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Chandra's Story: An Adult Education Student Journeys from Fear to Gratitude

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Abstract

This article presents the story of Chandra (her real name), a middle-aged, Guyanese-American woman attending an adult education center in the Northeast United States. Chandra grew up in extreme poverty in Guyana, and was taken out of school at age eight to help meet the family's basic needs. At age 22, she immigrated to the United States in hopes of better opportunities. Through narrative methods, Chandra's story is constructed from 34, narrative and expository, written texts that she composed for a literacy tutoring program, as well as three, in-depth, oral interviews. The result is a moving account of Chandra's childhood in Guyana, immigration and acculturation in the United States, and her determination to continue her education despite the obstacles she has faced.

Keywords

Adult Education, Immigration, Narrative Inquiry

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Chandra's Story: An Adult Education Student Journeys from Fear to Gratitude

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This article presents the story of Chandra (her real name), a middle-aged, Guyanese-American woman attending an adult education center in the Northeast United States. Chandra grew up in extreme poverty in Guyana, and was taken out of school at age eight to help meet the family's basic needs. At age 22, she immigrated to the United States in hopes of better opportunities. Through narrative methods, Chandra's story is constructed from 34, narrative and expository, written texts that she composed for a literacy tutoring program, as well as three, in-depth, oral interviews. The result is a moving account of Chandra's childhood in Guyana, immigration and acculturation in the United States, and her determination to continue her education despite the obstacles she has faced. Keywords: Adult Education, Immigration, Narrative Inquiry

"Just imagine if you couldn't read, how hard it would be. And you would want to learn, but it's hard. sometimes people don't think to understand if you don't know how to read how hard it is." – Chandra Byman (her real name, used with permission)

Immigration is life-changing in many ways, and often results in cultural-linguistic identity shifts (Pavlenko, 2004; Rumbaut, 1997). Many immigrants are faced with the challenge of acquiring a new language; however, even for those who speak some variety of the local language, living in a new cultural context requires shifting communication patterns to adapt to the subtler, social and behavioral cues surrounding language use. Additionally, for adult immigrants, participation in formal education (e.g., English classes, general education development (GED), or higher education), can play a key role in adapting to their new home, as well as increasing earning and employment opportunities. Throughout this process, there is the discovery –or perhaps, the (re)construction - of one's own voice and identity as it exists in a new language and culture (e.g., Kinginger, 2004).

These challenges, and others, are addressed here in the narrative of Chandra Byman, a tenacious, fifty-year old woman attending an adult education center in an urban area of the northeastern United States. Chandra grew up in a small town outside of Georgetown, Guyana, in a large, loving family living in extreme poverty. Her parents' struggle to feed seven children meant that basic education was a luxury, and Chandra was taken out of school at age eight to help fulfill household needs. At age 22, she boarded a plane and started a new life in a completely different, faraway place: Queens, New York. After more than two decades of working as a housekeeper/caretaker in the tri-state area, Chandra, now a U.S. citizen, decided to return to school to earn her GED.

In many ways, Chandra's immigration narrative is typical: As a young adult, she took a bold risk and moved from Guyana to the United States in hopes of escaping poverty and increasing opportunities for herself and her family back home. This turning point was a first step in a series of huge transitions in her life. In other ways, however, Chandra is different. At the heart of her story is education: her deep sadness and longing for the basic education of which she was deprived as a child and adolescent, and her continuous struggle to recover, as a middle-aged adult, the schooling she missed. Chandra is hungry for knowledge, and - as she

stated - having grown up without teachers or mentors to guide her, now serves as a role model for her nieces and nephews in Guyana and Trinidad, encouraging them to stay in school and read as much as possible because, “knowledge is power.” Thus, Chandra’s narrative offers compelling insights into the experiences and feelings of an immigrant, adult education student who, daily, pushes herself beyond her comfort zone into new and challenging worlds while, in the process, reconstructing her sense of self, and moving from a place of fear to a place of gratitude.

My roles in Chandra’s story include teacher, mentor, friend, and investigator. I am a university professor and researcher; however, foremost, I consider myself an educator. I am bilingual and, for the past twenty years, have been a language teacher in one way or another. Chandra participates in the language-literacy tutoring group at the adult education center where I volunteer. Due to my own experiences learning and teaching languages and living in other countries, I am particularly drawn to the immigrant experience. In my research, I work to promote others’ understanding of this experience through the voices of those that have lived it.

Methods

Chandra’s story was co-constructed on the basis of narrative inquiry (Bassi Follari, 2014; Clandinin, 2013; Clandinin & Connelly, 2000), that is, “the study of experience as story” (Clandinin, 2013, p. 13). Her narrative was documented over the course of two years during which she attended small-group, English language and literacy tutoring at an adult education center, where I volunteer as a tutor. Since fall 2014, Chandra and four other women - all immigrants with diverse goals - participated in biweekly tutoring sessions of two hours each.

As a tutor, my way of work with these women has been to use writing as a medium to advance language, literacy, and critical thinking skills (e.g., Klein, Boscolo, Gelati, & Kirkpatrick, 2014), as well as to encourage the students’ expression of personal experiences and opinions. Thus, Chandra and her peers have read and written narrative texts about their childhood and adolescence (inspired by Cisneros, 1991), and their immigration journeys (based on Vargas, 2011), as well as numerous expository texts in response to articles about women’s issues, education, poverty, racism, peace, the environment, etc. Due to the authentic nature of the students’ writing, we sometimes sent their work to relevant, outside audiences. In one such case, Chandra published an article (Byman, 2015) in *The Change Agent*, an adult education magazine for social justice, about her recollection of celebrating Diwali as a child in Guyana.

After working with Chandra for one year, she and her classmates gave consent to use their writing and participate in a series of interviews for the narrative inquiry (the study was approved by my university’s IRB). Ultimately, Chandra’s story is comprised of 34 of her written texts composed for tutoring; two, hour-long interviews (December 2015); and a 32-minute follow-up (March 2016). The interviews, which took place in Chandra’s home, were unstructured and open-ended, in the style of oral history (Fontana & Frey, 1994), and recorded with her permission. After the recordings were transcribed (56 pages, double-spaced), Chandra reviewed printed transcripts and we met again for a follow-up, member check (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002), where we discussed questions about the interviews and clarified/expanded on certain points. The member check was also recorded and transcribed.

I also should disclose that, in May 2016, I gave Chandra a printed version of her narrative, almost complete, to review. She returned the copy to me with various minor, editorial corrections to the text. However, I opted not to edit the text, but rather to preserve her voice by maintaining her original writing and oral language from the interviews.

Thus, the account presented here is a tapestry woven from Chandra’s own stories, told both in writing and orally. The result is a rich narrative of Chandra’s journey, from struggling as a child in Guyana to immigrating to the United States, becoming independent and, finally,

taking action to continue her education and development. In her own words, here is Chandra's story.

Growing Up in Fear: "Sadness in One's Heart"

It is hard to be uneducated and have to struggle every day of your life to do something like reading, you know, a simple task. Sometimes, people should walk in other people's shoes to feel how hard it is. Because, for me, it's very frustrating when I can't do something, and it's not like I don't want to learn. In my village, I never had a role model who I could look up to. I never heard anyone talk about education and the importance of it. For me, my greatest wish is to learn more each and every day.

As a child growing up, I always feared and wondered where my next meal would come from. It was a scary feeling to see the night seeping in and you might not have any food to eat before going to bed. Can you imagine what this does to a child's emotions? Only sadness in one's heart. All I know is it was very scary for a child to bear these burdens. Actually, as an adult it is more or less the same.

I'm the oldest out of the seven siblings. Growing up in Guyana, we were very, very poor. Because work was very scarce and money was scarce, I was taken out of school at a very young age and had to help out with the chores in the house: cook and clean and scrub the floor and fetch the water. Basically, your day would start out in the morning to get up, make breakfast for your dad so he can go to work and then, he would leave, and you would do all the household chores and then you would get ready to cook dinner and fetch the water, chop up the wood, and then get ready for the next morning.

My house in Guyana was located in Wales, south of Georgetown. It was on a busy road with lots of taxis and buses. It was a small house with white paint. We didn't have a bathroom or toilet inside our house. The bathroom and toilet was outside. We went outside for showers. We had a little small kitchen that they made out of whatever material that they could find. My mother and grandmother made a mud stove. It's two holes so you can put the pots on the top and then, in the front, it has a hole. So you would stack the wood, and then you would light it, and then it would go up in the two sides so then you could cook.

Food was very hard to get there when I was growing up. If you didn't have the money, you would have to go without. Sometimes we wouldn't have any vegetables to go with the rice, so my mother would buy a pint of milk, and then you would eat the rice with the milk with some sugar, so that would be your meal, and then you would go to bed. We never had TV, we never had any fancy dishes or anything like that. Everything was enamel plates and enamel cups. There were a lot of things that we could not afford to buy, like toothpaste, simple things like that to brush your teeth. So my father would, after they cooked with the fire, the coal, he would grind it up, and you would use that to brush your teeth because you couldn't afford to buy toothpaste.

My father was a cane cutter. He was very strict and, I guess they did not know any better or anything, they would spank you if you did something wrong. I remember sometimes two of my brothers used to like to go off and play in the woods or go searching for things. And in the cane field there was a big bridge and they would go there and dive from the top to the bottom and swim. Before my father would get home, my brothers would come home and pretend they didn't go anywhere, but then my father would somehow find out and he would spank them. Sometimes after that, he would put the three of us outside to sleep for punishment. That was his way of punishing you: he would open the door and send you outside to sleep. So my mother would open the door for us after my dad fell asleep.

My dad was a heavy drinker as well. But he was a great man looking back at it now. People respected him at the sugar factory. They all knew who he was because he was a hard

worker during the week, and he would go to work if they would call him in the middle of the night. Then comes Friday when he gets his pay; he would start drinking: Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. That made me very angry because he never brought home the money because, back there, they would give credit, so if you want a bottle of rum, or a bottle of gin, or something like that, you can go to the shopkeeper and ask them for the bottle of rum, or beer or whatever, but when Friday comes, they would be at the sugar factory waiting to take the money from the people. So, my father would have to give them the money so then he brought home very little.

My mom was a housewife, and then she went out to look for work just to help out in the household. My mother did all kinds of jobs to put food on the table. She was a very creative lady and tried to use whatever resources she had with little material to do things to make the house look homey and comfortable. Even though the house was very small and tiny, it was cozy. She made it that way.

My yard was like a rainbow with lots of beautiful flowers. For example, all around our house were lined with bright red, deep blue and purple flowers. We couldn't wait to wake up in the morning to see which color would bloom first. We also had lots of fruit trees. When the fruits were in season it was so much fun climbing up the trees to pick the fruits. The fruits were juicy and sweet. Our house had a hammock that was made out of a rice bag. It was a great feeling to rock back and forth, feeling the cool breeze rushing through your body. It was very relaxing. We would fight over the hammock because it was so many brothers and sisters to share it. Whoever gets there first would be the lucky one.

We didn't have many toys, so we had to find things in our yard to play with. For example, candy wrappers, we would use that for play money. We would also find things from the flowers and fruit trees to have a market. I couldn't afford to buy clothes, so I would wear clothes that were donated to me. One time my aunt, who was living in Queens, New York, sent a little mirror, and I was very grateful because I was so excited. I was like, "Wow It's from America!" It was just a little compact mirror. But not really, because the barrel of supplies from my Aunt was not coming for us. It went to her children, but I remember vividly that one time the little mirror, and I was very grateful for it.

The life was very difficult and, because you were so poor, people sort of looked down on you. You can't imagine waking up in the morning and you don't have the kerosene to put in the fire to light the stove or light the wood -the wood would be so wet, so, what do you do? Sometimes my mother would say, "Okay, you can go to the neighbor's house and knock on the door to see if you can borrow a little bit of kerosene or some matches or a little baking powder to kneed the flour." But I would be so embarrassed to go because it was early in the morning, four o'clock in the morning. Who wants to go over to the neighbor's house to beg for some baking powder or a match or kerosene or something? So sometimes we would just do without because I don't want to go. They had dogs and the dog would bark. I remember I got attacked by the dog one time. So I was always afraid.

School in Guyana

I remember my mom sent me to a kindergarten. There was a neighbor who ran a little kindergarten for just some students and I was going there just a little bit. Then I went to first grade, second grade, and then, because of my family being so poor, I had to leave school.

So I just went to second grade, and I always felt very bad in school because all my friends were like bright and smart and they would get all A's and B's, and I would come in very far. At the end of the year, I would feel pretty bad about it because I try very hard and I would say, "Why can't I get number 10 in class?" Because in Guyana they go first place, second place, third, fourth, fifth, and then those are the grade that you did very well. Like if you get first, you are very, very brilliant: you would go up and shake the headmaster or headmistress's

hands and stuff like that. On the other hand, if you get something wrong, they had a long cane and they would hit you on your hand because you didn't do well -especially this math teacher I knew, he was very strict and everyone was afraid of him because he would hit the kids.

School in Guyana was traditional. It was pretty big classes. I remember wearing uniforms to go to school. My mom would make our uniform and it had to be ironed and stuff like that. The teacher would do the times table, you know, two-one two, two-two four, and they would write it and then you had the times table in the back of your exercise book so you had to learn all that stuff. And I remember vividly that they did present tense, past tense, and verbs, and stuff like that also, but because I left school at an early age, I forgot all those things, so it's very hard.

I truly believe if you come from a family that is not educated, you feel ashamed and frightened, and most important, tears in your eyes. If you cannot read, it is embarrassing to go places and to do things with friends. This behavior can create violence, ignorance, and people who don't know how to speak their mind. Growing up in Guyana, I was so ashamed and embarrassed to leave our house. I was so sad when I saw my classmates going to school. I would look through the windows until everyone went by; then I would cry for hours. I believe education is the key to success because when you have knowledge you have power.

Avoiding Childhood Marriage

I was I think 14 or 15, so very young, very naive and uneducated, and not knowing a lot of anything. My father wanted me to get married, so he would look for people to get me married at a young age. But I was very stubborn and didn't want to get married. I remember one time my dad had a cousin and they came to visit my mom and my dad. He brought a friend with him, and the friend had a good job, and had cars and stuff like that. My dad wanted me to get married to him and I said, "I'm not going to." I was very firm. So the guy then bent down to tie - I had an old, like Converse shoes that we wear, and he was bending down to tie it. So I gave him a good whack. When they left, my dad was very upset. He said, "Oh, you were getting a gold spoon and you refused."

After that, I continued to do my work and continued to do the chores. And then, my aunt knew someone also, another person in Venezuela, and this person came to Guyana and he was standing at the gate and he said, "Oh I like this girl for my son," but his son was in Venezuela and they were arranging all the marriage. They brought me to the embassy to get my passport to go to Venezuela, and I was just praying and praying. I was like, "If this is not for me please don't let me get my passport." Everyone got their passport: my mom and my aunt and everyone else who were going got visas, except me. I didn't get the visa and something was wrong with my passport, so I didn't get the visa so I was not able to go. So that didn't work out.

A Way Out

I think was 17 or 18, my brother was working with these rich people in Georgetown. He was the gardener there. You had to get the bus from Wales to Georgetown and then they would pick him up at the market and bring him where they lived because they had cars and they lived in a very residential, a very nice neighborhood in Georgetown.

I would write letters asking them to please help me, "I want to help my family." After months went by, I got the interview by them, and they said I could work. They had a little café, and I was there selling ice cream and little pastries and little things like that. I did not like that job because I didn't know how to interact with people when they came into the snack bar.

To my surprise, one day I got a call and they asked if I could come to their office. They interviewed me again and asked if I would like to come to their home to take care of their four kids. I remember having a smile on my face, happy that I landed a good job caring for these kids.

I went and I helped: made breakfast and stuff for the kids and cared for their uniforms, because they were all going to private schools in Georgetown. So they would wake up in the morning and they got their breakfast and their uniform would be ready, and the driver would come and take them to school. The parents were business people in Georgetown and they had a house in Miami, Florida. I went there with them three times, to help with the children while they did their business in Miami in the summertime. I would stay home helping the kids, because they were rich kids so you had to stay home and cook and clean and wash their clothes for them.

Those people were always good to me and my family. After the kids grew up and they went off to colleges -two of them went to Miami and I think one went to Canada- I asked the boss if he could get me a visa or write a letter to get a visa for me to come to the States. I brought the letter and with my passport and that was how I was able to get the visa to come to America.

The Transition: Growing Hope

When I got my visa to come to America, I was happy and sad at the same time. The moment the plane took off was the most difficult: tears welling up because I knew there was possibility waiting for me. I said, "The risk I will be taking will only help me and my family. I don't want them to forget me." I was so worried that one day my sister and brothers will no longer remember what I look like.

When I came here I was 22 years old, inexperienced, and did not know anyone or anything. It was a cold, bleak March day. Life had to start all over in a new country. I was lost and frightened not knowing what was ahead. Months and months went by before finding a job. I missed my family and wanted to go back home. I always reminded myself, "Never give up."

Even though when I arrived in America I was able to speak English, but not as good as the people who lived here. I had a very hard time adapting to the culture and the language. I didn't know what to do and how to do things here. I had to pay very close attention and listen well. The culture here was very different than where I come from.

I stayed with my aunt and uncle in Queens. I really did not know my aunt and uncle that much because they were from a different county in Guyana. To me, they were considered rich because they had everything, like a washer and dryer. They had a very nice, big house, and so, when they came to visit us in the country, I was thinking we were so poor cause we had nothing. We had this small tiny house. So I really didn't not know them very well.

As time went on, I was able to talk to my aunt and we would stay up for hours and hours talking about lots of things. So I got to know them and I got close to my aunt and uncle in that aspect. I stayed with them for about four or five months before I would get the job caring for an 89-year-old lady in New Jersey. There, I had a small room and I stayed with them during the week and then I went home on weekends.

At my caretaker job, I was told many times how to do different chores. It was so hard. But I had access to healthier food. I could take medicine for cold and cough. My family don't have that option. Some of my brothers and sister have never experienced life in America.

I would go back to my aunt and uncle's on weekends and we would do small activities like go to cricket, or go to the park and everyone would cook something and bring it. It was a Guyanese crowd, but I really didn't know anyone because it was their family and friends: my aunt had all her sisters and her nieces. All the kids were like Americanized already, but I didn't

know what to wear, what to expect, what to say. I was always quiet and shy. You know, at 22, I was very young and naive and didn't know a whole lot.

I had no one. I did not know anyone. I just had the people I was working for and then, back to my aunt and uncle. My aunt and uncle had their friends, but they were not my friends. So it was pretty lonely. I would get phone cards and call my mom and my dad and my siblings home, maybe once a week or once every other week.

I sent tons and tons of barrels to my family in Guyana- maybe over 300 barrels. I would buy a lot of things, anything I could find. I would send home things and send home money to build up our house. They bought material: nails, wood, and stuff to extend. My mother did an extension and put in a bathroom and then running water. She fixed up the kitchen, so we had a nice kitchen. When I went back home after several years, the house was much nicer. So what I did to help my family was send home money and send home the barrels. They had nice clothes and shoes and peanut butter and cheese and whatever I could put in the barrel. My two sisters I helped go to school. They were the youngest out of the seven siblings. All of the oldest had a very hard time.

Back to School

When I came and was in New Jersey, I did not go to school. I was just working and going to New York and just working. And when I was in Connecticut also, I wasn't going to school or anything. I didn't know of any places where you can get help. And because I was so confined to just working and going to New York to stay with my aunt and uncle on weekends, I didn't have any resources. I didn't talk to people. I didn't know where I could- I just didn't know.

It took me a long time from when I came to this country to get some help. After probably about 12 or so years, someone told me that it's important to go and get some help. I can't remember who told me that there was some help out there and I should go, but they said, "Go to the high school, and then you can apply to take your GED."

I remember working and then going to classes two nights a week. Back then, I just read functionally. Maybe today my reading is a little bit better because I know more and I am exposed to more things. But 10 years, 15 years ago was just like, basic little bit of reading, trying to cope with life. I was eager to go back to school, and I wanted to go and I wanted to learn. I was very happy when I went. However, the first year, I just sat in the classroom and I just didn't know what they were talking about. The teacher, she would teach, she would write notes on the blackboard and I didn't know. I couldn't comprehend anything. I didn't know what was a common denominator and all that stuff. So I basically sat there for the whole year, not just one semester, but for the whole year. Then, someone said they can help me get an English tutor. So that was how the education started.

Reading is very difficult and hard for me. I don't know if I have a learning disability, I'm not sure. But from what my mom said, when I was a baby, I had very high fevers, and they used to have to put me in a bucket of cold water constantly. I was never tested or anything for learning disability or anything like that. Still, I love to learn. I love school. I fight very hard to learn to read, but sometimes when I can't pronounce my words, I get very frustrated because I want to understand. Sometimes it's hard to comprehend certain things because if you don't know the words and the meanings of the words, then it is hard to comprehend what you're reading.

I like writing. I like all the stories that we have written so far. There aren't any words to express, to say thank you to all the tutors and people who helped me get this far in my life, because if not, I would just be working and making money, but not educating myself. When I go back home to my country or to Trinidad, where my sister lives, everyone looks up to me

because I speak so well, and I'm knowledgeable, and I can say to them or to their children, "Please read a book; it's important." And they look up to me. I feel great, because even though I'm not highly educated –I have a lot to learn- I'm so amazed that the kids look up to me and think I'm a great person who is well educated and knows a lot.

Looking to the Future: Gratitude

Some of us have pain from childhood and cannot forget. I truly believe pain hurts more than anything you can imagine, but we have to let the past be in the past and not part of the future. I always tell my family, look at the beautiful side of things. It may not always be easy.

I feel blessed and I feel lucky in some ways, and very grateful to this country for the opportunity that it has given me. I can work, and I can have money in the bank, I can own a home. When people ask me where I'm from, I would say I'm from Guyana, but I live in the United States. So I feel like I live here, I can identify it as my home. I feel more Americanized than more Guyanese, because I try to adopt the culture here and try do to the things here.

Coming here has changed me a great deal because I was brought out of poverty. I can see what a different world is. If I was still in Guyana, I probably would have gotten married to an alcoholic maybe, or an abuser. I probably would have six or seven children. I would probably look like a granny, because when I went back home some of my classmates look very old, like they're 60 or 70 and they are not even that old, but the life is so hard.

If I was there, I would have been in poverty. I look at my brother: he's never gone out of his surrounding village. And that's his whole life: waking up in the morning, going across the street to take a shower, fetching the clothes, washing the dishes in the river. And that's what they have to do. And so I am so blessed that I can have hot water.

Sometimes people don't think to understand if you don't know how to read how hard it is. And you think of all the other children in the world who doesn't have that opportunity to go to school or read. If you can read and understand, it makes a big difference in people's lives. Just imagine if you couldn't read, how hard it would be. And you would want to learn, but it's hard. I should put in more time, but I have to work to cover the bills. I wish I didn't have to work, but I have to.

My goal for right now, I'm hoping to get into the program to see if I can pass my GED or the NEDP [National External Diploma Program] so I can say to everyone and to myself that I graduated high school. So my main goal is to focus on doing that. I'm embarrassed sometimes to say to everyone that I'm going to an adult education center. But inside of me, I'm proud that I'm doing something to educate myself and help myself. I feel very proud of myself because I never gave up. I am sincerely grateful to my brother who had the job, and sincerely grateful to those people who give me the opportunity to come here to see a better way of life, and have knowledge, and try to get educated and learn. I've been so blessed to have met such nice people so far in my life.

Many people in the past have told me that I am a positive person, and have a love for life. I truly believe this is so. This year I am turning 50. It is one of the scariest feelings ever. I will never be 20 or 30 ever again. Perhaps as we get older, we try to put our fears into perspective. Just this past year, I was thinking about all the bad things that had happened in my life and feeling sorry for myself. One day, I finally said I should start to think about all the good things that have happened to me. I should be grateful and thankful for all the many things that I have accomplished so far in my life. I decided that I am going to change my outlook on life. I am going to start by creating a happy place once again. Believe me, I started to feel so much happier and I'm not going to let anyone or anything put me down ever again.

I am happy and excited to write and tell my stories for all of us to learn at any age despite the many setbacks we might have in our lives. I believe we should embrace each and

every day with positive attitude in our life. It will help us to be better people. It doesn't matter what age we are. We can all be encouraged by each other. I try to find meaningful purpose. One thing I can say for sure, I am still growing and learning every day.

Closing Thoughts

Throughout her childhood and adolescence, Chandra faced the tremendous obstacles of poverty, hunger, and lack of a basic education. Leaving school at age eight left her with an experiential and emotional void, and a longing for education that only now, at age 50, she is beginning to mitigate. However, in spite of the challenges she has confronted in her life, Chandra's optimism and resilience have allowed her to persevere, take risks, and actively participate in her growth and development. Indeed, without teachers or role models to scaffold her, it was Chandra's own strength and determination that empowered her to find the means to escape poverty and begin the uncertain (and scary) journey to a more secure future. Years later, she was able to share the opportunities she forged by helping her extended family, both financially and as a role model for the importance of literacy and education.

As demonstrated here, the method of narrative inquiry allows us to share the stories of those whose voices are often marginalized or ignored. As Chandra stated, "Sometimes people don't think to understand if you don't know how to read how hard it is." We rarely know someone's whole story. Revealing the complexities –both good and bad- of someone's life can teach us a great deal. In this case, Chandra's story may offer insight and inspiration to those serving adult basic education students or immigrants: teachers, counselors, social workers, healthcare workers, etc. Perhaps the wisdom she has gained, and the generosity with which she shares it, will inspire others to journey from fear to gratitude.

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Author Note

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