

Communication in a Foreign Land
Tammy Cline

Language weaves through the air
all around me,
yet I hear no words.
Only deafness made of sound.
It comes at me, repeating
louder, slower.
Eyes search my face
directing, willing me to understand.
I don't, though I want to.
Hands move, gesturing
punctuating, underlining.
Drawing pictures in the air.
The images are ghosts,
appearing, fading.
A momentary hint of something.
I grasp at meaning.
Desperate for comprehension.
Holding tightly to nothing,
a residue that evaporates.
"Ok," I nod and smile.
A return smile, satisfied with their success.
They turn, leaving me with their tapestry of misperception.
But the threads are still loose,
fluttering out of my reach.



Tammy Cline is a PhD student in Art Education. Her research focuses on creativity in teacher education. For the past two years, she lived in China teaching English and conducting educational research. During this time, speaking very little Mandarin, she learned what it is like to be illiterate, to be in the presence of language while understanding nothing. It was a shocking revelation and engendered a new compassion in her for our immigrants here in the United States who do not speak or read English. This poem is her window into their world. She can be contacted at tcac@uga.edu