling 12 buckets and earning 12 lari—sometimes even 14 lari if I pushed myself to the limit.

When the day ended, I dragged my exhausted body home. Some nights, I didn't even have the energy to shower. I collapsed into bed, dirty and drained, knowing I'd have to wake up and do it all again the next day.

For nearly a month, I worked tirelessly, and finally, I saved enough money to buy my cell phone. Holding it in my hands for the first time, I felt an overwhelming sense of pride. I caught my reflection in the mirror and saw a different person staring back at me. My hands were rough with calluses—hardworking hands that had earned their reward. That summer, I learned some of life's most valuable lessons: responsibility, independence, and perseverance. I discovered that if you truly want something, you must be willing to work hard for it. Strawberry picking was my first real job, and though it was grueling, it shaped me into the person I am today. Whenever I see strawberries now, they remind me of that summer—the sweat, the struggle, and the satisfaction of achieving a dream.

GIFTY ABBEY QUAYE



FEELINGS

JÚLIA MACIEL ESPOSITO

She left in a sunny day of February 2022, and I was with her, holding her by her neck the whole time, trying somehow to bring some comfort. It was a hard decision, but she had to, her life as it was no longer fit her anymore, she needed a change. I felt her heartbeat when she hugged her family to catch the flight, it was steady at first, she was confident, excited with her decision, and everything was going to be fine but when the plane started to take off, her heartbeat was getting faster and faster like a drum.

BUM, BUM, BUM

She was scared, I felt her sweat coming down her neck and touched me, I felt her shivering and I started to shiver too, at this point there was no going back, and she whispered what am I doing? For no one to listen to but I did, that night we both stayed awake. After long 10 hours we have arrived in our destination, it was so cold, there was snow everywhere, our first time seeing snow and I saw her first smile since we left, however, everything was different: different smells, different language, and different food, and we both felt out of place.

That feeling of not belonging kept for a few weeks, she cried for endless nights holding me tight, I could feel her tears washing over me, hating to see her suffering, and wishing that this would all be over soon. Days turned into weeks and weeks into months, winter turned into spring, and I could smell the fresh grass and flores in the air, the sun came out and she made friends, she was starting to feel happy with her new life, she went

to a trip with her friends, saw beautiful places and I was with her the whole time like I always did.

Time flew by, and it was winter again, cold and snow all over. Two years have passed since she left her home country, out of her comfort zone but I could not be prouder of her, besides the hard moments at the beginning, she was genuinely happy now, building her live, going to college, some friends come and go during her journey, but she learned how to turn the loneliness into solitude and appreciate every moment, she grew up so much. Her parents came to visit her, and it was so special, I felt her heart beating faster, but this time of happiness and I couldn't be happier for her.

One morning she woke up and started to get ready for the day, but suddenly she holds me tight, I felt the pressure and started to get nervous, what is wrong? She took me off her neck and stare at me Did I do something wrong? But she was smiling at me, her eyes covered with happy tears and then I realized that she did not need me anymore. I was upset at first, wondering why, but then I understand, she was ready to live her life by herself, ready to face every good and bad moments by herself, Damn she grew up! and honestly, I was ready to rest knowing that she was fine. She touched me softly, I have the shape of a key and padlock, I was a present of a friend from her home country and from the first moment she put me around her neck we never separated, I know all her secrets, all she had been through. She put me in a small jewelry box and with a big smile and tear on her face she closed the box. That's my girl!!

Dear Death,

you have always been present in my life,
taking away the people I love the most.
Yet I cannot understand
what you do with them.
I begin to think that one day
you will come for me.

And believe me:
I will wait for you with open arms.
Because thanks to you,
my life has meaning.
Thanks to you, I value every minute.
Though I don't know where you will take me,
I know I will go with you.
I would like to know you better,
to make peace with you,
so I no longer have to live in constant fear.
You will always be
the purpose of my life.
I know you will soon come
for the others I love,
leaving me alone.

So I ask you this:
treat them with the greatest tenderness.
And when my time comes,
allow me to dance with you,
in honor of life
and in respect for your work.
The day we meet
will be the most important of my existence,
the revelation of the truth.
I am aware that moment

could come at any instant,
and it terrifies me.
Because life is ironic:
imaginary borders separate us
from those we love.
But in death, there are no borders.
It is the final refuge,
the one place where we all go,
regardless of our differences.

What irony:
to be more united in death
than in life.
My life,
which is far from perfect,
yet brings a smile to my face
when I think that it will one day end.
In the meantime,
in my bohemian youth,
I remain in awe,
gazing at the horizon,
knowing that one day
I will become part of the firmament,
like all those
who once walked this earth,
but whom time outran.
What meaning lies in this sea of causality
without order?
I do not know.
But I find beauty
in humanity's efforts
to make sense of this existence,
while you, Lady Death,
watch us,
flirting.
We shall meet,
on the day of my death.

MIGUEL ANGEL ROMERO RUIZ

SALMA OUMERJAL



BEDCLOTHES WASHING RITUAL

GEORGIA IN THE 1990's

Washing the bedclothes was a great ritual in my family. My grandmother, who lived in the village, used to say that a woman was ready to get married once she learned how to wash bedclothes. I don't know whether I was getting ready to marry or something else, but I was fifteen years old when my late grandmother first introduced me to the "secret" ways of washing bedclothes.

In the intense heat of the summer, when the whole region of Kakheti experienced severe drought and peasants returned home from their patches of land troubled by the afternoon sun, just to rest their tired bodies for a little while and then get back to work again in the evening, my grandmother still didn't take a break. She used to light fires from logs in the middle of the yard, where the clay oven stood. Then she would put a ginormous iron basin filled to the top with water on the oven, boil it and add one of the most expensive washing detergents in the 1990s called Ariel. She didn't use washing soap. All my family's bedclothes, including comforters,

pillowcases, and bed sheets used to be boiled in Ariel broth. Occasionally, grandmother would stir it using a big wooden stick, just like they stirred meat in a pot of beef stew called Khashlama.

The bedclothes boiled for about thirty minutes. After this, Grandma took them out using a big wooden stick and rinsed them through running water in the sink. There she also had a huge basin which could hold a pair of linens. Those boiled bed sheets were rinsed over and over again. Grandmother used to say, "The laundry says, wash me badly but rinse me well." So she paid a lot of importance to rinsing, and even though she swilled them in running water, she still rotated the bedclothes so the water would hit them everywhere. At the same time, Grandma would also boil starch out of water and flour and dissolve it in a separate basin full of water. She rinsed everything in this liquid starch. The last step was "blue" water. The bedclothes washing ritual ended with dissolving the kernels of blue crystals in the water.

Grandma hung the "blue" linens over the wire hooks stretching out successively from the balcony in a pleasing manner, so that bedsheets hung with other bedsheets, duvet covers with duvet covers, and pillowcases were lined up one after another.

The laundry quickly dried under the heat of the afternoon sun and hung starched and stiff, like dried-out twigs.

In the evening, grandmother removed the linens from the hooks and started ironing them. If she had the opportunity to use an electrical iron, she did so but in other cases, she used such a very heavy coal iron that it was a heroic deed to hold it. She took it out, filled it with hot coal freshly taken out from the fire and ironed the bedclothes. Then she made the bed beautifully and sent us, her grandchildren, to the bathroom one by one, so we went clean into the freshly made bed.

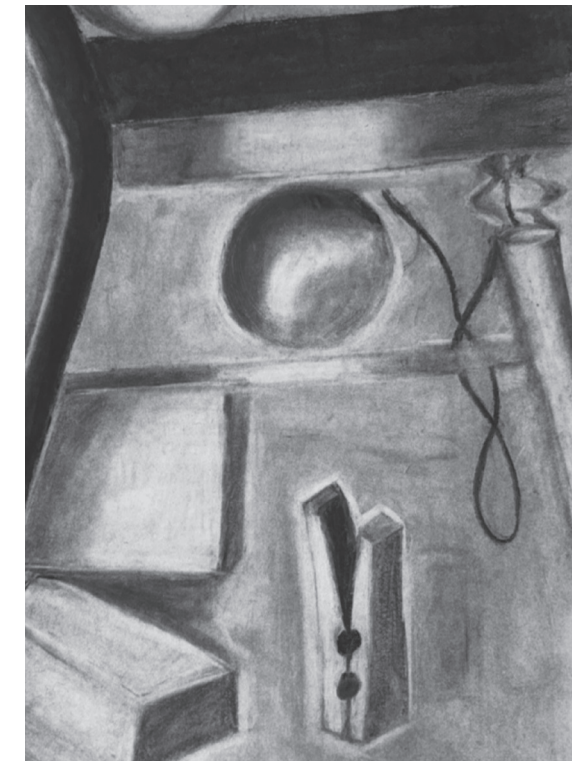
To be honest, I really loved these stiff linens. I slept like a baby and felt like a queen in them.

One day, when I was fifteen, my grandmother made me wash linens in exactly the way described above. That day, the whole neighborhood and village knew that I was washing the bedclothes. Neighbors came to see how I'd washed, rinsed, starched, "blued," hung out, and ironed them. My cousin Anna in no way participated in this tradition. Grandmother was very angry about this. Anna would say, "Why should I go through all this trouble? My husband will

be so rich that he'll have a washing machine, so I won't have to do the laundry by hand."

Later, my family also bought a washing machine, but I still vividly remember the stiff linens washed by my grandma. To be honest, I would do anything to lie in them once again!

TSISNAMI SISSY SAKVARLISHVILI



FIORELLA JANETH JIMENEZ CARRASCO

HAITI

THAMAR LEXAMAR

The pearl of the islands, Quisqueya Bohio was its name.
In the soul of it's descendent it is still that beautiful pearl.
The first black country to gain our independence
but to the eyes of the others, it's just another
small country in the struggle for survival.
Where is the respect we fought for?
All we have left is our pride,
And we'll fight with it until we win

Insecurities, gun fire, people leaving their home
But it's fine it's just another day in the life of some people.
They cry out in so many ways. HAITI PAP PERI (Haiti cannot perish)
A hand waves. Around it, walls become crumbs the earth has begun to eat
A hand is waving. Not a greeting - a distress signals, a peace treaty,
a sign of leaving.
A hand is waving. This image on a screen. A camera man standing by,
powdery white fingers lifting.

We've been put down by so many and many are waiting for our failure,
But once again we get to prove them wrong.
One day just like decades ago our head will be held high
Our pride will be seen and respected to the eyes of those hypocrites.
Our faith has not weakened but is stronger.
HAITI will rise again with its name
Pearl of the islands "la Perle des Antilles"

AJO ËSHTË HAJDUTE SHE'S A THIEF!

BLEDJAN IMERAJ

I know when she smiles,
in my eyes it looks like she steals the smell of the best flowers,
and she steals the beauty of the full moon,
as i open and close my eyes, it feels like paradise,
a thief that steals my heart from my chest,
just with a smile!

E di kur ajo buzëqeshë,
ne syte e mi me duket që ia viedhe aromën
luleve me te mira,
dhe ia viedhe bukurine hanës se plotë,
sa hap e mbylle syte më duket parajse,
hajdute që ma jedhe zemën prej gjoksit,
vetëm me nje buzëgëshje!

THERE MUST BE A POINT

At what point of the day should one wake up?
Supposedly, at the beginning,
Perhaps in decades, or within
Now is time to switch off the hanging clock

MARCELO CAMPANA HUERTA



ANDREA PERALTA AREVALO

His excitement and mixed emotions prevented him from listening to his father before leaving. He just ran and ran down the hill. But suddenly, he tripped over something that left him lying on the ground. While he was recovering from his unconsciousness, his face drew a pleasant smile that ignored any discomfort from the fall. As he slowly regained his vision his family, which had gathered around him, came into focus. Hamachi was a tiny village in the Andes mountains surrounded by green and golden valleys. Its majestic distant hills were

and sweet woman, and her two grandchildren: an intrepid teenager named Kuntur and a mischievous boy named Sayri. Waylla was called Hatumama, grandma, by all the children in Hamachi. She was one of the oldest women in the village. Her enlightened conversations were enjoyed by the villagers and visitors. Not only did her two silver braids represented her kindness and wisdom for the care of Mother Nature, called Pachamama by Andean people, but they also framed her charming face and her two brown crystal eyes that glittered

was the rescuer of many lost calves from the villages. He was the well-known hill climber who knew every angle of each hill, and he knew where to find these disoriented calves. Every time that Kuntur found a lost calf, he opened his arms to warm and calm it down. Kuntur's arms and hugs looked like two giant wings because of the poncho he wore. Kuntur dressed in a colorful cap, a charcoal gray poncho with reddish embroidery and colorful pom poms. He wrapped the calf with a snowy kerchief that Shaya made for her children, tied and carried it

black embroidery and fluffy pom poms. He liked to play and ran around with his pets – dogs, guinea pigs or bunnies – and pretended to be the savior of the animals.

Before any important activity in the village, Waylla would get up early before the sun god Inti rose in the sky and go to the eastern valleys to pray to Pachamama, Mother Earth. Pachamama was the daughter of Inti, the sun god, and Killa, the moon goddess. For Waylla's offering, she used a stick to

THE GUARDIAN

covered in shimmering layers of snow while other hills, which were rich in minerals, appeared to be dressed in seven different colorful veils. The flowing waters of a narrow river, the singing of small birds, and the whispering of the wind through the trees and grass created a melody to the sunrises and sunsets in the village.

The green valleys in Hamachi produced colorful and delectable tubers, especially potatoes and ocas, the Andean yam, which were the villagers' "gold." They used their root crops to trade for goods and tools with other villagers. They had hens, guinea pigs, goats, and donkeys in their backyards that were also their children's playgrounds. Pale dry hay from the fields made the villagers' huts appear like giant heads with big square flashy eyes and singular hairstyles. Some had spiky hair-do's, others had flat tops, and others had a peculiar fringe that covered the edge of their quadrangular eyes.

In one of the giant's heads lived a wise old woman named Waylla, her daughter, Shaya, a demure

during the nights that she sat near the warm rustic stove and told the children her stories.

Most nights, after dinner, Waylla would sit on a wooden log covered with a lamb's skin near the warm stove chewing coca leaves. She carried with her a small brownish pouch made of calf's skin, called a chuspa. This pouch held green coca leaves and cal, a grey powder made from other herbs and seashells which gave a special flavor to the leaves she chewed. Sometimes, those leaves soothed her back pain and inspired her to folktales set in the Andes. They also calmed her pain of missing Grandpa. Her layered skirts and her manta, a thick colorful cape, gave her the shape of a solitary mountain when she sat against the rustic lamp in the kitchen.

Shaya, Kuntur's mother, along with other women from the village, was in charge of the farms, while their husbands, including Shaya's spouse, worked digging the hard rocks in the high mountains. The brothers Kuntur and Sayri cared for and fed the farm animals while Shaya worked on the farm. Kuntur

OF THE ANDES

LINA ZENTENO

around his shoulder or neck; then, he ran down the hill with his arms wide open, crying, "I found it, I found it!" to let the villagers know about his success finding the calves. As he ran down the hill, he pretended to fly and yelled,

"Feeling the cool air gives me speed in the air."
"I can see Grandma!"
"I can see Mom!"
"I can see Sayri!"
"I can see Dad coming back home!"

Kuntur missed his dad who was working countless days in the mines. However, the most enjoyable part of the day was listening to Waylla's stories. It did not matter if the folktales were told over and over again. Kuntur was the one who asked the most questions and pretended to be one of the mukis – Andean anthropomorphic guardian creatures who could change themselves into anything that they wanted – or the apus, the Andean spirits, and he scared the rest of the children. Meanwhile, Sayri also wore a colorful hat and a reddish-grey poncho with

draw a spiral of seven circles and made a hole in the ground to bury some sweet fruits, coca leaves, and a drop of pure alcohol called caña. In her prayers to the Pachamama, Waylla requested protection from any danger to her human children.

On some evenings when Killa was extra bright – a full moon – she not only illuminated the miners' path as they returned home after work but joined forces with the stars so Kuntur and his friends could play long into the evening under their light. Among the children were also the mukis and the apus who enjoyed the loud and joyful moments. The mukis, Andean goblins, tricked the children by hiding their shoes and toys and even performed for them; and the apus took the shapes of some farm animals and played around the children. "There you are, you rascals," said Waylla, also watching the children laughing.

Waylla's walk became slower every day. She was getting older and more desolate. Some memories and regrets came to her mind

and made her concerned about the future of the villagers of Hamachi. She rubbed her knees and lower back, and sat down whenever she felt tired, but always repeatedly called out to Pachamama along the way, “I know we have failed you; I know our men are breaking your bones with their picks and shovels.” “I feel your pain, too. It hurts! Forgive us, Pachamama!” Waylla gently touched the ground and whispered to it.

It was the seventh month of the year, and the farmers had a poor harvest. The villagers did not produce enough goods and some farm animals were dying. They were concerned and upset because of it.

“Inti’s fury kept the rain from coming to Hamachi,” said Waylla.

The inhabitants saw Kuntur’s grandma along with some elders coming down from the highest hill of the village. They had gone to pray to Inti and Killa to ask them to calm their ire against Pachamama’s children, the humans, because many of them were not taking care of Mother Nature properly. After a few days, the sky started pouring for almost a week and made the river change its crystal color to an ugly yellowish pink. It had not only changed its color, but it also carried away some of the miners’ tools, including some animals. The river was rising and overflowing despite the stones placed on the edges. Waylla explained to Kuntur and the villagers that Pachamama was crying.

“Tears of pain are running down.”
“All the disrespectful actions of her human children against the Earth made Pachamama cry. Her tears are coming as dark and rainy days.”

A sense of danger made the dogs bark all night; the donkeys and goats escaped from their owners; the hens and the rest of the farm animals ran away from their cages. The villagers were trying to rescue their animals, but Waylla was there in the kitchen sitting near a cold stove and praying. Rocks and dead vegetation were sliding down from the hills. The

melodic sound of the birds singing, and the wind blowing through the trees of the mornings and evenings were replaced with terrifying thunder and rumbles. “Pachamama’s sobs made her weak,” said Waylla.

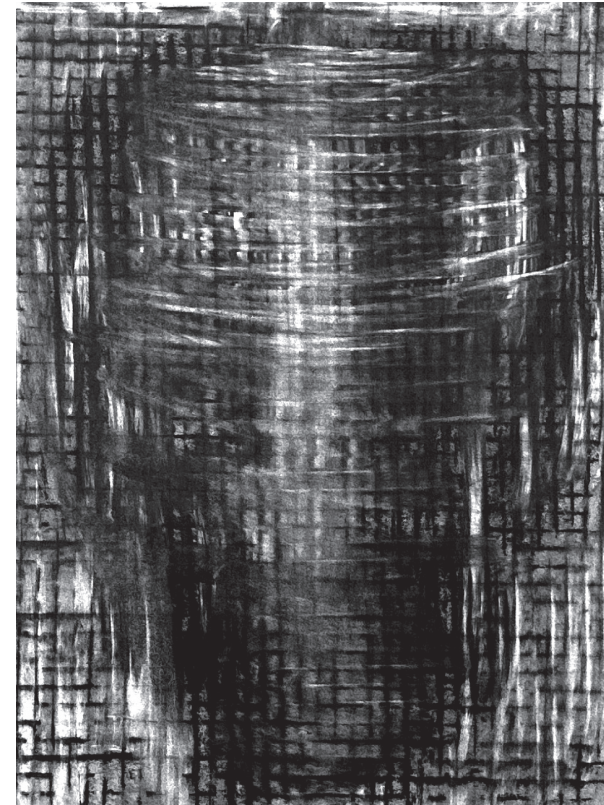
The rains made the ground too fragile to retain rocks on the hills. Suddenly, a stream of melted snow replaced the watercourse, and it was the second wave, but this one was like one of the monsters that Waylla described in her tales. The sparkling water became a slow, hungry, grotesque snake that grew larger as it devoured everything in its path. The villagers were running toward some rocky hills to save their lives and most of them cried, “Huayco! Huayco! Landslide!”

Kuntur helped his mom and his brother, Sayri, and some elder villagers to reach the high hills so they couldn’t be gobbled up by the Huayco. “Where is my grandma? Where is she? Grandma! Hatumama!” cried Kuntur. Most villagers ignored him while others replied, “I don’t know. I haven’t seen her.” These people were also panicked, looking for their own loved ones to run away from the village.

Kuntur sobbed, “Grandma! Hatumama, where are you?” Kuntur ran to his flooded hut and went into the kitchen. There she was, bent on the ground and praying to Pachamama. He removed the logs and branches that blocked the entrance to the kitchen. Waylla’s colorful skirts were wet and dirty; her coca leaves and her chuspa were floating around her. “Grandma! Hatumama, I love you!” Kuntur hugged her and kissed her forehead. Then, he carried her on his shoulders and walked to the top of the hill where he had left his mom and Sayri, but he couldn’t find either of them.

Kuntur called to them. “Mom! Sayri! Dad! Dad, where are you? Dad, we need you. I need you!”

“The huayco took them with him, Kuntur!” said Waylla. “The huayco also wants me,” she whispered to herself.



AXEL HERRERA

Waylla was trying to calm Kuntur down and told him that people have a destiny. They both sat under a huge rock talking as the rain passed.

“The rain has quieted down; the huayco is gone,” said Grandma.

Kuntur’s right hand was bleeding. He had injured himself moving debris in his path. As Waylla healed the wounds on Kuntur’s hand, she realized that the lifeline was short on Kuntur’s palms. Tears welled up in her eyes, and she drew longer lines over Kuntur’s palms with her fingers.

“It’s the finger of destiny!” said Kuntur.

“Pachamama is going to take you so early. She wants Kuntur, my brave grandson for her,” said Waylla to herself. “Kuntur, we need help to rescue our people, and save Hamachi.”

Waylla looked up at the sky and saw the bright sun and the moon glowing side by side. Then, she wailed, “Kuntur, Inti and Killa are wiping Pachamama’s tears.” Waylla stood up and pointed to the rainbow, and said, “Kuntur, look up! Those seven colors will lead you to one of the seven blessed Andean lands.”

“Killa is going to brighten up your path for seven nights. Seven are the days of the week; seven are the deadly sins; seven are the flavors that humans can taste; seven are the colors of the Andes; seven are the colors of the rainbow; and seven days the full moon lasts.” Waylla repeated those phrases.

Kuntur got ready for his journey. Waylla gave him her chuspa filled with coca leaves. “This is for her.” She was referring to the Pachamama. Then she covered his neck with a greying kerchief. She reminded Kuntur not to chew or use the coca leaves all at once. “It will last at least seven days. The mukis will guide you but remember that not everything that Pachamama made is good.

Be cautious!” said Waylla. “Kuntur, I love you! My love and blessings will go with you.”

“I love you, too, Grandma!” replied Kuntur and ran toward the rainbow.

Kuntur started his trip to the promised land that his grandma always talked about in her stories. On his way, he found some mysterious companions. The first night, he took refuge in an abandoned hut. He opened Waylla’s chuspa and chewed some coca leaves. Then some vizcachas, Andean squirrels, appeared in the hut, ate some nuts and shared them with Kuntur. He told them what had happened in Hamachi, his village, and the vizcachas ignored him and continued eating. At dawn, Kuntur woke up

next to a stunning llama who was nursing its cria, a baby llama. Kuntur fed the llama with a couple of coca leaves, and the llama let him have some milk. After thanking the llama for feeding him, Kuntur told her about what happened to his village, and she did not reply. He walked along with the llama and his new friends. Kuntur carried the llama’s cria around his neck while walking.

Kuntur continued on his way, but despite the sunny day and the bright moon in the early afternoon, the cold winds did not let him advance. Kuntur took refuge in a cave. He sat against the back of a rock, and he took out a green leaf from the chuspa, chewed it, and closed his eyes. In his memories, he saw his brother, Sayri, running away from his mom. Sayri did not want to wear the thick poncho that Waylla had knitted for the brothers. Kuntur chased him and brought his brother to their mom.

“This poncho will protect you from the cold.”

“I don’t want you to get sick. I want to see both of you healthy and happy,” said Shaya.

She was a caring mom and protected her children from getting sick, especially in winter. Kuntur woke up and a fluffy fox was resting near him.

“Hey, thank you for keeping me warm.”

When the fox heard Kuntur, he ran out of the cave. Kuntur ran after him and said, “I’m not going to hurt you. I’m lost too.” Then, Kuntur sat down and told the fox what had happened to his village. The fox remained silent, looked at him and ran away. Kuntur keep walking and running up hill after hill and got tired. It seemed like he was stuck in the same place. Sadness came over him. On the way, Kuntur only saw hills upon hills and suddenly heard water flooding. He followed the captivating sound and ran and ran as the sound became clearer until he found a spring. It was a small waterfall surrounded by green grass and stunning red flowers. Kuntur took off his poncho and his chuspa, and ran to drink the water. He scooped up the water with his hands. But after he drank the first sip, he was reminded of Waylla’s words.

“Not everything that Pachamama made is good. Be cautious!” Then he turned back his head from side to side and saw a snake sliding toward his belongings.

“Stop, stop!” cried Kuntur. But the snake already surrounded Waylla’s chuspa. Kuntur tried to remove it with a stick, but the snake clung to the bag.

“That is my hatumama’s chuspa, and I will not give it to you!” cried Kuntur.

After many attempts, the snake still clung Waylla’s chuspa. Kuntur told the snake what had happened to his village, and it replied,

“psss, psss ... I know a short way to one of the lands that your grandma told you about ... pssss, psss... I can take you there,” hissed the snake.

Kuntur pretended to accept the proposal of the snake, and when it was unrolling from the chuspa, Kuntur hit its head with a stone, took the chuspa, and flew away from the snake. As Kuntur ran, his sight was getting weaker.“My eyes! I cannot see clear! Everything is getting blurry!”

The spring water was contaminated, and Kuntur was losing his sight. He kept running and behind him also ran a puma who carried Kuntur on his back and took him to its safe cave.

As Kuntur woke up his sight was coming back and he saw his dad’s outline. Dad! He cried, but he couldn’t find him. Then, he realized that he was in a cave with the puma. “Thank you for saving me. I was thirsty and drank from a poisonous fountain

and then a snake tried to tricked me and the Apus protected me,” said Kuntur. And again, Kuntur repeated the reason of his journey and what had happened to his village to the puma. But the puma remained silent. As soon as Kuntur left the cave he saw a beautiful village at the bottom of the hill.

“There is the land that Grandma told me about! Yes, it is!! I will go back for you hatumama! Pachamama is with us!” cried Kuntur.

But as soon as Kuntur ran down the mountain, the serpent appeared in his path and tripped him. He was knocked down and his head hit a rock. He saw Hamachi. He closed his eyes and saw his mom hugging him, his grandma sitting near the stove, Sayri chasing the guinea pigs, and his dad coming home. Then, the llama and its cria, the vizcachas, the fox, and the puma encircled him. Kuntur smiled at them.

From the sky, a big bird swooped down on Kuntur and carried him on his back and flew all over the Andean mountains. Kuntur was so delighted watching everything from the sky. He saw the seven lands that his grandma had told him about. Numerous rainbows were decorating the Andean mountains; the llama and its cria were looking at him; the fox was chasing and playing with the vizcachas, the puma was roaring and climbing a hill; and many other Andean animals were running through the mountains. And there was a lonely, lush mountain decorated with abundant vegetation and surrounded by a crystalline spring. And they clung to life, and life clung to them. The sun and the moon shone as before.

Kuntur’s poncho and clothes were replaced by many beautiful feathers. His kerchief became a feathery white collar around his neck. It was the moment that Kuntur was destined for. The apus converted Kuntur into a condor, and he became the Andean king – the guardian of Pachamama. This truly was the prophecy finger of destiny purpose. It was Kuntur’s destiny.

AXEL HERRERA



BREATHE AMAZON!



Green is hope,
hope is life,
life is tomorrow,
and tomorrow alarms.

They cut you, they burn you,
they sell you,
they leave you bleeding
while us just stand needing.

You are not just trees,
you are healing!
Without your breath,
there is no life!
Your rivers cry,
the birds are silent.
Your lands beg,
for a future less diseased.

You are priceless.
You are the lungs of the world,
and without you,
there's no life, just worry.

Before the flame consumes us,
before silence becomes echo,
before the world discovers too late,
that without your green embrace,
we cannot escape...

Breathe, Amazon!

GABRIELA ARAUJO NEVES

Whispers of Self-Discovery

MIRILAUDY REYNOSO ESPAILLAT

It's a bummer not to fully know oneself or listen to
your inner voice, but seriously, am I the only freaking
person who's scared of running out of time in life
without having truly known themselves or even
visited those mountains high in the sky where you can
see the sun's glow, wet earth, or the pleasant blue sky
along with its cloud companion? These are reasons to
live and fulfill my inner voice's desires.



DAPHNE MEJIA

Her Inner Sanctuary

MIRILAUDY REYNOSO ESPAILLAT

She believes in herself, she has innumerable fears
like any other person in this life, but without a
doubt, she carries that something inside that
saves her by calling her to believe in her, and that
is the love she feels for her person. She believes
that she should never stop falling in love with
herself, that love should stay, yes, stay forever.
Having this kind of peace and love is like sitting
for hours on the grass looking at the blue sky, it is
feeling at peace with one and not at war, and that
is why she lives for herself.

I DO NOT UNDERSTAND

CASSANDRA LYONS

I do not understand
How things got so out of hand
You watched us cry, leaving as we stand
There without you
We begged you to stay but you left us alone
The woman who's loved and watched as we've grown
I get that you weren't happy
And that can happen
But now we're all mourning while you're with him laughing

How could you do this
To dad and to us
You took 35 years and crushed it to dust

You're happy now and sure that's great
Your choices have become something I hate
But still I lay down at night and wait
To wake up from this nightmare, this joke, this dream
But every morning reality hits until I've no choice but to scream

How could you do this
Just leave us behind
I'll forever hear dad crying in my mind

I hope you're happy and that he was worth it
As you left your family, feeling sad and worthless
As a family we'll stand
As you leave without a wave of your hand
And I'll repeat to myself
I do not understand