



the Lantern



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Hard Work, Sacrifice Lead to Citizenship

by Mary Jean Gregory

After months of studying and then acing the citizenship exam, my friend-student Kaoutar pledged allegiance to America in a ceremony in West Branch. She texted post-ceremony that she “had great feeling.”

She had reason to be elated, as nothing creates opportunity for immigrants like United States citizenship. Among other benefits, citizenship guarantees full rights and protections under the Constitution, a passport, and voting privileges. As it did for our immigrant ancestors, citizenship confers greater freedom.

To date, Presentation Lantern Center has assisted 70 individuals in obtaining citizenship, three of whom I have had the privilege to tutor. As we celebrated Kaoutar's

success, I considered the journeys these three women — from Bosnia, China, and Morocco — undertook to become “my fellow Americans.” Yes, their reward was great, but for each, the cost involved personal loss and hardship.

My Bosnian student was a refugee who fled the 1990s Balkan conflicts. It was distressing to hear her descriptions of how she was forced to prepare meals on blankets laid on the side of the road, of being separated from her husband and the deprivations of refugee camp living. And, although each stop on their journey to Dubuque moved her away from the fray, it also took her farther from her older daughter and grandsons in Bosnia.

The Chinese tutee was in her 70s when she sought citizenship. She was so determined to pass the citizenship test that she walked

her neighborhood listening to the Q&As on tape. Because she was unfailingly pleasant, I had no idea her path to America was marked by profound sadness. While compiling her documents one day, however, I encountered her husband's death certificate, and it struck me that immigration had been their shared dream. When she saw I had an inkling of her grief, she burst into tears, perhaps because someone in this foreign land had acknowledged her loss.



Left, left to right, Tutor Mary Jean Gregory and Kaoutar

Love compelled Kaoutar to leave exotic Casablanca for Iowa. Soon after their marriage, Kaoutar's husband initiated her immigration paperwork, but a lost letter unleashed a cascade of delays and expenses. They were advised to refile, with the \$595 fee, an action that resulted in a reprimand from an agent in another office for having two apps in the system. And although Kaoutar graduated from college in Morocco and has experience in her field, she cannot work in the United States without repeating the coursework. Trading a warm climate, career, family, and friends for a Midwestern January would challenge most of us.

Despite their obstacles and trials, all three women readily convey their “great feeling” about being an American. They've made this nation “home.” Working with them reminds me that American citizenship is a gift and that sharing it with those who not only understand its worth but are more than willing to contribute their talents makes us all better.

LANTERN CENTER

Welcome



by Corine Murray, PBVM, Executive Director



“It always seems impossible” stated Nelson Mandela,” until it is done.” Our students in the beginning stages of the

citizenship process feel this way.

They must meet the three to six-year residence requirement, study the 100 questions for the citizenship test, complete a 21-page application form and write a check for \$680. Next, they make two trips to Des Moines, one for fingerprinting and the second for the actual test. For people from eastern Iowa, the swearing-in ceremony usually takes place in Des Moines, Cedar Rapids or Davenport.

Citizenship is a game-changer. For some, the ability to sponsor other family members to come to the U.S. is very significant.

One former student won the lottery with the U.S. Immigration System. It was not about money. It dealt with the speed with which one can come to the United States and get a green card. During his first few years here, he returned home to marry. It was only after he fulfilled the six-year residence requirement and passed the citizenship test, that he could sponsor his own wife. What a journey!

Workensh Navigates Daily Life in the United States

by Katherine Fischer

Workensh came from Ethiopia to join her husband, Argaw Oremo, in February 2014. Argaw had become a citizen after studying with tutor Don Koppes at the Presentation Lantern Center. I am fortunate enough to be her tutor.

Workensh (work-en-ESH) learned to write basic English in Ethiopia, but did not speak it. We began with everyday phrases like "Hello, how are you?" When I did a happy dance to celebrate her correct pronunciation, she happy danced along with me and laughed.

In addition to workbooks, flashcards, and magnetic sentence construction on the fridge, Workensh reads Dr. Seuss books, immediately glomming onto humorous concepts and rhyme. Having learned the Humpty Dumpty tale, she quips to her husband as he makes breakfast eggs, "Humpty Dumpty had a great fall."

We worked together studying for the Iowa Driver Permit Exam. Beyond memorizing rules of the road, this also involved Workensh and me driving around town noticing the patterns of signs, traffic lights, and highway on-ramps.

When we visit her home village of Homacho (five-hour drive from Addis Ababa) via Google Earth, I am shocked: Homacho does not have a single paved road. Kitchens are outdoors with fire pits. There are no streetlights, no grocery stores, and only sporadic electricity.

Moving to the U.S. is an act of steely courage. So why did she come and why do they stay?

"Opportunity," "electricity," "a better life" and indoor plumbing, Workensh lists among her motives for emigrating to the U.S. "I like our apartment. Very good," she says. We go to needlework gatherings around town where her intricate crochet patterns elicit appreciation from Dubuque crafters. The language of stitches is international.

Although she worked for the tax office in Ethiopia, until her English improves, she serves in a college

cafeteria. "Good people," she says of her fellow employees. Her husband is enrolled at NICC to become a nurse. They plan on making Dubuque their home thanks, in large part, to the Lantern Center. "Lantern is our friend," Workensh says.

"I like share time," she says. During work sessions, Sister Corine gathers students and tutors to the center table for break, beverages, and snacks. "I hear where the others are from. I hear their stories," Workensh beams as she explains.

She recently passed her driver license permit exam. "Happy dance!" she says. She has never before driven a car.

Day by day, Dubuque and I are becoming better because of Workensh's tenacity, work ethic, customs, and yes, laughter. While she learns English, I learn the language of appreciation and international friendship. She takes me to Africa without ever leaving home.



Left to right, tutor Kate Fischer and student Workensh (Ethiopia).

PHOTO GALLERY

Life at the Center

"Make new friends and keep the old, one is silver and the other gold" rings clear for all at the Lantern Center.

Top Left, Presentation Associate Jeff Lange installs a new TV monitor. **Top Right**, Clarke University students provide service. **Bottom Left**, left to right, Seminarian Joshua Sticka meets

Inna (Ukraine). **Bottom Right**, Presentation Associate and Lantern board member Laurie Noel, center, welcomes Associate Colleen Venter and her husband Tom to the Irish Hooley.



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The Presentation Lantern Center is a drop-in center offering hospitality, educational opportunities and advocacy to adult immigrants, especially women, who are striving to better their lives. Sponsored by the Sisters of the Presentation, Dubuque, Iowa, the center is a non-profit organization.

HOURS

Monday, Wednesday, Friday
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM

Tuesday, Thursday
1:00 PM - 7:00 PM

Contact us at

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