

JESSICA'S 2016 HIGHLIGHTS

I can't believe the holidays are upon us already! It seems like yesterday I started my position with Reimbursement Technologies, Inc. and I will celebrate one year on November 30. On August 28, I celebrated my tenth anniversary working for the Upper Merion Township Library. Both jobs went well this year; I've successfully brought in over \$650,000 for RTI through various projects both in written appeal letters and persuasive appeals over the phone.

While I didn't teach a class or two this year for the library, I did read a story for the library's Diwali night. Diwali is the Hindu Festival of Lights, which was celebrated on October 30. However, the library held the community celebration on October 26. I read a Diwali story and sang a festive song. I also helped young children with colouring a lamp wreath and maneuver sand to make beautiful sand art. Diwali Night was amazing and it's great the library has different cultural events to teach our community. I have always loved participating in the cultural events and Diwali night wasn't any different. I was given a card of appreciation with a booklet of Diwali stamps.



I also helped set up laptops and projectors for evening presentations. Like with Diwali, I received many e-mails praising me for my hard work and dedication to the library. I donated a prize package to the young adult summer reading contest. I donated my recent book, [As Far as The Eyes Can See](#), and a Polaroid camera with the film to motivate teenagers to read. Each summer we hold summer reading contests for children, teens/young adults, and adults. For children, they are awarded medals on the number of books they read (I loved participating in the summer reading program when I was a child), but for teens and adults the process is different. Our contests in the adult department are based on chance. If one reads a book, they can write a review, put the review in a bucket, and we draw the slip from the bucket, and award a prize every two weeks to the name that was picked. We have different prizes for teens and adults, which is why there are two buckets. I also set up a travel display within the library in June to motivate our patrons to check out travel books and explore what their world has to offer. I'd say the display was successful; people enjoyed looking at my travel pictures and more travel books were checked out than usual.

2016 has also been a literary year for me. In February, I started to write articles for 5 Best Things.com. My articles have covered the best places to travel to, fun events in Baltimore and Philadelphia, restaurants, and recipes. In June, I self-published [As Far as The Eyes Can See](#), a poetry book about my travels and journeys. After a few snags with Word crashing and some issues with formatting, the book turned out great and has sold a dozen copies. I'm still working on marketing for [As Far as The Eyes Can See](#).

I had a busy year and had many wonderful moments, which I will highlight in this newsletter. I hope you enjoy reading about my adventures and I hope you had a wonderful year as well.

BRANDYWINE VALLEY RED CLAY ALLIANCE POLAR PLUNGE

In February I participated in my fourth polar plunge for charity. I started plunging for the Brandywine Valley Association in 2011, but last year they reorganized and 2016 was their first year holding the polar plunge under their new name. Like previous years, I quickly planned a fundraising campaign that consisted of e-mailing friends and family, then setting up a Go Fund Me account for social media and my blog. I raised \$100 for the Red Clay Alliance.

On the day of the plunge, the weather was 52 degrees Fahrenheit with minimal clouds—a warm welcome that felt more like chillier beach weather than weather for a polar plunge. I arrived in my jellyfish costume and I had a few newspapers interview me. I placed honorable mention in the costume contest.

Jumping into the water was a cold shock, but I made it to my head and won a shirt. My fifth polar plunge was extremely memorable. I want to thank dad for bringing me to the event and I want to thank mom and Aunt Kathy for coming along with us to cheer me on. It was a fun day.



TORONTO

In April, I decided to use my credit from the canceled trip that was scheduled for December 2015. I thought April would be warmer, but when I crossed the border and discovered it was around 48 degrees Fahrenheit (-3 degrees Celsius on Canadian phone screens I saw from being cramped tightly together on a plane—that was a funny shocker), I was pleasantly surprised since I love cold weather. However, I planned April mostly to see the Blue Jays and their home opener since I love watching baseball live.

I was happy when I arrived in Toronto on April 7 because I was tired from my five-hour flight. I took Delta and had to fly to Atlanta first to get to Toronto. I had a great experience with Delta—the flight attendants were amazing and friendly! On my way to Atlanta I was sitting towards the back. The flight attendants and I were chatting about traveling and before I left the plane, they gave me food for my travels. I'm thankful since I had to run for my flight to Toronto and didn't have time for lunch. Despite taking the subway within Atlanta's airport (fun memories from when I was 13 and went on a business trip with mom when she still had a branch in Atlanta. People are so friendly in Atlanta!), I made my flight in time.

I had a relaxing first night in Toronto. After chatting with the bed & breakfast owners and meeting April (Tabby cat) and Fendi (dog), I walked along Bloor Street and settled on having dinner at Ali Baba's, a Middle Eastern chain restaurant. It was good—the lentil rice was amazing and I loved that they had Turkish Delight! After dinner, I decided to the TTC to Danforth Avenue to explore. The evening was chilly, but saw many neat stores and had tea in this one Turkish café. People were talking to me in Turkish and although I could only understand bits and pieces of what they were saying, it was still a fun experience. I also ordered a white tea from a music café before I headed back to the bed & breakfast. I'm glad I did because when I was walking back to High Park, where my bed & breakfast was located, it began to snow. The sight of snow in front of the bed & breakfast was gorgeous.

On Friday, April 8, I had a breakfast misunderstanding at the bed & breakfast. I didn't mention that I don't eat eggs (lactose intolerant); they made me an omelet. I ate the omelet to be polite, but it was interesting to say the least. I also was served a fruit cup and yogurt as well. Midway through my breakfast, a middle-aged couple joined me at the table and we ended up chatting for an hour-and-a-half. In the conversation, they mentioned they have creative children like myself and should consider looking at jobs in Toronto since I told them I was looking at job programs abroad.

After breakfast, I decided to walk to High Park. The park looked gorgeous from the outside and I wasn't disappointed. Although nothing was in bloom yet and it was 40 degrees Fahrenheit, I loved walking by the ponds, seeing the geese, and taking pictures. High Park attracts a lot of dog walkers and I loved playing with the dogs. One mentioned a zoo within High Park and I had to explore. On my way to the zoo, I walked with a gentleman walking his golden retriever (or it looked like a golden retriever) and we

chatted the whole time about sports and travel until I arrived at my destination. High Park Zoo was small, but I loved seeing the emus, reindeer, elk, and other animals. The emus were my favorite because they kept playing games while I tried taking their pictures.

I attended a spiritual service that afternoon and met many wonderful and met many wonderful women. They invited me to lunch afterwards and I made some new friends. Something about that afternoon put me into a



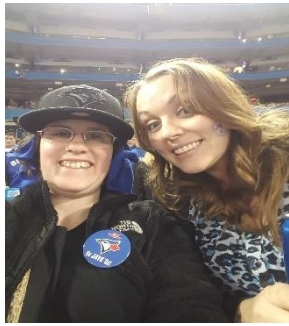
forgiving piece (peace) of mind. When I first planned the trip in October 2015, part of the reason was to visit a friend/pen pal, Moe, for a day. We had been friends for five years and I wanted to meet him face-to-face after skyping and writing for a while. But, at the end of October we had a falling out and in November I had to postpone the trip since I lost a job. When I arrived, I debated calling him, but didn't because I wasn't sure what some friends would think. When I went back to the bed & breakfast after the spiritual service, I didn't care what anyone else thought—I wanted to meet Moe and make amends. I'm thankful he answered me and we arranged to meet for lunch on Saturday. I was happy, but also nervous.

BLUE JAYS HOME OPENER

After my chat with Moe, I left the bed & breakfast to start my trip to the Rogers Centre where the Blue Jays and Red Sox battled it out for the Home Opener. I met an older couple waiting for the TTC and we chatted as we waited. They mentioned their granddaughter goes to college where we would be getting off; we ended up walking to the game together. I loved riding TTC because of the jingle it played when the doors were closing, the people I chatted with, most helped me with directions, and coming home from the game a gay couple heading to High Park walked with me until their destination (my bed & breakfast wasn't too far from their destination). Toronto is a friendly city for the most part.



I had dinner at Corktown Burger and had my first Tim Horton's half & half (half coffee, half cream). I loved Tim Horton's—it tasted better than Dunkin Donuts. I also made a new friend during the game, Michelle. We had a blast watching the game and making commentary with another woman. The other woman, although she was a Jays fan, loved David Ortiz and kept cheering for Big Papi since it was his last season before he retired. Her boyfriend was so mad and threatened to break up with her, but it was comical. Even watching Ace dance around (I even tried to



follow him when he danced into the concession stand, which is how I ended up trying Tim Horton's instead) was joyous. I love Ace. While we were all sad that the Jays lost in the end, we all had so much fun giggling, talking about Drake, and meeting new people.

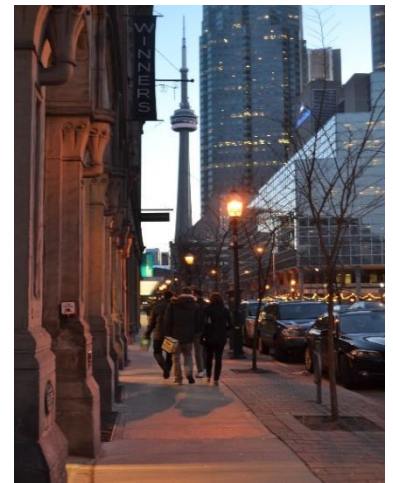
The Saturday after the game, I was only running on five hours of sleep when I went down to have breakfast. I guess the hosts noticed my reaction to eating eggs, I had the option of French toast and fruit. The French toast was to die for! There was a new guest staying—a middle aged woman from Northern Canada, visiting Toronto for a race and to visit her daughter. We talked for an hour and she mentioned that I should try to look for work in Toronto: she also thought my creative self would fit in well in the city.

I loved Ripley's Aquarium. I would say it was comparable to the National Aquarium in Baltimore. I loved walking around and looking at all the sea life, especially the jellyfish and sharks. I had a chance to take a shark selfie. My favorite part of the visit was petting sting rays. There was an area where visitors could put sting rays in a pool. Of course, there was someone on guard to watch, but it was neat. The sting ray felt like a rubber boot.

After Ripley's, I walked over to Union Station to meet up with Moe. He was taking a bus from Hamilton (Ontario) to Toronto, we thought it'd be best and easier to meet at Union Station. After a half an hour of waiting and meeting a group of young women and men from a local university's anime club, Moe finally arrived. The moment of finally meeting face to face after six years of writing and Skyping was intense, but it was nice to finally meet him. I gave him a big bear hug. We weren't sure where we wanted to go for lunch; we ended up walking around downtown Toronto until I suggested lunch at the CN Tower. It was a cold day, but walking around Toronto with Moe was fun. I also loved having lunch (bison bangers and mash) and touring the CN Tower with him—even though heights make me nervous. I learned a lot of history about the CN Tower and Toronto as well.



Lunch was heavy and although I couldn't eat much of my Moroccan dinner, I'm still glad I met Moe. That night after we parted, I went to dinner and belly danced at the Sultan's Tent on Yonge Street. I loved walking around Yonge Street, especially as the sun set against the CN Tower. I left Toronto the next morning and went to Tanoreen in Brooklyn for a Palestinian lunch before taking the train from New York City back to King of Prussia.



TANOREEN

I heard about the restaurant from a recipe book we have in the library. Last November, I wanted to cook a Middle Eastern dish for myself when my parents went to a concert. Chef Rawia Bishara's *Lemon, Olive, and Za'atar* looked interesting and I ended up making a fish dish I loved. I even took pictures of my dish and tweeted the pictures to the chef. Someone from the restaurant replied that it looked great and thanked me for reading the book. I made the fish dish again for my parents and they loved it as well.

When I booked Toronto, I booked one-way tickets each way since I thought I was taking a train to the airport on the departure date from Philadelphia. I didn't have the means to fly from JFK to Toronto, but I had the means coming home from Toronto to fly into JFK and take the train back (I wanted to leave early on Thursday). Dad's coworker drives a shuttle on the side and he ended up taking me to the airport on Thursday, but I kept the original plan of going to New York City coming home. I decided I would check out Chef Bishara's restaurant in Brooklyn before traveling to King of Prussia.

I'm glad I did and I'm glad I made reservations for Tanoreen! Tanoreen was very crowded and lively. The staff was friendly. The lamb, spinach, and cheese pies were amazing, especially the lamb pie. I had to order the **سمك مقلي** (pan-fried fish) and I wasn't disappointed when I sunk my teeth into the tender brazino. Of course, my cooking doesn't compare yet, but I was thankful Chef Bishara was walking around and stopped to chat. I told her the fish was amazing and I've been trying her different recipes. She gave me pointers on how to cook the fish and other pointers on how to cook other dishes. I'm grateful for the advice and I'm slowly learning. The dining experience took an hour and it wasn't too expensive compared to other restaurants in Brooklyn. I would recommend Tanoreen.

WASHINGTON, D.C.

While my parents were on an Alaskan cruise, I decided to take a day trip to Washington, D.C. the Saturday before Memorial Day. I had never been to Washington, D.C. before and wanted to visit—I thought the Saturday before a patriotic holiday would be fitting.

After a three-and-a-half hour Megabus ride, my first stop was the Washington Monument. Sadly, since I arrived at about 10:30, the free tour tickets were gone. However, I could still walk around and take pictures. After spending an hour walking around the Washington Monument in the hot sun, I decided to walk over to the World War II Memorial.



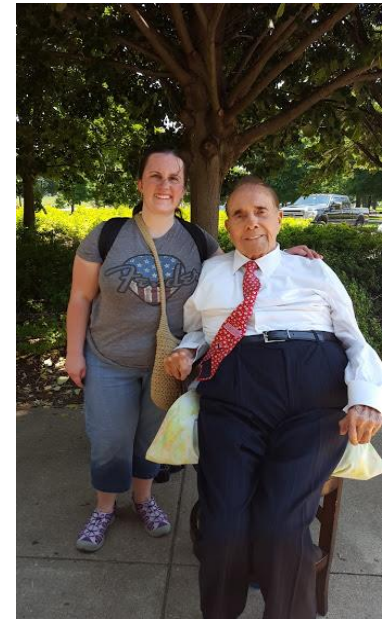
The day gave us the first full taste of summer—the day was hot and humid, but the weather didn't stop the millions of visitors from visiting the Memorial. The

Veteran's Administration was in front with the Freedom Bell. If someone donated money, the donor could ring the bell. I donated \$5, then handed a middle-aged man my DSLR camera to get a picture of me ringing the Freedom Bell. Unfortunately, he couldn't figure out how to use my camera. He apologized; I told him it was okay and not to worry about it because my camera can be tricky. His son, who looked to be around my age, was standing next to him—before I walked away, I heard the father tell a young boy scout that his son used to be a boy scout and the organization helped him grow into the young man he is today.

I didn't get to meet the young man until I was trying to take a selfie in front of the fountain. He saw me struggling and rushed over to help. We then took a selfie together and his father took a picture of us together, this time with my phone. His father was excited about how nice the photo turned out; he looked proud. They were on their way to the White House tour, which he explained took many background checks and a six-month wait to be approved.

The World War II Memorial was amazing. Soaking my feet in the fountain after walking around to read the engravings on the monuments, felt great. I had the chance to meet many veterans that day, and I loved learning about what they face after coming home from duty. I met a service dog, which was the mascot for one of the coping programs, and took many wonderful photos of the dog with his owner. The dog rescued his owner and helped with his PTSD coping techniques.

After chatting with the veteran, I decided that it was time to break for lunch. I approached an older gentleman in a Vietnam Veteran jacket, once I was outside of the Memorial, to ask him if he was familiar with the area. He was sort of familiar with the area and after he had pointed to where he thought the Tidal Basin was located, he said to me: "do you know who Bob Dole is?" I shook my head yes and continued, "he's over there!" I MET FORMER SENATOR BOB DOLE! What an amazing experience and what a charismatic man. We talked for a little bit, and I was happy that the former senator agreed to a picture. He said something to the effect of, "Of course, for a beautiful young lady like yourself, I don't mind at all!" It made me blush and laugh a little.



Lunch at the Tidal Basin was beautiful. I sat under the trees and ate my lunch while looking at the Jefferson Monument with the Potomac River surrounding the site. The Tidal Basin was a great place to relax before walking to the Seer Museum. I will admit I wanted to see the Saudi writer that was visiting one of the other museums, an event I discovered online while I was planning my trip. However, when I arrived at the area the museum was not opened. The museum was undergoing renovation.

Instead, I went inside and descended the stairs to the Seer Museum where they had an Afghani Art exhibit. An Afghani potter was visiting and demonstrating his work for the exhibit. Now that was neat! I studied ceramics for two years in high school and watching Abdul Matin make plates, candle holders, and vases brought back wonderful memories. After the demonstration, I had the chance to meet Abdul Matin. We had a brief conversation about how I used to study ceramics and I loved watching him create different pieces of pottery. He smiled and stated that he offers classes in Turkey, which many Americans attend. I laughed and said I would consider it in the future.

FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHER'S FOOTSTEPS

*My father was a potter, I'm in his footsteps
as his feet quickly turned the pottery wheel—
the beauty in the tea cup made with such pep:
my father was a potter, I'm in his footsteps.
From Afghanistan to D.C. he has schlepped,
with clay and glazes ranging from red to teal.
My father was a potter, I'm in his footsteps
as his feet quickly turned the pottery wheel.*

I ended my day having a lamb dinner at Mama Aisha's. I loved the fact I could dine while listening to Umm Kulthum,

an Egyptian singer and actress that was active from the 1920s until 1973. It was a great ending to a great trip filled with new experiences such as riding a bike taxi from the Museum to the Capitol.

PENNYPACKER MILLS' CIVIL WAR REUNION

On June 4, I went to the Civil War Reunion held at Pennypacker Mills in Schwenksville, Pennsylvania. Pennypacker Mills holds this event each year, but I haven't attended since 2012. I wanted to go this year; I ordered a Lyft and went. I met a family that forgot to bring their camera; they had me take pictures of their children joining the Union Army and I e-mailed the pictures to them when I arrived home (I had the father write down the e-mail



address). I hope they were pleased with the pictures! I also had a daguerreotype photograph taken. It took about a half an hour setting up, a minute or two to take the picture - that's why I look so stern and that is why Victorian photographs look stern too. I am glad I went because I enjoyed singing the Civil War songs, meeting new people, and walking around.

ASBURY PARK

Sadly, my uncle did not open his pool this year, which meant a trip to the beach was in store. I wanted to go to a beach I had never been to before and thought about the pictures of Asbury Park an Instagram friend always posted. Asbury Park looked neat and I was glad I could still make reservations on July 1st for the weekend of July 22nd. I found a New Jersey Transit bus that left from Philadelphia and traveled all the way to Asbury Park for \$22.50. My reservation was set for the Tides Hotel.

The ride was scenic and pretty. New Jersey Transit travels through all the Central and Northern Jersey beach towns; the view didn't make the three hours, forty-five-minute commute seem so long. I arrived in Asbury Park at 11:20 am and I was glad I could check into my room right away. When I made the reservations, I planned on taking a half-day of work, but I realized I had the time and took the day off. I arrived six hours earlier than my reservation.

After spending the entire afternoon on the beach, I decided that I would rest for an hour before going to dinner. I decided on a restaurant called Fish, an urban restaurant that served delicious dishes.

Fish was amazing. I loved the Little Bitches, which were East Coast raw oysters. They were sweet, and the vinegar dip they had next to the oysters was amazing! I will admit I did share with the waitress that I've been eating raw seafood since I was seven years old. Every year until 2001,

my mom's family would head to Cape May every week around my birthday. My Pop-pop loved raw clams and oysters. One night at dinner, I was curious and asked Pop-pop about what he was eating. He let me try a raw clam and I loved it. I helped him eat the raw clams. After that, I never turned down sushi or other raw seafood dishes. I had fish and chips for dinner, which I enjoyed. The fish was perfect and the service was prompt and courteous. Fish was a bit pricey, but I would recommend the restaurant.

I had to visit the Stone Pony. The experience was amazing and saw some interesting performances. The headline act was a Grateful Dead cover band, which I had seen once before when Christina and I used to go to the Note in West Chester. The opening acts were two local bands: the cover band composed of teenagers did a great job covering classic rock hits. Stone Pony is a must visit in Asbury Park!



The next morning, I thought I'd go to the beach upon waking at 5:30 to watch the sun rise over the ocean. That didn't quite happen until seven o'clock and the view was gorgeous. I had the opportunity to take many pictures of the beach and boardwalk before having breakfast inside the convention center. I met this one couple and the man noticed my camera. He said, "take pictures of us!" I did and then he took some pictures of me with my camera. The "photo shoot" was funny and gave us a case of the giggles.

On July 23, I spent the entire morning and most of the afternoon (until 3:30 PM) on the beach. Despite the sand being hot, the water was freezing, it felt good. Saturday was the hottest weekend of the year. At around eleven, I decided to take a break and walk to the Silverball Museum Arcade that was located on the boardwalk. The arcade was \$10 for an hour, though they charged \$15 to play for the day. I was amazed at all the retro games they had and I could play every single one of them! The hour and a half I stayed seemed to go by a little too quickly. I had a lot of fun and would recommend it to anyone who visits Asbury Park.

After I had returned from the Silverball Arcade Museum, I decided to take a dip in the ocean. I'm glad the hot weather didn't heat the water. It was a shock at first, but after I got used to the temperatures it was refreshing. I spent two hours swimming between the waves and beating the rip current.

While I was getting ready to take another dip, I saw three men speaking Arabic walk by me. I could understand a little of what they were saying. I had to strike up a conversation. I started the conversation by asking the one if he could take my picture in front of the waves, then one with him. It opened the door for conversation, we spoke a bit of Arabic.

I hung out with the guys for a little bit before I went for another swim.

On Saturday evening, I met up with Jared, a friend I met in Wisconsin when I went to a Packers pre-season game in 2012. It was so nice seeing him after four years. It was also nice meeting his friends. His one friend turned 29 and they were holding a little party for her. Jared said I should come along, gave me where they were meeting and I took a Lyft to this ale house. Jared and I caught up, then I met his four friends.

We then moved the party to MOGO Taco. The restaurant was a taco and Korean fusion eatery. I ordered a beef taco since I ate before the party, though we all shared food. I had a bite of a burger and some kimchee. The kimchee was spicy and I couldn't eat all of it. Also, there were many parties in the restaurant and we all toasted one another. The moment was awesome how people just celebrated everyone. I'm also glad the party was small and I made new friends.



WALKING FOR CHILDHOOD CANCER

September was Childhood Cancer Awareness Month. One morning as I was riding the train to work, I noticed an ad for Children's Hospital of Philadelphia (CHOP) hanging up near the door. CHOP was advertising their fun run/walk for September 25, 2016. While I've participated in polar plunges for charity, I had never participated in a walk for charity. I decided I would sign up, I would sign up for my friend's daughter, a sweet little girl diagnosed with leukemia in September 2015; I would raise money for her daughter, as well as the children and their families that utilize CHOP's services. I raised \$175 for the charity by reaching out through e-mail and social media.

The morning of September 25, 2016 was beautiful. When I arrived, I was amazed to see how many people were participating in this event. Some of the patients were also participating in the walk. Seeing some of the children made me cry; after reading what my friend and her daughter go through, I could only imagine what these children go through daily.

During the opening ceremony, we were informed that we raised over \$1 million for CHOP, and they expect to raise over \$2 million by the end of 2016. The opening ceremony, with information about CHOP, what the cause is for, how many children they have helped over the years, went quickly. By 8:30 AM, the runners were beginning to run.

As a walker, our start time was 8:45 AM. We walked a 2K and walking around Eakins Oval, Logan Square, the Academy of Natural Sciences, the Franklin Institute, then back to the Philadelphia Museum of Art. I am thankful the weather was lovely. I loved taking selfies with the international flags as I walked. The sky was also a crystal blue and the temperature was perfect. There was a chill in the air, but as I walked, I didn't notice the chill. I had my iPod on and rocked out as I walked. I finished the 2K in 35 minutes.



ADVENTURES WITH CHRISTINA

I don't remember how the conversation started; I might have posted something on Facebook about free things to do in Philadelphia or some ways to save money since I am trying to save for a move to Toronto. Regardless of how it started, my friend Christina reached out to me about exploring Philadelphia on Sundays since she has off from work. Christina is originally from Cleveland and is a friend I made in college. She has moved to the Philadelphia suburbs, but despite going to concerts she had never explored the new city she calls home.

On September 4, 2016, we met up and I decided to show her around Independence Mall. We were too late to get tickets for Independence Hall, but we toured the Liberty Bell Museum and saw the Liberty Bell. She loved seeing the Liberty Bell and like the other tourists, we had to get selfies in front of the Liberty Bell. The museum also had passport stamps and we had fun playing around with the stamps after reading about the history of the Liberty Bell.



The day was gorgeous and on the way to Old City Hall, we had to get pictures of us in front of the building with the bright blue skies behind us. Now, Old City Hall was neat and loved hearing how they decided cases, how the building was built, and just walking around admiring the architecture of the building. However, the Philosophical Society was our favorite, especially learning about Jefferson and the relations with the Native Americans. I took a class in college about Native American literature and history, but I learned so many new things about how there are institutions that try to preserve Native American culture. I never realized that there were institutions in place that did so. Christina was a DJ for WCUR in college and loved hearing Native American music. We both loved reading the message board of notes written about what people learned from the exhibit.



Before heading to South Street, we decided to go to Elfreth's Alley. Elfreth's Alley is one of my favorite places. I was a hungry, but we decided we would go to Starbucks after Elfreth's Alley. However, we sort of got lost on our way there since it had been two years since I last went. Fortunately, someone pointed us in the right direction and we arrived in ten minutes. We both loved Elfreth's Alley, especially with the quietness and quaintness.

We ended the evening at Alyan's and had a delicious meal. I had lamb and couscous and she ordered a zucchini sandwich that looked to die for. The meal and going to Repo Records was a perfect ending to a wonderful day.

I've always loved Edgar Allen Poe and he is part of the reason that I became a writer. I've visited Baltimore many times, but I never made it to Poe's house. I was a little surprised to hear there was a museum in Philadelphia but knew I had to visit one day. On October 16, Christina and I ventured to Spring Garden to learn more about Poe's history in Philadelphia.

After our twenty-minute walk, we stood in front of a beautifully preserved house that looked out of place for the area. The Edgar Allen Poe House is a National Park landmark and it is free to visit. The park ranger handed us a map and said we could tour on our own or he could guide us through the house. We opted for our own tour so we could take pictures and take our time reading the history.

Sadly, there was nothing left in the house. There were illustrations of what might have been in each room, as well as the nebulous history of the horror writer. As the video we saw towards the end of our tour mentioned, Poe took all of his belongings and not many people really knew the man. He was a brilliant writer that fell on hard times, especially

when he mysteriously died in Baltimore when he was 49-years-old. Not much is known about him outside of his writing; historians had to piece together what they believe of Edgar Allen Poe's life from the few pieces of evidence left behind.

Christina and I enjoyed our tour and we loved taking pictures within the creepy house. The writing parlor was an intact room and I had to get a picture of me writing in the parlor. While we could not see physical furniture, we loved imagining what the house looked like when Edgar Allen Poe and Virginia Clemm resided in the little house in Spring Garden.

CONCERTS

On April 16, I met up with Christina to see Underoath at the Electric Factory in Philadelphia. It had been two years since I last hung out with Christina and it was great seeing her again. The Underoath concert was amazing and I loved listening to their heavy metal sounds. I ended up buying a bunch of their songs.

On October 12, I took off from RTI for the holiday. After the library, I traveled to Philadelphia Mills (formerly Franklin Mills) Mall to go to FYE to see Sum 41. It was a hike and I sort of missed the FYE in Center City, which closed in August. However, meeting Sum 41 was worth it. Hearing a small performance was worth it as well. When the time finally came to meet Sum 41, I rambled like a fan girl. I've liked them since I was 12, and they were one of the many bands that defined the middle school years. I told them this; I think that was one of the few things I could manage to say. I tend to get anxious when meeting celebrities. They were kind and they signed my Toronto Blue Jays hat (they're from Ontario). They were a little overjoyed with that one. I'm thankful that they were gracious and I am thankful they were very nice to the fans. It was so neat meeting them and hearing them.

In August, Yusuf/Cat Steven's Facebook page announced he was going on tour. I was excited to read the news and was happy that he would perform for the Kimmel Center on September 15. "A Cat's Attic" was amazing and worth every penny. The show was about three hours long and the performance was soulful. Yusuf/Cat Stevens not only performed his songs, he also told stories about how the select songs were written and gave background on what was going on in his life at that time. I loved the storytelling approach and thought it truly added to the performance (but, hey, I am a storyteller myself, and I may be biased). There were some tender, emotional moments, especially when he shared his spiritual journey. I am happy everyone clapped when he finished. Verizon Hall and the Kimmel



Center was the perfect spot for Yusuf/Cat Stevens. I enjoyed the show and the people I met.

On November 5, I had a chance to see the British Organ Invasion symphony. I used to play the organ in college and love going to organ concerts. The tickets were on sale for dirt cheap, and I couldn't pass the opportunity up. I wrote a poem about the experience:

A SYMPHONY (A TRIOLET)

*Basslines and sopranos dance around my head,
march triumphantly into my ears;
the fierce organist at the keys has led
basslines and sopranos dance around my head.*

*Now the choir joins suit, their emotions bled,
together the musicians work in harmony, wash away
fear—
basslines and sopranos dance around my head,
march valiantly until the end in my ears.*

TAKING THE IELTS EXAM/THE CANADIAN PROCESS AND FUTURE

After I returned home from Toronto in April, I considered what everyone said at bed and breakfast or on the TTC: I'd fit in as a creative in Toronto. They weren't kidding; Toronto is filled with a bunch of creative jobs. I also liked Canada and could see myself living in Canada. I researched how to make moving to Toronto happen and while I figured it would be a long and difficult process, research forgot to emphasize that. Many sites maintained its simpler for an American to make a move, but patience is needed. However, many message boards stated that it is very hard for Americans as well. I still wanted to give it a try and signed up to take the IELTS examination on August 20. The IELTS is an English language proficiency test and is needed to either immigrate to the UK, Canada, or Australia or an academic IELTS is needed to go to university in the UK, Canada, or Australia. I signed up for the general examination for immigration.

I took the IELTS on August 20, 2016. I woke up at 5 am; I had to be on Drexel University's campus by 7 AM to sign in for the 8 AM test. The test was delayed a bit, but as I waited, I talked to a young woman from Lebanon. She was currently visiting her brother in Philadelphia, and since she wants to move to Australia to be with her other family members, she signed up to take the IELTS in Philadelphia.

After the three-hour listening, reading, and writing tests were completed, we had a break before our oral exams. I saw my new friend, asked her how she thought she did, and we decided to have lunch together. My oral exam wasn't scheduled until 3:45, her exam at 4. We had lunch at the Shake Shack and walked around the city. I helped her with her English; she helped me with my Arabic. I asked her why she wanted to move to Australia and she was telling me since the war in Syria, Lebanon's food supply has been cut drastically. Lebanon is also helping the Syrians that are fleeing, and it is economically scary in Lebanon.



She has better opportunities in Australia and wants to be with her other family members that had left their region in Lebanon. We exchanged e-mail addresses and I made a new friend that day.

I scored an overall band of 8.5 on the IELTS. That means besides some minor errors (nervousness), I am fluent in English. I also had my education assessed and I submitted the application for Canadian permanent residency on October 29. I made the minimum requirements, but I must be invited by Ontario to complete the process. I was told on my application to join a job bank and search for jobs because that would give me 600 extra points to speed up the process. There is a lot of anxiety surrounding it.

I don't want to move because Trump is in office. I would still have moved if Hilary won. Two years ago, I decided on looking abroad and had West Chester's career center enroll me in "My World Abroad." In high school, I talked incessantly about moving to Germany because I loved the country and I looked at the move as a chance to explore; I've always wanted to go abroad to explore different cultures. While I forgot that dream for several years, for the past two years I've been looking at jobs in other places. I decided on Canada because it's close and it offers everything I'm looking for. I also fell in love with Toronto. I'm not sure how things will work out; my test covers Australia and for another fee, I could take another part of the IELTS to qualify for the UK. I have other countries in mind as well.

I have a good feeling that 2017 will take me to Canada, though an occupation has yet to be determined (I hope writing). Wherever 2017 takes me in terms of location or occupation, I look forward to the journey. I want to thank everyone who has supported me in the immigration process so far and for their continued support, as well as helping me reach my goals this year. I had a wonderful 2016, despite some bumps in the road, and I look forward to what 2017 has to offer.

I wish you all the same for a happy, healthy, and wonderful year ahead!

 Jessica

I had an adventurous and busy year. This newsletter is only the beginning in regards to the year I had in 2016. If you'd like to read more about my adventures, please visit my blog, Musings of Creative Writer (www.musingsofacreativeyoungwoman.com). I'll be posting a video of my year on December 31, 2016.