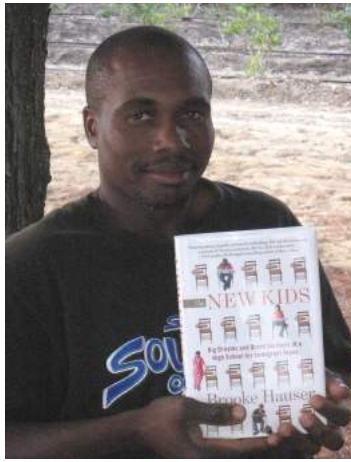


Book review



We recommend this book!

The New Kids: Big Dreams and Brave Journeys at a High School for Immigrant Teens by author Brooke Hauser

**Originally published in the Summer 2012 Haitian Migrant Worker Journal.*

The New Kids is a nonfiction work, focusing on the lives of five teenagers who attended a public high school in Brooklyn, New York, and graduated in 2009. This book is a recipient of the 2012 American Library Association's Alex Award, which each year recognizes the ten best adult books that appeal to teens.

For those who grew up in the United States, *The New Kids* paints a detailed picture of many of the challenges facing immigrant teens. For those who immigrated here, especially as young people, this book is sure to stir memories.

Quote from book jacket:

"Some walked across deserts and mountains to get here. Others flew in on planes. One arrived after escaping in a suitcase. And some won't say how they got here. These are 'the new kids': new to America and all the routines and rituals of an American high school, from lonely first days to prom. They attend the International High School at Prospect Heights in Brooklyn, which is like most high schools in some ways - its halls are filled with students gossiping, joking, flirting, and pushing the limits of the school's dress code - but all of the students are recent immigrants learning English. Together, they come from more than forty-five countries and speak more than twenty-eight languages...

"Hauser's unforgettable portraits include Jessica, kicked out of her father's home just days after arriving from China; Ngawang, who spent twenty-four hours folded up in a small suitcase to escape from Tibet; Mohamed, a diamond miner's son from Sierra Leone whose arrival in New York City is shrouded in mystery; Yasmeeen, a recently orphaned Yemeni girl who is torn between pursuing college and marrying so that she can take care of her younger siblings; and Chit Su, a Burmese refugee who is the only person to speak her language in the entire school. The students in this modern-day Babel deal with enormous obstacles: traumas and wars in their countries of origin that haunt them, and pressures from their cultures to marry or to drop out and go to work. They aren't just jostling for their places in the high school pecking order - they are carving out new lives for themselves in America."

The journal spoke with author Brooke Hauser, who grew up in Miami, Florida. She has written for *The New York Times*, *Los Angeles Times*, and other publications. She currently lives in Massachusetts.

JOURNAL: As you followed the students through their senior year, what were some things about the students' experiences which surprised you?

BROOKE: I was very surprised by how many students were basically taking care of themselves at such a young age. A few had come to the U.S. without family and really had to fend for themselves once school let out; some kids lived alone, worked long hours, or simply had huge responsibilities at home. Over the course of the reporting process, I came to admire these students for their perseverance. What an enormous and daunting challenge it must be to live in a new country, to learn a new language, and to have to take care of yourself, in some cases without the support of family.

JOURNAL: Was there one part of *The New Kids*, one story-within-a-story, which you found most compelling?

BROOKE: I found all of the students' stories compelling, but I was instantly hooked by Ngawang's story. Ngawang is from Tibet, and he wrote an essay about the time he spent a full day and night trapped inside a suitcase in the trunk of a car to escape to the border of Nepal. I remember hearing his story and thinking, *Wow, with his help I'd like to make this a chapter in the book.* His story did end up being its own chapter, titled "Twenty-Four Hours in a Suitcase."

JOURNAL: How did your research and writing of this book affect the way you view your own experience in high school?

BROOKE: I went to high school in Miami, Florida, where there are huge Haitian and Cuban populations, among other groups. There were new students at my school who had come from different countries. I'm not an immigrant; I had it easy compared to the students at International. For anyone, high school brings challenges both academic and social. Students are trying to find themselves, to figure out where they fit in, where to sit in the school cafeteria, and those challenges are compounded by having to "learn America," so to speak.

JOURNAL: Are you still thinking about working in the field of education?

BROOKE: I really enjoy interacting with students. I taught a short, two-week writing class at Smith College recently. I did a Skype interview with an ESL (English as a Second Language) class in Colorado. *The New Kids* is being used in high school classrooms in different parts of the country, and it also has been adopted as a Common Read by college communities and universities.

*Follow separate link, "Interview with Haitian College student" to read our interview with Marie Feline Guerrier, whose high school class author Brooke Hauser followed and wrote about in her book, *The New Kids: Big Dreams and Brave Journeys at a High School for Immigrant Teens.*

**The photo below was not included in the original publication of this book review.*



Riccardo and Olphine used to be in the program at the International High School at Prospect Heights in Brooklyn and now study criminal justice and nursing in NYC.

Facebook Post March 21, 2017