



MEI NEWS

ISSUE 4 • WINTER 2015

THE FRONT PAGE

**“WHAT GOOD IS THE WARMTH OF SUMMER,
WITHOUT THE COLD OF WINTER TO GIVE IT SWEETNESS.”**

John Steinbeck, one of America's most famous authors, wrote those words in his book, *Travels with Charley: In Search of America*. With this thought in mind, I hope you'll agree, we can look forward to a summer filled with sweetness!

But now, 2015 is well underway at MEI, and we want to welcome our new students, as well as our returning ones. You are all in for a treat with this newsletter.

Four student stories from last semester's UMEI 001 RWG await you here, each capturing the sights, sounds and feelings of an unforgettable experience. Also gracing these pages is a poem written by Xun Yang of UMEI 004 RWG.

Our Faculty Spotlight highlights Mr. Eric Walker, who offers valuable insights into the language learning process. This issue's Vocabulary Corner includes Part 2 of "How to Increase Your Vocabulary" by Mrs. Liakos.

Our Alumni Spotlight features Mesharia Alkhuzae and Nourah Ali, who met here at MEI and married last December. Congratulations to them both!

Finally, don't forget to check out our upcoming dates and events section - the semester moves fast, and the sweetness of summer is right around the corner!

Your Friends at MEI

If you have photos of you and your MEI classmates at MEI events or traveling together that you would like to submit to the newsletter, send them to ask-mei@umd.edu with the word "photos" in the subject line.

Visit us at mei.umd.edu or on Facebook at facebook.com/meiusa



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STUDENT **POEM**

XUN YANG
UMEI 004-0201: RWG
1/27/2015
DR. JULIE LAKE

There was a young boy
who lived in a village.
He went to a college
which is near by the countryside.
After that, he came to a city
that is far from his hometown.
This city, which is the biggest city
in this country,
has many opportunities and treasures.
Then he became a teacher,
which he wanted to be.
This is my father,
who always acted like a tiger,
when I was a teenager.
This is my father,
who rarely smiled,
who taught me a lot about my future.
This is my father,
who always told me that
I don't want to be a loser.
I said, yes sir.



WHAT'S UP AT MEI

UPCOMING DATES AND EVENTS

- March 4 **Midterm Conferences**
- March 11 **Summer enrollment information session**
- March 11 **International Coffee Hour, hosted by MEI**
- March 14-22 **Spring Break**
- March 26-27 **No IEP Classes**
- April 1 **All Institute Field Trip (location TBA)**
- April 8 **Ropes/Challenge Course**
- April 15 **Claude Moore Colonial Farm Park**
- April 23-24 **Achievement Tests**
- April 25 **Maryland Day**
- April 30 **Final Conferences, MEI Final Ceremony**

FEATURE STORY

These stories were written by UMEI 001 students in Fall 2014. They had been asked to write a paragraph about an unforgettable experience. The pictures included were chosen by the students themselves.

MY FIRST PARACHUTE JUMP

BY HANAN ABUSADA

The first time I jumped off a mountain in a parachute was very exciting. I can still remember how afraid I was that day! I was only sixteen years old. My whole family was together on top of a mountain in Indonesia. I watched as different people put on their parachutes and fastened the buckles. Then my sister told me, "Let's try it!" I told her, "No, I cannot, I am too scared!" I watched person after person jump, and their multi-colored parachutes opened. It was so beautiful. So, I wanted to do it too, and to be strong.

Then an Indonesian man held me and buckled on the parachute. After that we ran and jumped. We went straight down. My heart almost beat out of my chest, but I didn't scream. As the parachute opened, I could see the small houses below in the sunny cool weather. We flew in the sky for a short time. It only took a few minutes. The people below clapped their hands. The experience was exhilarating. After it was all over, I knew that I wanted to do it again and again, but next time I want to control the parachute.



THE BEST DAY IN MY LIFE

BY SALI ALASHBAT

Six years ago, I went to the hospital to give birth to my son. When I gave birth to him, I had very conflicting feelings I can't forget to this day.

I was in a very cold room. The sound of the clock was very loud. I felt very uncomfortable because the bed was hard. Suddenly, I heard the sound of footsteps from my doctor who slowly came to me. She said, "You have a beautiful child. Look at him". Before I turned my face, my feelings were strange. I felt scared and happy at the same time. After that I quickly looked at him. His eyes looked directly into my eyes. It was the most beautiful moment of my life.

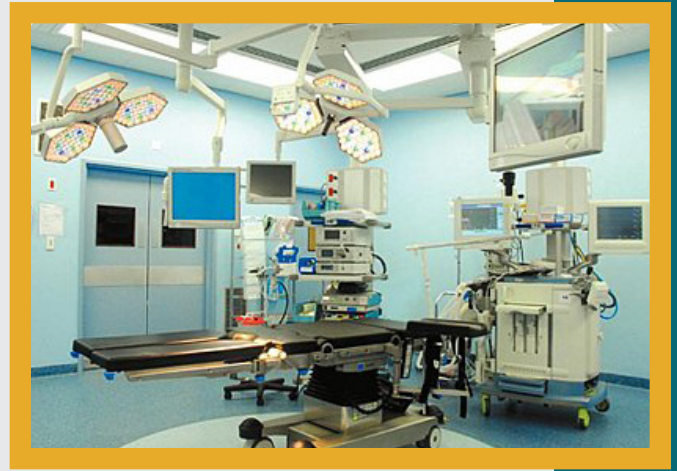
Right away all my family came to share this moment with me, so I felt safe. Then I slept because I was very tired. This was the beginning of a new and beautiful life to me.

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THE FIRST SURGERY

BY MOHAMMAD ALHUZALLY

Ten years ago, I had a problem in my heart, and I had to have an operation. My first experience in the hospital was scary. I was scared because my surgery was very difficult. When I agreed to do it, I knew there was a big risk. I felt uncomfortable. The doctor talked with me about the surgery, and he said, "It will take a long time." There were many doctors, and I thought that I would die. They asked me to sign the paper that they weren't responsible.

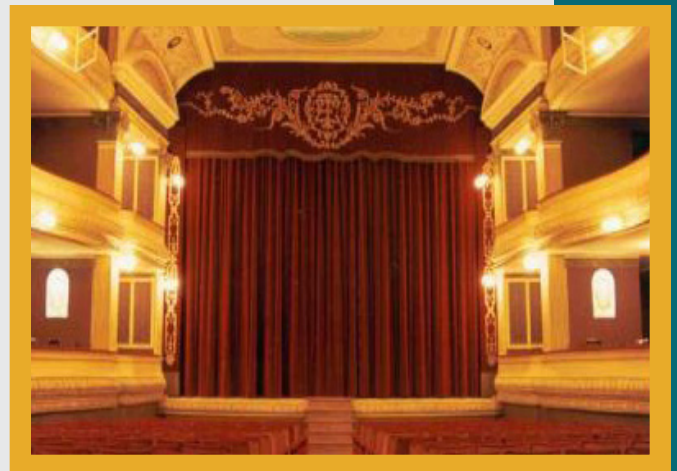


Before I was brought to the operating room, my mother kissed me on my forehead. The room had sharp tools and many devices. There was a strange smell, and almost everything was white. That is what I remember before I fell asleep. After the surgery ended, I opened my eyes slowly and wondered where I was. After I saw my parents, I couldn't believe that I was alive. I felt that I was born again. Then my doctor came to check on me, and the first word that he said was "congratulations". I never forgot this word and the whole situation. My surgery was successful, and I could leave the hospital the next day. After a while, I could do my daily activities, such as walking, playing soccer, swimming and eating a snack. I was very happy and thanked God.

MY AUDITION

BY BELMARIE PEREZ OQUENDO

The day I auditioned was very important to me. This happened 5 years ago when I wanted to get into the drama department at the university. In the morning I was a little nervous and had anxiety. But I was very happy to have the audition. This was a challenge for me. At that moment I wanted to be an actress, because I liked the theater.



When I arrived at the theater and waited for my turn, I thought that this opportunity was valuable, and I had nothing to lose. My goal was to do my best and be satisfied with my performance. When I went on stage I knew I could do well, and I felt confident and grateful to God for this great opportunity.

The theater was large, airy and comfortable. Before starting the monologue called "My friend, the mirror," I told the judges my name, that it was my first year in college, and why I wanted to study drama in college. My costume was simple, a casual outfit with sandals. When I started acting, from start to finish I was concentrated on the dialogue, so I did not forget anything. When I finished my monologue, I thought the judges liked my performance. After a month, I got a letter in the mail. When opened it, I found out that I was accepted into the drama department of the university. That moment I felt great satisfaction because I succeeded.

THE MEI VOCABULARY CORNER

*Every issue, we look at a specific topic connected to English grammar or vocabulary.
In this issue and the next, we look more closely at how to increase your vocabulary.*

If you have a question you would like us to address in a future column, send it to us at ask-mei@umd.edu.

HOW TO INCREASE YOUR VOCABULARY

BY NINA LIAKOS

Part 2: **Systematic** Study

In the last issue of MEI News, we looked at ways to increase your vocabulary through extensive reading. Besides extensive reading, you can also study vocabulary systematically. You can use a book for English language learners, such as the Vocabulary Power series. Each book presents 300 words with several meanings and uses. There are many exercises to help you understand and remember the words. It's important to do the exercises, because they help you to understand how the words are used naturally. When you learn a word, be sure to learn how to pronounce it and which syllable the stress falls on. If you don't understand the International Phonetic Alphabet used in the book, you can click on the speaker icon in an online dictionary to hear the word pronounced correctly. (Memidex <<http://memidex.com>> provides several different models of both North American and British pronunciation.) And don't forget to learn how to spell the word, because if you can't spell it, you cannot use it when you write (and you may not recognize it when you read). A website like Vocabulary and Spelling City <<http://spellingcity.com>> helps you to memorize spelling by playing games and taking practice tests. If your teacher doesn't use it, you can make your own spelling lists and practice with those.

Most teachers and textbook writers also advise you to make a **personal vocabulary notebook or list** where you write new words that you have found and want to remember. However, don't just write the English word and a translation in your native language. You can also write the part of speech (noun, verb, adjective, etc.), any irregular forms (for verbs and noun plurals), a synonym or simple definition in English, and the sentence where you first saw the word, or another sentence from the dictionary that shows clearly how to use the word. Many English words have multiple meanings and uses, but do not try to include all the meanings in your list; that is too much to learn all at one time. Include the meaning that fits the use of the word as you first found it. (You can add other meanings later.)

Some students like to make flashcards for their words so that they can practice and test themselves anywhere. Other students prefer to keep their words in a special notebook or a special section of their binder, and still others keep their list on their computer (in a Word document or a spreadsheet, on a blog or a wiki) or on their tablet or smart phone. However you do it, remember this: you need to review your list frequently! If you do not review your words, you will not remember them.

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THE MEI VOCABULARY CORNER *(continued)*

Finally, there are **many websites** that you can visit to test or practice vocabulary. A few are listed here:

- **Free Rice** <http://freerice.com> This multiple-choice game has sixty levels. As you play, it adjusts the difficulty level to the right one for you. Each time you choose the right answer, ten grains of rice are donated to feed hungry people in the world.
- **The University of Ghent (Belgium) English Word Test**
<http://vocabulary.ugent.be/> You are shown some real English words and some letter sequences that could be English words but aren't. You choose Yes if you know the word, No if you don't know it. At the end, it tells you the percentage of English vocabulary you know. (My score was 87%. Even teachers do not know everything!)
- Several websites have a **Word of the Day** that you can sign up for, or you can visit the site. Examples are
 - Merriam Webster Learner's Dictionary Word of the Day <http://www.learnersdictionary.com/word-of-the-day>
 - English with Jo/ESL Word of the Day <http://www.englishwithjo.com/category/esl-word-of-the-day/>
 - About.com's English Word of the Day <http://esl.about.com/c/ec/44.htm>
 - English with Jennifer Word of the Day (video) http://www.englishwithjennifer.com/Word_of_the_day.html

Choose a site that you understand easily. It isn't helpful to try to learn words that are far beyond your current level of English.

In conclusion, you can increase the size of your vocabulary, but it takes time and effort. If you read extensively, study vocabulary systematically, and use books and websites to expand your vocabulary, little by little, your vocabulary will grow.

SOURCES

Reading Power 1, 2, 3, 4
by Beatrice S. Mikulecky
and Linda Jeffries
(Pearson Longman)

**Vocabulary Power: Practicing
Essential Words 1, 2, 3**
by Jennifer Recio Lebedev
and Kate Dingle
(Pearson Longman)

FACULTY SPOTLIGHT

ERIC WALKER



Q: Name (as students refer to you)

A: Eric (sometimes “Mr. Eric” when the class is predominantly Arabic).

Q: How long have you been at MEI?

A: I started in the summer of 2005.

Q: What were you doing before MEI?

A: I was teaching ESL at Eurocentres in Alexandria (a block and a half from my house. Sweet. Best commute I ever had). Before that, I was teaching at the University of Utah.

Q: What countries have you lived in (or taught in)?

A: I lived in Newfoundland (Canada) for 7 years on 2 occasions—once when I was a child and then again as an adolescent. It was where my mother was born and raised, and, despite snow on the ground for 8 months of the year, it was a fabulous place to grow up—it was a place filled with the wildness of nature and the warmth of culture (and unique ways of speaking English that enchanted me then and now).

I also lived in Mexico (at different times) for 6 years. Although the climate was the “polar” opposite of Newfoundland, Mexico had that same combination of wildness and warmth I knew and loved as a child. And it’s where I began my career teaching English as a Foreign (and later Second) Language. At the time, my wife Abby had a grant to study Mixtec folklore in the Sierra Madres of Oaxaca, so while she was busy doing that, I was teaching EFL beginners at the National Polytechnic Institute in Mexico City. (My metro commute was even longer in Mexico City than it is to College Park. Not sweet).

Q: What languages have you studied?

A: I studied French in high school for 2 years. Everyone in class had to take a French name, so for 2 years for one hour every day I was “Julien” (as in ‘je m’appelle Julien’). In college I studied Spanish.

Q: When you’re not busy teaching English, what do you enjoy doing?

A: There are many things I love to do that I consider, at heart, to be social—like cooking, listening to music, and hanging out with friends and family. But I also love time to be by myself, and on those occasions, reading (in almost all genres and disciplines), writing (mostly creative), and fishing (always “creative”—which is to say, when I don’t catch any fish, I try to catch a beautiful day on river).

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FACULTY **SPOTLIGHT** *(continued)*

Q: What advice do you have for MEI students?

A: Language learning is not just acquiring “proficiency” in the 4 skills—it’s acquiring “literacy,” and this means you have to acquire the culture of the language you want to master as well. When I finally became “fluent” in Spanish, it was because I made a conscious decision to avoid Americans at all costs (except my wife), to have Mexican friends only, to read Spanish periodicals and books only (except for the books I had to read in in my major and my guilty pleasure each Sunday—The New York Times Sunday), and to watch only Spanish TV programming, especially news and old Mexican movies. In the 1930s and 40s, Mexico had a very vibrant film industry, and some of its biggest stars ended up in Hollywood.

So, my advice is, when you come to edge of the cliff, “Jump!” Get out of your own (linguistic and cultural) comfort zone. Acquiring a new language is truly acquiring a new identity, and the only way to do this is to trust yourself, to let go of your old identity. It’ll be all right. In fact, it’ll be one of the great experiences of your life.

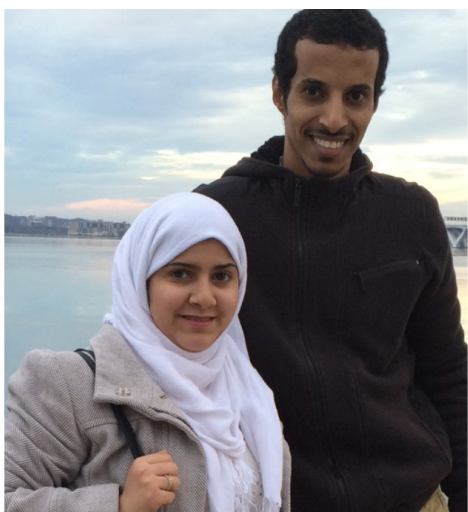
Q: In your opinion, what is one place in the U.S. that international students should visit while living here?

A: This is a really difficult question because it’s so personal and depends on temperament and tastes. The U.S. is so regionalized in everything—its peoples, its languages, its landscapes, its cultures, its foods, its types of music—everything. But I suppose I would say New York City—it’s got the best and worst of everything “American” and the human condition.

Q: Can you share an interesting fact about yourself?

A: My ethnicity is 99% European and 1% central Asian. I identify with the 1%.

ALUMNI **SPOTLIGHT**



MESHARI ALKHUZAE, MEI Alumnus, 2014
NOURAH ALI, MEI Alumna, 2014

Meshari and Nourah, who met here at MEI, got married on December 25, 2014 in Mecca, Saudi Arabia. Now, the two are studying at Washington Adventist University in Takoma Park, MD.

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