

2011 TESL ONTARIO ESL WEEK CONTEST

POETRY ENTRY #11

TITLE

She Asked Us All to Call Her Nelly

She cried quietly when she arrived in my class that day.
I heard something, but I wasn't sure.
When I looked around to see where it was coming from,
there she was, hunched over, head down, demure.
The class was beginning, the chattering contagious
as they opened their books and flipped through the pages.
Each student knew the other, each sat in their spot.
But this morning was different; there was someone new in their lot.
We all introduced ourselves, one by one;
told her our names and where we were from.
She looked up and saw, smiling eyes, smiling faces.
She heard broken English, from so many races.
The tears rolled down her face as she attempted to smile.
She looked at us all and then, after a while,
Said, "My name Nereida. I no English speak."
But the class kept on smiling; they'd give her a week.
Then she'd be one of them; she would learn to read, write and listen
to all those new words that she thought she was missing.
I spoke very slowly, gave her time to ingest,
this strange, new language, all the grammar, and the rest
of what she would need, to at least give her name.
She was determined, ambitious; learning English was her aim.
She listened and repeated, wrote everything down;
asked for meanings of words, the spelling, and the sound.
Worked in groups, played the games sometimes became so frustrated
that she cried but endured all the things that she hated.
But slowly and steadily her vocabulary grew,
the verbs and the nouns and the adjectives too.
She was speaking in sentences, reading complex directions,
writing long stories and mastering inflections.
She came everyday with her pencils and books.
She was now eager to help those who had frustrated looks.
She was patient and calm and repeated things often;
and by the end of that school year, with bad memories forgotten,
she said she had learned, not just the language, but her new found confidence from me.
And on her last day, she asked us all to call her Nelly.