

TRADITIONS
&
CULTURE

Letter from the Editor

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Dear Readers,

As we stand at the crossroads of summer and fall, I am honored to introduce you to the Fall edition of the iWriter magazine. My name is Tanvi, and I serve as the Editor-in-Chief of the iWriter magazine. I hope that throughout my journey as Editor-in-Chief, I will not only be able to connect with you, the reader, but also empower you to share your voice within the community.

The aroma of pumpkin spice, the breeze of cool air, the change of colors...you know what season it is: Fall! One quote that always comes to mind when I think of fall is — “All of spring’s work has paid off.” After all, fall is a season of harvest, hope, and holidays. As fall approaches, we prepare ourselves for new beginnings and embrace new opportunities through festive celebrations. Whether it be a change of colors, change of fashion (it’s the start of sweater weather!), or simply change of lifestyle, fall is a time of joy and renewal. The importance of fall has been celebrated worldwide through many traditions, or long-lasting rituals. Each family has a set of traditions that make their family unique; however, it is agreed upon that fall is the hub of traditions. Whether the tradition is globally celebrated, like Halloween, religiously celebrated, like Diwali, or regionally celebrated, like Oktoberfest, each tradition has a story to be told.

This issue is sure to be filled with articles that uniquely reflect each iWriter member’s perspective on the traditions of fall and provide stories and poems that will take you on a captivating adventure through a rich array of global traditions. It is our hope that these pieces may help you take the time to reflect on the importance of traditions in your life or perhaps empower you to create new ones this season. So, keeping these considerations in mind, I hope you enjoy the October 2024 issue of the iWriter magazine!

Happy fall and, as always, happy reading!

PS: Don't forget to join us for the upcoming LIT Fest on November 16th. We'll celebrate the literacy and creativity of the iWRITE community together. We can't wait to see you there!

Tanvi Padala

Editor-in-Chief

I WRITE because words are the sound of my thoughts and let me be creative. Through writing, I can escape to impossible worlds, experience magic, and create imaginative characters. Writing brings a tremendous amount of joy and relaxes me.



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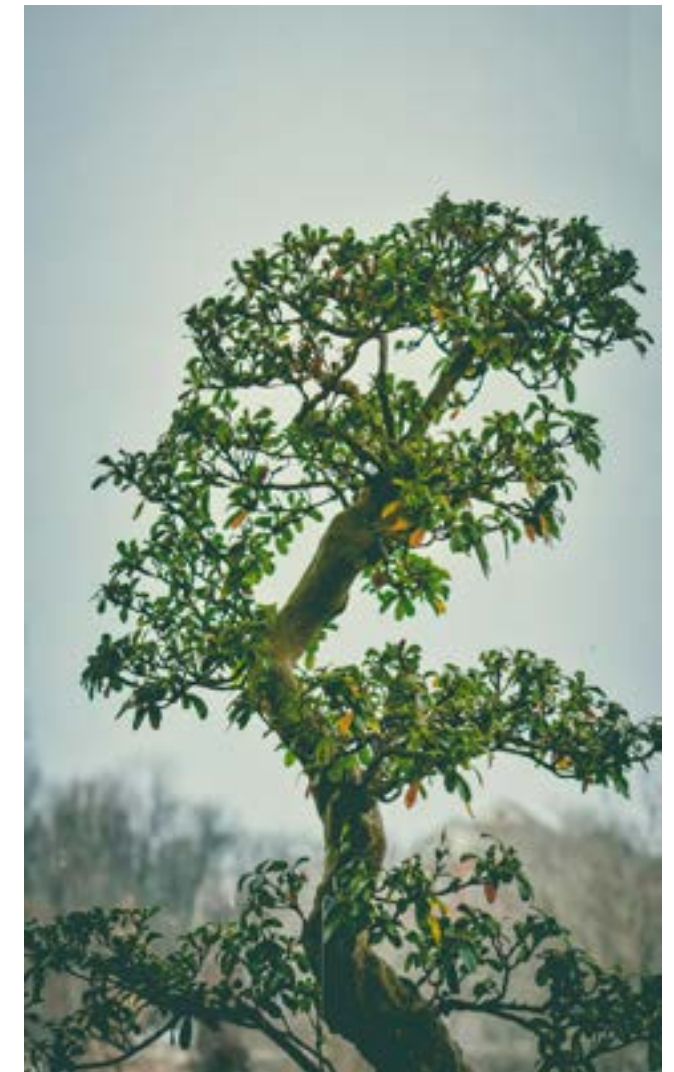
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Culture & Traditions: Helping Cultivate Who We Are

Every year, when fall comes ‘round, my family and I celebrate Diwali. This holiday is symbolic of the victory of good over evil, represented by light dispelling darkness. For as long as prayers, and people from all over the neighborhood who came to join us in the celebration of Diwali. Playing my part on this day, whether it’s in entertaining the guests, lighting candles, or even singing for our friends and family, has been so important to me. Ever since I could remember my first Diwali as a little girl, I was surrounded by an uplifting and overjoyous environment.

The traditions that have been created over the years are what make this celebration so important and special to me. Traditions help shape the people we become; the way we’re raised when we’re young affects the kind of person we grow up to be. The culture and customs that are instilled in us are extremely important, and so is maintaining them.

For example, one Diwali tradition is when we sing “bhajans”, or songs of devotion. All throughout the evening, the air is filled with the melodious sounds of bhajans. Everyone is given a chance to get up on stage and sing, which provides an open space for everyone to share their voices with each other.

Another tradition is when our family sings and performs “aarti”, which is a kind of bhajan sung to express complete love and worship towards God. We offer our gratitude and devotion to show us the light that can be found in everything. Towards the end of the night, after bhajans have been sung, stories have been shared, and stomachs have been satisfied, we go outside and light fire sparklers.

This is a tradition that my mom started years ago, as a way to entertain the children who wanted something fun to participate in, and as a safer alternative to the original lighting of celebratory firecrackers. Now, everyone joins in on the fun!



Our backyard is covered with people, standing together with sparklers in hand, ready to welcome in the light that will always prevail over darkness. Each sparkler we light represents the light of our traditions and the good that will always conquer the evil in the world.

Celebrating Diwali has helped grow my sense of togetherness and belonging. It gives me the peace of knowing I will always have a community of people with whom I can spend time with and trust.

All the things we do for Diwali—the rituals, the songs, the lighting of lamps—bring us together because we share such similar memories and experiences. The strength of our community is held together by our traditions and heritage that has been preserved for generations.

So, I encourage all of you who are reading this to think. Think about the kinds of traditions you have in your life. Whether they are for holidays, for everyday life, or even for yourself, take note of them. Now, try and implement them. Remember the significance of these traditions, and how sustaining them will benefit you for life.

BY Sanvi Pandit
I WRITE because writing is my way to share what I think and feel. Composing stories and poems helps me tell the world about myself without feeling scared.



Fall Reflections: Celebrating Family Traditions and Strengthening Bonds

Fall is a time of fun and festivity as we see a change in the weather, day-night cycles, and aromas, while nature changes its colors to prepare for winter. Every person in the world, no matter how they do this, acknowledges the change of seasons and becomes prepared for what the next season has in store. As our surroundings change, the traditions we have developed over the years are our own unique ways of celebrating the changes. The arrival of fall is not only a seasonal change but it is also a warm welcome to the season of festivity, joy, and reflection.

Embracing Fall and Our Traditions

Fall is the time of embracing some very well-known traditions like Halloween, Diwali, Thanksgiving, or a Mid-Autumn Festival. While these traditions are meaningful to many and have a rich, deep history, fall is also a season to embrace the small traditions in our lives and reflect back on ourselves, our family, and our world. A simple, habitual reflection can become a meaningful tradition in the fall. It’s important to discuss, embrace, and reflect on yourself and your family’s traditions because traditions are the glue that help us in challenging times.

Bonding with Traditions

Unique family traditions bond us together and build our interpersonal relationships with each other. As we look back over memories we have built with our loved ones, we see that the large and small rituals, ceremonies, meals, and activities done together bring us comfort as these special events enriched and bonded our ancestors.

While many may not realize this, birthdays are a form of tradition that have become so popular over the last couple of centuries. Birthdays were never meant to become grand; they were just meant to celebrate our very existence. But the fact that we have continued to embrace birthdays as a way to embrace our very existence has made birthdays one of the greatest traditions on planet Earth. Likewise, each of us has a tradition that we may ritually follow for our pleasure, like saying “I love you” every night to our family members or praying every morning, but these traditions build us as individuals and help strengthen our relationships with others and within our inner selves. Embracing these traditions helps keep them alive as you realize their importance.

Discussing Our Shared History

It is enriching to discuss your family’s traditions whether they are big and small. It gives everyone a chance to share their own perspectives on their favorite parts of the traditions. There are many examples of simple traditions that have expanded and become global. These range from saying Good Morning or Good Evening, or in some families, having special meals every day, such as Taco Tuesday or French Fry Friday. As we welcome these simple routines and traditions, it slowly becomes a beloved and meaningful routine with profound impacts on our lives.

Reflecting on Our Shared History

Fall is a time of cooler weather. But it is also a time for all of us to cool down. Whether your year was a breeze or rollercoaster, fall is the perfect time to acknowledge that we need to move forward and embrace a change in our lives. So this fall, no matter how small or big, think about some meaningful moments throughout the year or past couple of years. Reflect on how they have affected you, for one day, you may realize that the small things were the big things. Happy Fall!

BY Tanvi Padala
I WRITE because words are the sound of my thoughts and let me be creative. Through writing, I can escape to impossible worlds, experience magic, and create imaginative characters. Writing brings a tremendous amount of joy and relaxes me.



Connecting Through Music and Community

Growing up as a first-generation Pakistani American in the diverse city of Houston, I have been fortunate to be part of a vibrant community. I've immersed myself in many of the joyful traditions of my culture, whether it is savoring the rich flavors of nihari and naan while enveloped in the sweet aroma of chai at a local restaurant or dressing up for Eid in a traditional outfit made of Jamawar, a richly woven silk fabric. However, one aspect of my culture that I was unfamiliar with was the Qaumi Tarana, the national anthem of Pakistan, with its poetic Persian lyrics interpreted to mean 'Land of the Sacred.'

It began when my parents discussed the opportunity to participate in an upcoming community event—the Developments in Literacy (DIL) Carousel of Lights Gala. This gala aimed to raise awareness about the urgent issue of out-of-school children in Pakistan, where approximately 25.3 million children, nearly one-third of the child population, are unable to attend school due to poverty and lack of resources. Maha Khan, the President of DIL Houston explained, "The carousel symbolizes the journey of countless children who dream of a brighter future. Yet, for too many, that light remains dim. For these dreams to take flight, they need a path illuminated by education." I learned that DIL aims to provide affordable, high-quality education for underprivileged children in Pakistan.

The DIL Gala begins with the Qaumi Tarana, encouraging attendees to contribute to their community. The lyrics, "The order of this sacred land is the strength of the brotherhood of its people," capture the message of uniting in the pursuit of progress. In previous years, the anthem was performed by a children's choir singing along to pre-recorded music. However; this year, I asked the organizers if I could play the national anthem live on the piano to accompany the singers, similar to the live versions of the Star-Spangled Banner performed at major sports events.

However, I encountered a significant challenge while searching for appropriate piano sheet music that matched both my skill level and the correct key. I learned that the Qaumi Tarana was typically played as a pre-recorded track, featuring the original 21 instruments in a brass band ensemble, or performed live by a military band. This differs from the Star-Spangled Banner, which has been adapted across various genres. Determined to create my own arrangement, I drew inspiration from iconic reinterpretations of the Star-Spangled Banner, like Jimi Hendrix's electric guitar version in 1969 and Lady Gaga's pop version at Super Bowl 50 in 2015. However, I worried that if I altered the original musical composition written by Ghulam Ali Chagla in 1949 too much, it might lose the emotional connection that people have with the version they remember from childhood.

In the weeks leading up to the performance, I bought a new electric keyboard and spent many evenings simplifying some of the brass parts while maintaining the essence of the anthem. It became a collaborative effort, as my parents sang along creating joyful memories as they reminisced about singing the Qaumi Tarana daily in their school assembly while growing up in Pakistan.

On the night of the gala, as the announcement was made that the Qaumi Tarana would be performed with piano accompaniment, I took my place at the keyboard and watched as the four hundred and fifty members of the audience stood up, many placing their right hands over their hearts as a sign of respect. Despite feeling intimidated, as I began to play the notes, they reverberated through the beautifully decorated hall as the children's choir began to sing. Soon, audience members joined in, which reflected their powerful emotional connection to the melody and lyrics. When the anthem concluded, the room erupted into applause.

Exploring the national anthem with my parents brought us closer together as we created a new tradition of performing a live musical rendition of the Qaumi Tarana. In the end, the DIL Gala successfully brought the community together to light the path toward a brighter future for the less fortunate.

BY Raasti Kayani

I WRITE because it brings me joy and is a simple way to express my thoughts and feelings. Writing has the power to transform an ordinary moment into something extraordinary. I can lose myself in another dimension while developing characters, introducing conflicts, and building my setting.

Book Review: Crying in H Mart



Michelle Zauner's memoir, *Crying in H Mart*, is an exploration of grief, cultural identity, and the mother-daughter relationship. Known as the lead vocalist of the indie band Japanese Breakfast, Zauner creates an impactful story that will resonate with many.

The book centers on Zauner's experience with her mother's illness and eventual death from cancer, but it is much more than just a memoir of loss. It covers the complex relationship she had with her mother—a relationship built by cultural differences, love, and tension. Zauner's Korean heritage plays a significant role in the narrative, with food becoming a powerful symbol of connection. The titular H Mart, an Asian grocery store chain, serves as a place where Zauner feels she can connect with her heritage and mother, even after her death. Food serves as a language of love and a way for processing grief, as Zauner attempts to preserve the cultural identity she fears losing after her mother's death.

Zauner's writing is enhanced by her vivid descriptions of food, which make readers not only understand but also feel the significance of each dish. Her writing about food is very descriptive, and her ability to link these culinary moments with her memories gives the book a tangible quality.

The scenes in which Zauner and her mother cook together, or in which Zauner attempts to recreate her mother's recipes, highlight both the joy and the heartbreak that come with trying to hold on to someone through memory.

Readers who have experienced the loss of a loved one or who have struggled to connect with their cultural heritage will find Zauner's story deeply relatable. The universal themes of love, loss, and the desire for connection cross cultural boundaries, making this book impactful for a wide audience.

Crying in H Mart is ultimately about how we hold onto those we have lost and the ways in which our culture shapes who we are. It is a beautifully written, heartfelt memoir that captures the complexity of love and loss.

BY Shaivi Moparthy

I WRITE because writing is a way for me to express myself and it helps me connect to my artistic side. I enjoy writing because it allows me to reflect on experiences that I have encountered. Writing is something that I truly enjoy, and it has always been one of my greatest passions.



A Place for Poetry

Featured Poems From the iWRITER Staff

PIXELATION

After Chen Chen

To be dazzling
glitter gun, hot gun,

glue clinging to your flesh like
a dewdrop. To be burning silently

& slowly like hardwood, like soy-
wax candle, cream-colored, on my

mom's nightstand. To be forgiving
& less angry all the time. To be

frozen time, frozen river—not frozen
blood. To be a bucketful of snakes for O

& a bed of hydrangeas for S. To be pieces of
a kaleidoscope, falling in

place with each turn. To be dream catcher
with hands of solid gold. To be no more

promises I can't keep for S. To be
a dictionary of Chinese so I can keep

up with a single argument, so I can hold on
to understanding & not doubting

my love. To be more than a waist size
for my aunt who likes to play dress-up &

send me expired makeup. To be a cartoon
animal with enlarged head & four fingers,

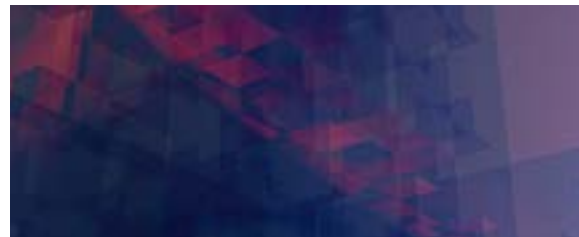
high on pixel gravity, fields of pixel berries,
and oh so many pixel ponds to pixel-swim in.

To be a seed to root to sprout to tree

to juicy amethyst plum ready to be devoured.
To be

a string of orchids at a window ledge
outlooking a sea of pebble, foam, & full

moon reflection bleeding across the waters.



BY Sophie Yu
I WRITE to let my thoughts, feelings, and ideas spread across the paper. To form and create a story that can be told in any perspective, described with any words. Writing can create a whole new world.

DIWALI

The diya glows in my palm
The small clay lamp
A dark red and green floral
Flame dancing in the center
Adjusting to the circular motion of my hands

The next year
The same scene ensues
Brighter flame
Surrounded by a floral pattern
Except
Different faces now surround me
Diyas of their own shining

Laughter swirls in the air
New stories brought into the light
Stories involving good times and family and friends
Stories involving diyas



BY Prisha Shivani
I WRITE because it is a creative way of expressing your thoughts and ideas through words. iWRITE has given me the opportunity to write and publish, sharing my pieces with many people.

Film Review: Twisters

Though some believe *Twisters* directed by Lee Isaac Chung to be surface level, in many ways the exhilarating scenes filled with realistic effects and small moments between characters prove that *Twisters* is a perfect watch for those looking for some action.

Though some of the characters are complex and show duality—Kate Carter played by Daisy Edgar-Jones, Tyler Owens played by Glen Powell, and Javi played by Anthony Ramos—the majority of the characters in the film are one-dimensional. For example, during the tornado chases in the film, Owens' group is simply seen yelling, kicking, and driving head-first into tornados, fully playing into the out-west stereotype of running straight towards danger and wrangling it.

Some movie-goers may be disappointed by the flat characters or light-hearted dialogue, but for a casual weekend viewing, *Twisters* is the perfect film. It provides laughs, romance, and serious action. Even for viewers who are searching for deeper relationships in the film, some of that can be found between the three main characters: Kate, Tyler and Javi.

Javi and Kate both tackle with their own forms of grief following the death of three of their friends in a tornado chase. For Javi, that means striving to find better ways to capture tornado data to protect civilians, but for Kate that means being more removed and keeping to herself. After losing her previous lover in a tornado chase, she only ever works from a desk, analyzing data from afar.

When the two reconnect, they revisit the past they both shared together in college. However, their two forms of grief clash as Javi pushes Kate to join his project out in the field.

Just as Javi and Kate are able to connect over their grief, Kate and Tyler are able to connect over their shared knowledge of tornados. In the beginning, Kate underestimated Tyler's knowledge of tornados, assuming he simply live-streamed the occurrences without knowing the consequences. Soon, she finds he is more educated on the topic than she assumed.

Kate originally abandoned her hopes of using sodium polyacrylate to diffuse tornados after her attempt resulted in the death of her three friends, but Tyler helps her to revisit her old designs and recognize what was missing from them in the beginning: silver iodide.

Tyler also reveals that the proceeds from his livestreams go towards helping damaged towns following tornado tragedies.

Even if some movie-goers would have wished for deeper characters, *Twisters* still provides deep relationships, coupled with amazing tornado effects. During the post-production of the film, visual effects supervisors drew closely from tornado footage and consulted real storm chasers. According to the film's Wikipedia page, the final iconic scene of the film where the cast is trapped in a movie theater during a tornado was drawn from the 2013 El Reno Tornado, the Western Kentucky tornado, and the Kansas wedge tornado of 2023.

The film's wikipedia page states that the crew used 70 miles per hour fans, jet engines at up to 180 miles per hour, and a polyacrylamide hail machine to create the tornado scenes. The scenes were then later edited and visual effects were added to create captivating scenes. Though some critics believe that the film fell short, providing cheesy lines and interactions, the film did well in box office and works perfectly as a weekend-watch. For those looking to enjoy a two-hour action-packed tornado chase, *Twisters* is the perfect film to grab a cup of popcorn for.

BY Cami Culbertson
I WRITE because it makes me feel powerful. When I write and have the ability to publish, I feel like I am making my mark. Writing is the articulation of everything I cannot express otherwise.



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