



IT'S
NEVER
TOO
LATE

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

It's Never Too Late

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

Copyright © 2023
Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) promotes, supports, and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As a statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 250 adult education, literacy, and family literacy providers throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.



FLORIDA LITERACY COALITION, INC.

Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center

**235 Maitland Ave. S, Suite 102
Maitland, FL 32751**

**Phone: (407) 246-7110
www.floridaliteracy.org**

**Florida Literacy Hotline
1-800-237-5113**

This book is dedicated to Florida's adult learners and the teachers, tutors, managers, and programs that support them. Thanks to all of the adult learners who contributed to this book.

Thanks to the following individuals for reviewing and editing the essays:

Giovanna Kubota (Editor)
Isabel Adamus
Greg Smith
Zahra Nathoo
Susan Chapman
Ann Breidenstein
Ethan Smith

Special thanks to Corey Alexander for designing the essay book cover.

This book was made possible through a grant from the Florida Department of Education, Division of Career and Adult Education.

Preface

This book was designed to give adult learners the opportunity to build confidence while also improving their reading, writing, and critical thinking skills. Adult learners enrolled in adult education, ESOL, literacy, and family literacy programs throughout Florida were encouraged to submit essays. The imagination and creativity of these students shines through in their writing, reflecting a range of perspectives and life experiences that are as diverse as the authors themselves. As always, the editorial committee has chosen to minimize the editing of submissions, and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they were received. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or any other affiliated organization.

We congratulate the authors who contributed to this year's publication and hope you enjoy reading and learning about their journeys.

Table of Contents

My Experience in Adult Education

A Dose of Endurance	P. Aparicio	1
The Place To Be	M. Beltran	2
My Experience In Adult Education	L. Carreral	3
More English, Please	Y. Carrillo	4
Lifelong Learning	M. Dalzon	5
Ready and Willing to Learn it All	M. Damasceno	6
Who I Am	S. Diaz	6
My Self Love Journey	S. Flowers	7
USA Opportunity	E. Francois	9
Persisting For a Long Time	A. Gallards	9
The Importance of Education	H. G. Leon	11
New Friends	Y. Haseeb	12
A Successful Semester	F. Kerdy	13
Education Is Key	J. L. Garcon	14
My Experience in Adult Education	K. Pierre	14
Success Depends on Your Resistance	V. Pierre	15
Goals of a Successful Student	B. Rice	16
Studying Does Not Have Age	N. Roman	17
My English Learning Journey	G. Silva	18
Adult Education Has Helped Me for Many Reasons	Y. Suarez	19
My Experience In Adult Education	Y. Cesar	19

A Turning Point In My Life

Life Is Unpredictable	O. Aguirre	21
A Refund For Your Misery	M. Amrhein	22
The Story of a Miracle	A. B. Revelo	22
Let's Talk!	M. Cadet	23
How The Pandemic Changed My Life	M. C. Pereira	25
A Life Never Started	M. L. Dufault	26
Life Lessons	I. Echemedia	27
Child's Play Turning into Reality	L. Estrada	28
My Personal Story	M. Fernandez	29

Change of My Life	S. Gutierrez	30
Medicine or Dentistry	J. H. Barrio	31
Waking Up In A Nightmare	N. Hernandez	33
The Resilience of the Human Spirit	J. DeSantiago	34
The War	T. Kononova	35
Laughter and Your Life	G. Lago	36
It's The Moment To Start to Live	K. Lispergue	38
Becoming a Parent	J. Luckner	38
My Son's Dream	S. Maslova	39
A Turning Point In My Life	G. Miranda	40
Persecution in Venezuela	L. Miranda	41
A Difficult Situation Makes Us Stronger	N. Mun	42
And So, I Learned...	C. Munoz	43
No More Fear	S. Oo	44
Life Changes	P. Ortiz	46
The Point of Finding My True Paradise	P. Perederko	47
The Day My Life Changed	K. Popilaire	48
More Than a Dream, a Hope	W. Quesada	48
Grieving Is a Real Thing	K. Quiles	49
Eric Is The Reason	A. Ramirez	50
Steps to Success	G. Reyes	51
Becoming Myself	L. Silvero	53
A Turning Point In My Life	A. Solares	54
Three Changes	M. Fort	55
The Many Turning Point In My Life	M. Thomas	55
Metamorphosis	Y. Villar	57
Coming of Age	J. White	58
A New Life	X. Xo Na	59
Escaping the War	I. Yakovenko	60

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received		
Was From My Grandparents	D. A. Piedra	63
Forgive and Let Go	N. Aung	63
If You Can Dream It, You Can Do It	S. Bader	64

Words of Wisdom From a Seventy-Year-Old	J. Baptiste	65
Live, Love, Enjoy and Thank You My Mom	D. Barbosa	66
To Know Me	O. Collado	67
Words of Wisdom	H. Crumpler	68
Words of Wisdom	G. Gallego	68
The Pharmacy Course	E. G. Gonzalez	70
The Power of a Smile	M. Goel	70
The Best Advice I've Ever Received	A. Guillen	71
My Mother's Advice	Y. J. Joseph	72
Always Face Your Fears	F. J. Paul	73
My Mother	O. Mannik	74
My "English Song"	L. Seide	75
Valuable Advice That I Follow	A. Soto	77
	N. Vasquez	78

My Bravest Moment

Two Of Them	Y. Aranda	80
Be Careful With Ian!	J. Capacyachi	80
Another Way to Face the Reality	A. Corporan	82
Our Time of Resilience	H. Dihn	83
Resilience in the Face of Adversity	K. Fenelon	83
Whatever It Takes	M. Gabriela	84
Starting Again: A Moment of Bravery	H. Hernandez	86
My Bravest Decision	L. Mattos	86
My Bravest Moment	E. Mitchell	88
Brave Start of Motherhood	M. Ramirez	89
Push Yourself and Be Brave	J. Rodriguez	89

My Goals and Ambitions

All For My Future	R. Castro	91
Best Engineer	S. Delice	91
My Goals	M. Dumas	92
My Greatest Ambition	Anonymous	92
My Goals and Ambitions	G. Jeudy	93
The Adventure of My Life	T. Lozano	94
USA: Our Dreams and Goals		
I Want to Achieve	T. Nguyen	95
I Believe I Can Do It	J. Obregon	96
Patience, Planning, and Hard Work	F. Petitt	97
My Goals and Ambitions	Y. R. Aloma	97
Ready For The Change	Y. Rosado	99

Friends	F. Sanchez	99
Can Money Buy Time?	J. Tamayo	100
Working Hard to Learn to Read	D. Wells	101

My Favorite Place

Happiness is an Inside Job	M. Abad	103
Mirador (The Looker)	S. Arumendi	103
Going to The Coast	S. Bryant	104
I Love New York	A. Cerowska	105
Right Place, Right Time	M. Gimenez	107
Looking for a Warmer Place to Live	C. Gowman	108
Happy and Safe	C. Guerire	109
Dreams Are Worth Having	N. Kraszewska	110
My happy Childhood Place	N. Kutsayev	111
My Favorite Place	M. Leon	112
The Bahamas	C. Lormond	112
Kwai River	A. Lynova	113
My Favorite Place	S. Marisol	114
My Favorite Place	Anonymous	115
A Winter Forest	E. Ovsyannikova	115
The Royal Palace in Mandalay	E. Phyu	116
There's No Place Like Home	Y. Popkova	117
Happy in Florida	E. Schell-S.	118
My Favorite Place is You	G. Tamayo	119
My Safe Place	O. U. Hurtado	119
My Favorite Place	A. Yopez	120

How Life in My Home Country Differs From Life in the U.S.

Seize the Moment	D. Cabello	122
A Subtle Difference...		
Immigrate -Emigrate	D. Lares	123
Life in U.S.A.	M. Seymour	124

Someone I Admire

The Person I Admire: My Husband	T. Aleman	126
I Admire My Mom	M. Ambrosie	126
He Didn't Have a Common Life	O. Angeles	127
Someone I Admire	M. B. Philibert	128

My Father	I. Cadenas	129
Beyond My Pride	M. Debrandt	129
Someone I Admire	T. Espanola	130
Perseverance	D. Lee	132
More Than One	D. Lopez	133
My Mom	F. marcelin	133
My Father, My Hero	A. Martin	135
My DEOS	B. Olano	135
Sebring Middle School		
Football Coaches	C. Orellana	136
My Best Friend for Life	M. Oscar	137
True Love	M. Sac	138
Someone I Admire	L. Sanintilaire	138
The Most Important Love	L. Vegas	139
My Reason To Be	A. Velasquez	140
Diomedes Díaz	R. Verbel	140
A Very Special Friend	J. Zembrano	141

Personal Stories

Never Stop Dreaming	J. Aguilar	143
My Childhood	F. A. Jerez	143
Beyond the Limits	A. Angel	144
Following My Dreams	M. Arevalo	145
My Life in Syria Before the War	R. Arnaut	147
God Is With Us Always	P. Barrios	148
My Story	J. Bishop	149
Good and bad Days on the Cruise Ship	D. Bolanos	150
My New Life in the United States	C. Buitrago	151
Life is a Race	L. Comas	152
Personal Story	S. Davis	153
USA & Cuba: Several Nuances	R. Delgado	154
My Journey To America	Y. Diaz	155
Family Night	E. Esquivel	156
Where Is Home?	L. Estrella	157
Escaping Diablo	E. Flores	158
My Advice To You	U. Garcia	159
My Story and My Dream	L. Georges	160
Joy for You and Me	J. Henri	162
Learn to Speak English	W. Joseph	162
Never Give Up	C. Krasilchuk	163
A Horrible Story	M. Krysil	164
My Goals, My Future, My Story	E. Lanza	165

Love Without Borders	Anonymous	166
My History of Immigration	Y. Mata	167
How My Childhood Affects My Life	M. Matine	168
Going Back to School	M. McDonald	169
Personal Story	J. Monterroso	170
Repaying the Debt of the		
Water Element	D. Nepelska	171
Depths of My Soul	S. Nevins	173
Dreams Versus Reality of My Life	S. Neyret	174
Living Alone	S. Olvera	175
The Passage of Hurricane Maria	A. O. Fontanez	176
Love	L. Palmieri	176
My First Year in the		
United States of America	M. Perez	177
The Importance of Family	R. P. Frere	178
Learning English	N. Pierre	178
Where I Come From and Where		
I Want To Go	H. Pierre	179
My Journey To Literacy	T. Ramsamujh	179
God Bless America	K. Reyes	181
Yes, You Can! Keep Going!	D. Riera	181
Love	M. Rincon	183
What I Would Never Do Again	V. Riveron	184
My Life In Guatemala and		
the United States	B. Rodriguez	184
Life is Too Short	M. Romain	185
Opportunity is Knocking	I. Salazar	186
The Brandenburger Cat Story	M. Schweda	187
Becoming Myself	L. Silverio	188
Is It Time For Me?	A. St. Louis	189
I Still Can't Believe This Is True	O. Sukachova	190
My Testimony	G. Talavera	192
Fight For Your Dreams!	L. Torres	193
Find a Way, Not an Excuse	P. Torres	195
Lisa's Story	L. Tubman	196
My Best Day Ever	M. V. Bello	197
Roots	J. D. Valles	198
The English I Learned In My Country	E. Vargas	199
My Life Experiences, So Far	P. Velez	200
The Strong Girl	D. Vertilus	201
Pending Subject	N. Vivas	201
Free At Last	A. Wright	202
My Life's Transition From Colombia		
to the U.S.	M. Zarur	203
Special Moments	B. Zepeda	204

My Favorite Day

Holiday On The Beach	W. Aung	206
My First Day of School	A. Carbajal	206
One of My Favorite Days	C. Johnathan	207
Sunday, A Day of Rest	M. Joseph	208
Relax, Rejoice, Refresh	A. Khant	208
My Birthday	S. L. Compere	209
It's a Beautiful Day	M. Lin	210
Family Days Are Blessings	R. Marius	211
How do Ukrainians Celebrate Christmas?	Y. Tsvitaieva	212

Original Poetry

Forgetfulness	B. Borowiecka	213
What Do You See?	D. Burney	213
They Say, I Say	D. Coleman	214
The Land of Natural Mirrors	C. Dam	215
“How To Describe The Black Woman”	I. ElBay	215
Poetry of Ourselves	F. Fertil	216
My Family Are My Stars	J. Green	217
It's Not About How You Feel	K. Hill	218
F.E.A.R.	M. Horton	219
You	A. Johnson	219
She Is A Woman	S. Kinlow	220
Labyring	M. Liranza	220
Who I Am	L. Mckissick	221
A Fractured Paternity	R. Monroy	221
What Is This	D. Montanez	222
Not My Last Breath	M. Ode	222
How Lucky We Are	C. Palma	223
Fear	A. Perry	224
The Dreams of Florida and I	J. Serna	225
Toss the Carolina Coin	K. Summer	225
No Kid of Mine	T. Welsh	226
My life In My Twenties	C. Valdez	228

What the American Dream Means to Me

The Climate of Economic Change	M. Aldana	230
Point of View	I. Campos	230
My Dreams	L. Castro	232
The American Dream	K. DeJesus	232

What the American Dream Means to Me	Figueredo	233
We The People	L. Mckissick	234
Are You Ready to Transform Your Life? I Am, and How About You?	M. Metz	234
Finding Our Way	M. Perez	235
What Do You Mean? Heh!	J. Preciado	236
What It Means to Be an American	R. Egbert	237
What the American Dream Means to Me	S. S. Torrez	240
Is It a Dream or a Truth?	B. Suy	240
What Does The American Dream Means to Me?	A. Ubaldi	241
Graduation Day!	P. Vilamizar	242
Miracles Happen	L. Volkovich	243
Embranching the Change	F. Zine	244

Original Fiction

Jill's Journey	E. George	246
Finding Nemo (Alternative Version)	M. Koltstova	247
Life as a Housecat	M. McLaren	248
While I Wait for You	S. Ogowa	249

Why Voting Is Important to Me?

Why Voting Is Important to Me	E. Renaud	251
-------------------------------	-----------	-----

My Experience in Adult Education

A Dose of Endurance

Only the person who emigrated from their country can understand how much determination and grit it takes to move forward. In almost all Colombian extended families, there is at least one member who has already emigrated from the country. This might also happen in the rest of the Latin American countries.

For many Colombians with relatives overseas, it is well known they have made various sacrifices to achieve their dreams. Despite of trying to maintain close contact, it is almost impossible for those who have never been immigrants to understand the daily challenges faced by their relatives abroad. Many of them hide information to avoid being criticized for the decision to settle in a foreign country. Others just do not want to ask for help, preferring that their families do not worry anymore and think that they have a fulfilled life. Regardless of their immigration circumstances, they all arrive in this country with almost nothing. The luckiest might have summed up their lives in a 50-pound suitcase, others only might arrive with a backpack, and others might lose everything along the way. However, what they probably all have in common is an endless desire to build a new life.

In the U.S.A., ESOL programs offer adults the opportunity not only to learn the language, but also to know many aspects of the new culture, at a convenient schedule for people who work. These classes are every day - a dose of endurance! Each student has individual progress and can feel they are in a safe place where they will not be discriminated against. Teachers in beginner classes teach colors, days of the week, and how to greet and introduce oneself. Progress does not come suddenly, and students will experience good days and better days.

One day at a time. Immerse yourself in the culture, get up early, and never give up are the golden rules. Every winning battle brings immense pride, like having a driver's license, having a bank account, having a job interview in English, and finally being hired. For immigrants, these achievements are priceless while for their teachers, these are the motivations of every day. Other dreams may come later. No matter how long an immigrant has been in the country, they can always learn something new.

It's Never Too Late

One day they might even have a turkey recipe of their own for Thanksgiving. They have already accepted that they will always have a foreign accent, and they know how much they have worked to contribute to this society.

Nobody does as much as the one who fills the wings with feathers that will make you fly.

Dedicated to my English teachers.

Paula Aparicio is an ESOL student at Pinellas Technical College – Clearwater. Her teacher is Regiane Zanardini-Rojas.

The Place To Be

Adult Education is a program very important because it helps people interested in learning English. This program has a variety of activities. For example, we have to learn grammar and vocabulary to be able to communicate with our instructor, Mrs. Vickers and with my classmates.

In this program there are people from different countries, for example Nicaragua, Haiti, Cuba, Yemen, and Mexico. We all want to learn English to be able to socialize and be able to work in this country. On this note, I think that this program gives us the opportunity to work and attend classes because it has a flexible schedule and our teacher is reasonable with our work situation, especially with the mothers in class.

In this program, we also use the computers to do listening exercises. This helps me to improve my pronunciation and my hearing. I can better understand my friends and people that speak English where I work. This program also helps me to improve my language because our teacher does not let us speak any other language besides English. We need to advance in this semester and to pass the test, all of us, students are working hard.

So far, my experience has been very good because I am learning more English, and my vocabulary is improving. I feel great with all my classmates and my teacher. We are a big family working hard to learn English.

In conclusion, I think this program will help me advance this semester and reach new goals in this beautiful country that gives us the opportunity to start a new life and obtain a good job.

Maria Beltran is an ESOL student at the West Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

My Experience In Adult Education

My experience in Adult Education ESOL has been great. I have greatly improved my English, I lost the fear of communicating with persons who don't speak my language, and it has helped me to accomplish goals that changed my life.

I had already studied English in my country, and I practiced it when I was working for an automotive company for six years. It was easy for me to read the documents, fill out forms, and communicate with my Japanese boss in English, but I used to avoid external phone calls from United State companies that required me to speak. It was also difficult to understand the meetings with external coworkers. Fortunately, I could keep my job because I handled the situation well by reading and writing memorandums and communicating by email. In April 2021, I moved with my family from Mexico to the United States due to my husband's new job.

When I came to live in Florida, I was forced to face English in real life because I did not understand it, and I was afraid to speak. In the beginning, I did not go out by myself. I could not take my kids to the doctor, attend school's meeting, or go shopping. I depended on my husband all the time. Getting my driver's license was another big challenge for me. At that moment, I realized that I really needed to start taking English classes in this new country.

Six months after arriving here, I enrolled in Adult Education ESOL classes. My purpose was only to learn English. I never imagined that these classes would offer me so much more than that. The English class not only focused on learning the language, but I also learned important information to live here in the United States. For example, I learned about the education system, driving laws, housing, and the healthcare system. Besides that, our teacher gave us tools to develop a website, training to prepare an essay, and some workshops about communication and careers. Each class is an opportunity to learn something new. The best part for me is to have classmates from different countries and to learn about their cultures. It is a great chance to meet new

friends that do not speak my language and have a conversation in a safe environment.

I have been in ESOL classes for one year. Now I have new friends from different countries and I completed some of my goals. I passed the driver's test, I can go out and take care of my kids by myself, such as attend school meetings, take them to the doctor, go shopping, and hang out with friends.

I am happy because I have completed some of my goals that I need to live in Florida. I will continue in this class working on my English skills, because I want to be ready to achieve new goals.

Irma Carrera is an ESOL Student at Palm Beach Central CHS Adult Ed in Palm Beach County, FL. where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult ed school site director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

More English, Please

I remember when I was in college in Cuba and there were so many classes and one of those classes was English. I said to myself, "Why do I need English, if this country only speaks Spanish?" I didn't have the desire to learn English because I didn't understand what I know now. I was young and didn't understand the importance of learning English. I thought I knew what I needed to know, but of course I see it now that I was incorrect.

The thing is that due to the dictatorship of my country I knew that I had to make a 360-degree change and leave. I'm amazed to observe that now living in the United States there are so many diversities of spoken languages. It has been a challenge for me and I know that increasing my knowledge will only help me in the future and open doors to new and great opportunities.

At the age of 30, I am in the ESOL program where we learn something new every day. I am thankful to my teacher every day for teaching us how to write, read, and listen to the language. I really appreciate her dedication in her job to help all her students gain more and more knowledge.

I am so proud of myself to see myself learning and giving myself the courage to learn more and more. I can do things that I never thought I would be able to do. My goal is to work as a salesclerk and help people find products. I am very surprised

how ESOL class has helped me with everyday life.

Yadira Carrillo is a student in the Suncoast Technical College ESOL Program. Yadira's teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

Lifelong Learning

I have traveled often to the United States of America without ever thinking of living there. Suddenly, an opportunity presents itself to seize this opportunity; of course, I have to make sacrifices for a new start.

In truth, choosing this new beginning was not easy because it involved starting all over again and living far from the people I love, like my mom, family, and friends. Finally, after this difficult but necessary decision, I had to face this new challenge, starting first by learning English.

To do this, a friend took me to Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. I remember my first day; I was so excited to start but stressed at the same time because I had no idea how it would be. As we know, learning a foreign language is not easy. I wasn't prepared for that. I spent almost all my life in my country, and now I have to restart learning even though I know it's never too late to learn. I had no choice because it's the price for all immigrants everywhere.

I started in Level Four with Mrs. Viviane Williams. At first, I was fearful, but within a few days, I realized I had nothing to fear. The teacher was terrific. She created within me a curiosity and a desire to learn. Now even though I can't speak very well because my pronunciation is bad, I can say I'm proud of myself.

I have come a long way in my learning of English, and I'm now in ESOL Level Seven. I want to do my best every day so that I can become better at English. I know it is not easy to learn a foreign language quickly. Certainly, I need more time to learn, but I need to and have to speak English correctly. I have to find the right formula to make it happen. I don't want to give up. I have a wonderful teacher, Mrs. Lisa Cox. I love learning at my school. At school, we find many opportunities, and the environment is good. I made some friends, and I feel kind of sad when I can't come to school.

In a few words, my experience at Chuck Shaw Education Center is very interesting. I have no regrets, and when I finish the English course, I'll plan to take something else because, at school, I have a choice to learn something else like EKG, forklift, phlebotomy, CDL, and more! My school offers many opportunities, and I want to take advantage of all I can!

Marie Dalzon is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Ready and Willing to Learn it All

I started studying in the ESOL program at Suncoast in 2017. In Brazil, I had studied English for 5 years, but when I arrived here, I realized that understanding American people was very difficult. At Suncoast, I could improve my English, improve my speaking, along with my writing and listening. I believe I can understand others speaking better also.

The ESOL program is wonderful, people like me as an immigrant, this program is complete and the teachers are able to understand what we need and are open to listen. When my friends told me about Suncoast, about the programs and prices, I was very happy because I didn't know that this type of course existed here in my city. I could finally go back to studying English and improve my communication.

At Suncoast I was able to learn about different areas and subjects. All the teachers I have encountered have been wonderful and they are here to help and advise us on grammar, pronunciation and more. My experience at Suncoast and the ESOL program was wonderful, and now I am able to solve my daily issues, such as going to the doctor and much more. I am very grateful to Suncoast.

Vanessa Damasceno is a student at Suncoast Technical College. Her teacher is Kimberly Alibro

Who I Am

Hello everybody. My name is Susana but I like that my family and friends call me Susie. I am from Chile, a country far away from the U.S. I have 3 children (1 son and 2 Girls) and also have 2 pets (1 Cat 1 Dog).

I came here to visit my mother in February 2016 and I fell in love with Palm Coast! It was so beautiful and quiet and the people were so nice. So I said to myself, "I would like to live here". I started the paperwork to live here. It was super difficult because of the pandemic but now we finally have our permanent residency to live here.

When I was young I studied English in a school in my country but it was very basic. I like to sing but I could not understand what I was singing, so I decided to study English and I started watching series and movies in English.

When I arrived here I searched for classes in English and my friend advised me about Flagler Technical College (FTC). I did the test and the results showed that I am advanced! Wow surprise for me! I am in the virtual class in the evening and my teacher is Mr Alexander Davlantes. He is a very nice teacher and he has a lot of patience!

My goal this year is to improve my English to find a good job. I would like to travel and know different states with my family.

Susana Diaz is a student at Flagler Technical College and her teacher is Alexander Davlantes

My Self Love Journey

Being an Adult Learner is not easy but it's worth the journey. You need to believe in yourself, not create self-doubt or hide behind obstacles. You can overcome these obstacles and do what you couldn't do in the past. This is all part of self-love, now let me share my journey.

Before I started my classes I was so excited. I started making goals and plans for what I would like to do next in life. I was so pumped up with excitement, I wanted to share my future goals and plans with my mother. So, as I'm going over my goals and

plans with her, I suddenly noticed that she turned towards me with big eyes. As I'm going into detail about my grandiose plans and the time frame, I see that her eyes are getting even bigger with what I'm telling her. I had no doubt that this was going to be a quick fix! The way I'm thinking, I just admitted that I had a learning problem and found help for myself, which was the hardest thing I ever have done in my life. But little did I realize that my expectations were so ridiculous. If I had it my way, I would have been a college graduate in 6 months!

It was time for my first day of class. I was over the moon with excitement and nervousness at the same time. Then the first day approached, it was a walk in the park. The first couple of lessons were a breeze. I was still thinking about the plans and goals I made before I started class. I was still under the impression that this would be a quick fix. As more classes went by the work was getting more difficult for me. Then it hit me like a bag of bricks... This wasn't going to be a quick and easy fit for me. I struggled so badly and thought I wouldn't understand what my teacher was trying to teach me.

After more classes, the old feeling of self-doubt and lack of confidence returned. I wanted to go back to my old ways of hiding. I couldn't get what my teacher was trying to teach me, and I started thinking this was a big mistake and felt I was just wasting my time. Every time I had a difficult time in class my teacher always made sure to lift my self-esteem and confidence back up. Sometimes she would change the lesson plans for me and tell me that I was doing great. But I had a lack of confidence in myself. So, I had a conversation with my mother expressing how I was feeling down and thinking I was just wasting everybody's time. My mother looked at me and said it sounds like you're trying to give up on yourself. Then she smiled at me and said I believe in you, and you will get it. I just shook my head at what my mother had said.

I started realizing I had a lack of confidence in myself. I didn't believe in myself. I knew I needed to do some self-love and start believing in myself. I stopped doubting what my mother and teacher were telling me. I will not shortchange myself in life, it doesn't matter how old I get I believe in myself. I now read books in bed, something I couldn't do before. My journey will not be quick and easy, but it will be a positive journey for a better life

for me. I'm worth it.

Sherry Flowers is a student at Literacy for Adults in Brevard. Her teacher is Ms. Dyer.

USA Opportunity

One of my greatest pleasures was visiting other places on vacation. I started traveling in the 90's, but after the assassination of President Jovenel Moise in his home on Feb 7, 2021, the country has become fragile in terms of security. Demonstrators are taking to the streets to protest; every week new cases of kidnapping are recorded in the capital; assailants rule the streets; schools and universities are closed; transport is paralyzed, and churches are attacked. It is a truly lamentable situation.

To get away from this atmosphere, I had to buy a plane ticket. Two weeks later I came to the USA. I arrived in this beautiful country of opportunities, and my first idea was to learn English.

Without delay, I enrolled in Tomlinson School on 3rd Ave North in St Petersburg, where I spent nearly a year. After it closed, I went to Clearview School on 38th Ave to continue my studies.

There, I was welcomed as if they already knew me. The understanding, the smile of the leaders and teachers makes me want to stay forever.

In the courtyard at noon for lunch, it is the United Nations; we are all gathered around the same table tasting our dishes according to the customs of our country while sharing with each other, and while enjoying practicing English. The generosity of these great people gives immigrants the necessary means as well as the standards to live by; they just must seize the opportunity.

Eric Francois is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Persisting For a Long Time

When I was studying at the University, I knew of classmates who went to study abroad overseas and in different languages. Since then, I have been almost obsessed to do the same as them. However, I had not accomplished the language requirements to be accepted in this program. So, I ended my studies without the chance to do it.

The first step was clear: to learn the English language. I am a native Spanish speaker and I had learned a little bit of English languages from primary school, but it was impossible to have a conversation, write a letter or even to listen to any audio record. I started to practice by myself watching movies and reading books in my free hours out of work.

After five years passed, I felt capable of taking the TOEFL test, which is one of the accepted for study abroad, and I was very excited to know better what my level was, regardless of my being able to study in a different language. My result was very good for my expectations. Even though I was not able to be accepted in foreign universities, I was very close to the required score. This was just with my own study, and that gave me stronger motivation. I realized that I needed to learn the language among native speakers.

By that time, after five years working, I had the resources to study English in another country. So, I started to research how to do it. I was lucky to find friends living in Palm Harbor, Florida, who accepted me to live with them. I started a new life in Florida studying the ESOL program at the Clearwater Adult Education Center in Oldsmar with the great help of our teacher Robbin. At first, I struggled to talk and listen, but the immersion in the language made it easier than I had thought.

However, it was not the only education in Florida. I also joined the ESL conversation classes of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas with three teachers at the same time: Geoffrey, Pat, and Eileen. I was committed to improving my English skills as best as I could, and the outcome arrived soon. After four months of studying, I took the test IELTS, which is another of the accepted exams for studying abroad. My happiness rose when I saw the score I needed to study abroad printed in the results, and I felt like I earned a prize for a long-term run. I realized that although sometimes one can feel that there is no chance to achieve a goal,

then a light of hope can appear to make it seem possible.

Alvaro Gallardo is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. His teacher is Pat Bauer.

The Importance of Education

Do you know the importance of school in the development of a person? Some people go to school without any goals. Others just go because their parents want them to have an important job in the future. This is not my case. Since my first day in school, I was convinced about my goals and what I wanted for my future. In school, I learned a lot of things, and I improved my knowledge, not just about math or science. The real knowledge that I acquired was about real life and the development of a person in society. I grew up in a small school in Cuba, but I am now studying English at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach because I plan to continue my studies to become a doctor in the future.

I grew up in a small town called Encrucijada, in Cuba. When I was 5 years old, I started attending Roberto Peredo school. It was the place where I learned to read and write. My teacher was very patient with me during those years and taught me the importance of education in people's lives. When I was 13, I went to Abel Santamaria's Secondary School, where I acquired a deeper understanding of science and the real composition of our world. That was the place where I made more friends, learned how to function in society, and be a better person. Three years later, I began my preparation to get into college, and with hard work and long hours of studying, I became a medical student.

On January 23, 2022, I left my country to come here. It was a difficult and hard experience because I had to leave the university and all my friends in Cuba. Now, I am studying at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center in West Palm Beach, improving my English, learning about vocabulary, how to write autobiographies, and the use of capitalization and punctuation. This school will help me increase my knowledge because to get into college I need good English, and I have a lot of things to learn about this language.

I have important goals for the future. I want to get into college so that I can become a doctor. I know that is not easy, but with hard work, I know I will succeed. Also, I would like to buy my own house and have a beautiful family. At Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center, I have learned about the values that a good person has to have. With this knowledge, I am convinced that I will achieve all my dreams.

School is the place where we acquire all the knowledge that we need, learn what real life is, and how to be a better person. At school, the teachers are like our parents. They teach us the values that a good person needs to have to function in society because that will help us in the future. People who have good values will have very clear goals, and almost all the time, they will work hard to achieve their dreams. Never stop learning, go to school, get the education that the teachers give you, and use this to be a better person because it is all about dedication, what you have learned at school, and how to use this knowledge to create a great future.

Hanser Guzman-Leon is an ESOL student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Their teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

New Friends

I went to the Literacy Council picnic on the first Saturday in November at Weaver Park in Dunedin. My daughter joined me. It was really fun. Since we came to Florida, we haven't gone anywhere. We stayed at home with the COVID pandemic.

I met many people, and they all are very nice. They didn't know me, but they all talked like they had known me for a long time. Students read their stories published in the book, "New Beginnings."

I met my teacher, Bob, and classmates Fanny and Gloria. They both are such nice ladies. Then they served lunch. It was a good day; my daughter and I enjoyed the picnic. After that, we went to the beach which was across from the park. It was a really fun day.

Yasmeen Haseeb is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas and the Hispanic Outreach Center in Clearwater. Her teachers are Robert Baum and Melissa Palermo.

A Successful Semester

In April 2005, I came to the United States. I am from Lebanon, my first language is Arabic, and my second language is French. I have a Bachelor's in History. I was a French teacher, too. I am a wife and mother of two wonderful sons.

I can read, write and speak English, but not too much, just the basics. Meanwhile, I only just now thought about the importance of this language when my sons started going to school. I helped them to do their homework as much as I could.

I realized my weakness when I talked to people. First, I tried to understand what they said. Then, I struggled to find the correct words.

After 17 years, in August 2022, I decided to go to school. I did an online search. I found the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. I did the first test, and they put me in level six (ESOL classes). I tried my best to attend every day, and I felt comfortable. I learned new things and had excellent teachers who were very knowledgeable, kind, friendly, and supportive. I took the CASAS test and passed it the first time. It was my first success.

Frederick (Level 6 teacher) invited me to join the SAC meeting and become a voting member. She nominated me for membership based on my attendance, attention, and attitude in class, and I attended the ceremony. It was a great experience, and this was my second success.

By December 2022, I had graduated from level seven, my third success. However, I am still going to school to learn more, develop my skills, and achieve my goals because the Adult Education Center is the right place to learn English and the right environment to succeed and to accomplish your ambitions.

To do is to believe in yourself, don't hesitate to ask questions, find answers, and share your ideas and opinions. Mrs. Lisa Cox (Level 7 teacher) always told me, "I am her assistant". I am very grateful for everything she has done for me.

Finally, your future is created by what you do now, not

It's Never Too Late

tomorrow. So keep moving forward, and definitely, your dreams will come true.

Fatme Kerdy is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Education Is Key

One day, sitting in my living room, I was thinking about how to change my life. I have been cooking for twenty-eight years and was ready to do something different. My wife gave me advice that day, telling me I should attend school and get a good education. She was so supportive of me. I decided to listen to her and went to Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center, where I am learning English. I am disciplined and focused because I want to achieve my goals and dreams.

While working as a cook, I was living paycheck to paycheck and wanted a more secure profession. So, in addition to taking ESOL classes, I decided also to take Air Conditioning Tech classes so that I can have a secure job and help people simultaneously. So, I take ESOL classes during the day and air conditioning classes at night. It has been challenging coming to the United States of America not knowing any English, but I have improved my English skills, and I am also improving my job skills at the same time.

I will continue my education at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center because education is the key to success in people's lives. I will be successful by the grace of God. I will also earn my GED as well. I will not stop learning, and I will achieve my goals. The education I am receiving has made all the difference, and I will succeed. I will not stop until I am finished. Education is the key to success!

Jean Luc Garcon is a student at Chuck Shaw Education Center. His teacher is Lisa Cox.

My Experience in Adult Education

My adult education experience has been a path which I have been following to achieve my goal in obtaining a certification

in Automotive Technician and Information Technology. I have been looking for the right professional career for myself. In the meantime, I am going to school, completing my lessons in class, and studying hard to pass the test for the next level.

Sometimes, there are different tests for me to take and when I ask for the score to see if my level improved, I am still in the same one. I do not know if I will ever move to the next level. Regardless, I try to stay calm, and I practice my lessons to hopefully pass but the test gives me a problem to pass. I know I must keep trying and not give up.

My experience in adult education is good because I see everyone comes from different countries to study English. Every time I come to class, I try my best to think positively and try to pass the test. I get to work with other students, which helps me to understand better and I will eventually go on with my professional career training. After I finish studying for my career, I will come back to adult school and my score will be much higher. I must be patient and remain calm to pass the test and get the score I need for myself.

My experience in adult education has supported me on this journey to becoming a professional.

Keraldy Emmanuel Pierre was born in Haiti and has been attending ESOL classes at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus with Ms. F. Johnson. He works diligently to improve his skills and looks forward to continuing his career pathway.

Success Depends on Your Resistance

My name is Vilner Pierre. I was born In Leogane, Haiti. On January 12th, 2010, I was in a building, meeting with a youth group. All of a sudden, the building began shaking and my first instinct was to get out. When I reached the front of the building, it had collapsed on me. I couldn't move my feet. A few days later, the U.S. military transported me to a hospital where I had surgery on my back and then brought me to the U.S. It was then that I had learned about how big and damaging the earthquake was.

After arriving in the U.S., I began my journey to learn English. I

went to the Pinellas Refugee Education Program in St. Petersburg, Florida. My first teacher, Mrs. Ivette, helped me succeed through the ESOL program and I graduated into the GED program. There, I met my next teacher, Mrs. Donna Lawless, who helped me get prepared for the GED test as an online student so I could work from home. Although I studied a lot, I never thought I was ready to take the GED test. Mrs. Lawless retired and introduced me to my next teacher, Mr. Mark Haverfield. He motivated me by telling me, "Take just one of the four GED tests." I couldn't believe that I passed it. He made me believe in myself, so I took two more tests and passed them.

My last test was the Reading and Language test which I was so afraid to do. I took it and did not pass. I felt horrible. Mr. Mark brought me a few books to study and sat down with me to create a plan to take it again. I wasted no time and took it. I didn't pass it again. I felt like giving up. I could hear Mr. Mark as well as the test scheduler, Mrs. Angela Beard, telling me not to give up, that I was almost there and that I could do it. On the fourth try, I passed the test! I was so happy that I finished what I started and had earned my diploma. Although I was an online student, I did not have a printer to print off my diploma. About two weeks later, Mr. Mark stopped by and brought me a present. When I unwrapped it, I held my high school diploma that he had printed and put it in a frame for me.

With motivation from myself and from others, I reached my goal. I now have my diploma and I am hoping to attend college. I would like to be a medical doctor to help others in need, like I had been. It was painful not to pass after trying so many times, but I didn't give up. Your success depends on your resistance. You can do it!

Vilner Pierre is a student at Pinellas Technical College. His teacher is Mark Haverfield.

Goals of a Successful Student

Imagine climbing a mountain for hours with the goal in mind of reaching the summit. Looking down on the world with glee is what succeeding in my GED® will feel like. Many hardships arose throughout my life. When I was taken out of middle school for four years, many negative things happened. For example, I lost

many friends because the school system failed me when I was so young. I had no clue what I was going to do about my education until a friend told me about this GED® program.

When I enrolled into my new school two years ago, I was quite nervous because of past experiences. Walking into this new school, I felt like I had lost all my knowledge from earlier schooling. So, it took me a while to get back into the swing of things. Slowly but surely, I was getting to my goal.

Since I've enrolled, it's been about a year since I've been in school. It's been worth it. Doing my schooling on the computer is a lot easier for me since I have learning issues. Having wonderful teachers who take their time to help and listen to me has been a wonderful experience. Over the course of my testing, my scores have gone up little by little. This has helped me gain confidence to tell myself I can do this!

Brianna Rice is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School – ABE. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

Studying Does Not Have Age

In these times, it is necessary to study English. It does not matter if it is perfect but it is necessary to have a better global perspective since millions of people use it to communicate despite their differences. This language means to communicate with the rest of the universe. It is not the most spoken language in the world, but it is the most learned. When we are on our way to the other side of the world, this is the language that can save us. Learning English is to be up to date with what happens on a larger scale around the world. If we realize most or a large part of the movies and songs are produced in English, sports do not fall short. In almost all job offers they ask you for English, not speaking in English, it is almost a sin.

If we are 50,60,70 years old, it does not matter, you launch yourself into that adventure; knowing that learning and acquiring fluency in a new language requires a lot of constant effort and time. It is always possible to improve your level and get to speak fluently in a new language. It is very important to be clear about the reason for wanting to learn and to be constant and put in all your effort. We have to get rid of barriers and fears because we

learn by making mistakes because we learn from them.

The secret of learning a language is to be in contact with it daily, we have to look for all the opportunities to practice it. Adults have to try to integrate the language into their daily life through the things we like the most such as watching their favorite series, watching them in the original version and reading books. It is known that to learn English, you need more than 1000 hours of studying to have a more advanced level of English.

Adults have to be like a child when he learns to speak without fear of saying nonsense words. Research has shown that language learning has the same effect on the process in adults and children. The fundamental thing is to correct ourselves along the way and be positive because learning at any age is possible.

Nadia Roman is an ESOL student. Her teacher is Olga Lucia Ortegon Rios.

My English Learning Journey

When I came to live in the United States, the only words I knew how to say in English were “Good Morning” and “Thank You.”

It was hard to start a new life here. For a long time, I thought about giving up, but I continued trying; after a while, I received an excellent opportunity for a job, and one of the requirements was to speak English. I have been living here for one year already. I hadn't learned any new words in English.

I felt very frustrated because I had lost the opportunity. At the same time, my husband spoke the basics of Portuguese. This situation pushed me to think about my priorities. From that moment on, I started using the rest of my time to learn English.

For a long time, I thought that I would never be able to speak English. Throughout my experience, I learned that acquiring a new language is like being born again; you need to start from the basics like you were in kindergarten again, knowing the ABCs. It is not easy, but you feel motivated to continue when your effort brings the desired results.

Everything in our lives has a price, and nothing is free. If you want to learn something, give it your time, give your life for it.

Today I am almost 80% fluent in English, and I continue trying to make progress every day although I am taking ESOL classes at FTC to help me improve my skills. With my story, I would like to motivate other people to dedicate time to their goals because I guarantee it will bring you great results.

Gabriela Silva is an ESOL student at Flagler Technical College and her teacher is Claudia Strong.

Adult Education Has Helped Me For Many Reasons

I have always dreamed of going back to school and studying, and I am pursuing that dream at the age of fifty-three at Chuck Shaw Technical School. Going back to school was a little bit scary, and I did not know what to expect, but I was determined to do it. I was going through a very difficult time because of a sudden separation from a person I had loved for thirty-five years, and it was challenging, but God helped me through it.

When I started studying, everything was difficult at first. I was depressed after my relationship ending, and I did not know a lot of English, and there I was, taking my first class, Level 5, with my teacher Mr. Armas. He is a fantastic teacher, motivator, and a great person. He made the class interesting and entertaining too. Going to school gave me purpose, focus, and school helped me gain a positive attitude.

I also made new friends at school. My classmates helped me a lot, and they helped to improve my life. I noticed that I was understanding some English and I even passed the test to move on up to Level 6! Going to school has helped me in so many ways. I thank my family, friends, and God, who gave me great advice. Going back to school was a great decision, and I am thankful I did. Life is getting better and better.

Yanet Suarez is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

My Experience In Adult Education

My experience in adult education is considered a major part

It's Never Too Late

in my life. It started since I graduated from high school and is totally different compared to my experience with education as a teen or kid.

My experience in adult education has taught me a bunch of life lessons in behavior, discipline and the formula if I want to be successful.

My experience in adult education helped me focus more, be persistent in everything I do, and it also helped me gain confidence.

My experience in adult education helped me recognize my weaknesses and work on them so that I can make progress with my learning. It makes me realize that I am better than what I think I am.

In a nutshell, my experience in adult education provides me new life experiences, and to encounter new friends from around the world.

Yousemithe Cesar, was born in Haiti, is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida. She is working to improve her skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of Health Science.

A Turning Point In My Life

Life Is Unpredictable

As rational beings, we tend to predict many kinds of scenarios to be prepared for when bad things happen. Certainly, I am not the only one who did not expect everything to happen the way it happened. It was the afternoon of March 11, 2020. I was one of the Class of 2020 high school seniors in my country, El Salvador. We were sent home as the government said to avoid COVID-19 infection. It was just for 21 days, we all said. From then on, everyone's life, including mine, did a 90-degree turn. We had to adapt to our new reality. Meanwhile, we were worried about our family's health, school performance, and mental health. Many nights I was restless due to the stress and anxiety of being in quarantine.

For me, things got worse when my dad was assigned to be in the US in June. He told us that we would accompany him for almost 9 months. I was very disappointed because I just wanted to do all the things that I had planned. I refused to visit United States because I felt it was not the right moment. But I understand that things in life occur when they must and not when we desire.

On September 25, 2020, we arrived in Newport, Rhode Island, our new home. My life did another 90-degree turn, 180-degree in total since everything started. Something good about being in quarantine was that I could continue with my classes virtually, even away from my country. I graduated from my country's high school in December. The next day, I enrolled at the high school in Rhode Island as a senior. It was a fantastic experience, like a movie.

I met some people with different stories, and I learned a lot. There I realized that adapting was easy for me. I helped some people to graduate, and my teachers were always happy with my development. So was I when I graduated (for the second time). During our stay here, we explored many places around New England. For my 18th birthday, I got to go to New York City for the first time. We returned to my country, El Salvador on June 14th, 2021.

Remember, in our lifetime we will not acquire everything we

It's Never Too Late

want, but one way or another, life will give us a chance to experience other amazing things. Everything happens for a reason, and we just need to accept that sometimes life is unpredictable.

Oscar Aguirre attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

A Refud For Your Misery

I'll see you on the other side. I wish this world was kinder to you and your demons were exorcised.

The darkness is ever present, and it's for real. It will chew you up and spit you out.

If I could turn back the clock, I would pay better attention and allow the light to filter into your life and permeate your thoughts.

I miss you, man. More than you will ever know. I wish I had known your pain was real. I wish I was a better human being then. Someone who could feel.

In my pocket I still have, the two coins I would place on your eyes for the ferry man while you journey to the other side.

Heroin is a helluva drug. My brother, my friend, if fate allowed, and it was within, and power to do so, I would gladly refund your misery.

Michael AmRhein is a student at South Bay Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility. His teacher is Cheralee Morgan.

The Story of a Miracle

Generally, people expect a miracle to occur in a supernatural way, but the reality is that God works miracles through ordinary people like you and me. Next, I am going to tell you about an incredible miracle that I was part of. In my country, Ecuador, certain processes and requirements must be met to be a police officer. One of them is to have a specific height. Unfortunately, I was missing one centimeter so my application was denied. A

week later, the recruitment process had already been closed, but a friend told me that she had been able to submit her application and asked me to accompany her to find out how the process was going. However, when I arrived at another one of the police offices, my friend asked me to wait outside because only she was allowed to enter. During the wait I noticed a janitor who was very angry because the place was very dirty. Before this I had greeted him, and started a conversation with him, and he told me that he was upset because the people had entered the police station to hand in the applications, and they had left bags, bottles and a lot of dirt. I told him that I had also applied for the police, but that I handed in my application in another office. I showed him the folder with my rejected documents, and while he was looking at them, my friend came out and said that we had to leave quickly. For this reason, I forgot to ask him for my folder, and when I was at a certain distance from him, I heard him yelling in the distance, "Miss, Your documents!" I remembered that nothing in that folder was essential since they were just copies, so I told the man to throw them away.

Days later, while I was sitting on the steps of the university, my friend stopped in front of me very upset, and she threw a newspaper in my lap. I did not understand anything. Then I realized that it was the most important newspaper in my country in which the list of applicants approved to be part of the police had been published. It is when I got my miracle, my name was on that list! To this day I have no idea how my documents got from that man to the recruiting department, but I have to thank that man, whose identity I don't know, for everything I am and have today. I have always been very respectful of all people, but since that occasion I greet the manager, the director, as well as the cleaning, kitchen or various service staff, with the same enthusiasm. We all have the same value for GOD, and we are his tool for his miracles.

Alexandra Benavides Revelo is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Let's Talk!

Not everyone is born wise. At the same time, a person must

keep re-evaluating their life to decide whether they are on the right path. Some need one shaking experience to change their life course properly. Sometimes, a crisis of sorts is essential for the hard-headed ones to lead them to different paths or make them stop and take notice. One person's turning point is different from that of another's. We should use turning point lessons as springboards for the changes they know they need.

One of the significant crises that led to a vital turning point in my life happened when I was young. Another one happened when I was a teenager. Since the time I was born, I have been taking life easy. Fortunately, both of my parents were alive. My parents, in turn, worked, and we had money. I never used to lack anything, and nothing used to bother me in my life. At that time, I did not understand the meaning of responsibility. I did not understand the importance of living life.

My first turning point was when I was 14 years old; I came very close to death. I was diagnosed with anemia and was very vulnerable at this time because I couldn't go to school and play soccer. I had never faced a bigger challenge than the one I was facing, so it helped to rethink my life.

The incident was a steering wheel that directed me towards the right path since I had been following the wrong one for a long time. To achieve my goals and to properly walk on the right track, I had to change my attitude towards everything. Therefore, I had to live each day as if it was my last day. I have understood that God awakened nature to help me move forward in the right direction.

Since coming out of the hospital, my life changed tremendously. This helped me in dealing with different events. It also helped me to notice when I am on the wrong path. Because of this, I am always quick to rectify my errors.

The second point was when I came here to stay for a long time, and I had to acclimate to the weather, the language, people, and the culture. One of them was understanding English, because I didn't have a high level of English. Sometimes it takes me time to understand the language. The other thing is that I had to stay here for a long time, and this has never happened to me before.

Some events or tragedies happen in people's lives so they can change their lives. A person who can understand the role of an experience can turn it into a success. People go through different situations that mark their life turning points.

Makendy Cadet is an ESOL student at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

How The Pandemic Changed My Life

It started three years ago. COVID changed many people's lives around the world, including my life. I was resistant to changes, and I was afraid of failing. The pandemic came and made me change.

Before COVID, I worked at the biggest international airport in Latin America. I lived close to my work, and I had good co-workers. My family lived close, and I used to travel and spend time with my friends. Everything was fine.

During the pandemic, everybody stayed at home. All stores, gym, parks, and restaurants were closed. I worked two days per month. Everyone was scared because many people were dying, and the hospitals were too crowded. No one knew when this situation would end. Some days, I didn't talk with anyone. I spent my time watching movies, sleeping and eating.

After a month at home, I decided to occupy my mind and try to learn something new. I read many books about investments, and I made many cakes. I worked out at home and started running. I was able to do more things than I had imagined.

A couple of months later, I quit my job because I needed some new challenges. I was studying a lot about business, so I wanted to open a business to invest more money. I started selling Brazilian desserts (Brigadeiro) at an open market and at my apartment complex. My friend worked with me. We worked hard and earned a lot of money, but I wasn't happy. I wanted to work with investments. I was obsessed with learning about investments, so I sent a résumé to many banks. I passed the interview and began working at Nubank. This is the largest fintech bank in Latin

It's Never Too Late

America. It is a modern, innovative, high-tech bank. I could work remotely and keep my cake business.

After the COVID chaos, my friend invited me to visit her in Saint Petersburg, Florida. I said, "yes." I went to Florida one month after she invited me. I spent almost two months with her. One week before I went back to Brazil, I met Zach. Today, he is my husband and the love of my life.

If it weren't for the pandemic, I wouldn't have discovered that I can learn anything I want, that I can start over as many times as I want, that I can run ten kilometers, and that love really exists.

Mariana Costa Pereira is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center, Pinellas County Schools. Her teacher is Jeffrey Kallan

A Life Never Started

Do you know the exact date you are going to die? I did, November 28th, 2023. How did I know I was going to die on that date? I was going to commit suicide. Why?

I was incarcerated at the age of 14 for murder. I was given a life sentence, and I lost my appeal. I failed to file anything to further the appeal process and became time-barred in the courts; this effectively cut off all light at the end of my tunnel. If I'm being honest, I did this on purpose. I felt I deserved to be in prison. I had many dark years ahead of me. Dark years during which I lost all hope in everything and contemplated suicide constantly. I even attempted it in 2004 at the age of 20. I decided I was only going to do 25 years in prison: I would kill myself the day after my 40th birthday, November 28th, 2023. I was not going to spend my entire life in prison.

Have you noticed the past tense yet?

What changed my mind? Miller vs. Alabama, a law change making it unconstitutional for a juvenile to receive a mandatory life sentence. This law changed everything for me, including the way I think and act. After 18 years, I was back in court for a hearing to determine if life applied in my case. I was nervous and, to be honest, scared that I would still have life after the hearing.

I had worried needlessly because the hearing never happened. I was offered a plea bargain, and then resentenced to 40 years. For the first time since I was 14, I had a light at the end of my tunnel. I once again had hope.

To some, 40 years might seem like the end of their lives, but for me, it was the beginning of a new one. But wait! There's more! I have another hearing in October of 2023 to determine if I am fit to re-enter society, and Lord willing, I could very well be released before the date I once planned to kill myself on.

Either way, I have hope again. I have a chance to start a life that, due to my own bad decisions, I was never able to start. I am no longer resigned to the fact that I am going to die in prison at the age of 40 by my own hand. I have hope, and I will never lose it again. And I encourage everyone, in prison or out, regardless of what you are going through, to never give up either.

Mark Louis Dufault is a student at South Bay Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility. His teacher is Cheralee Morgan.

Life Lessons

On July 9, 2021, I took an airplane to the United States, leaving my mom, my brother, all my family, and everything I knew to come to this country and meet my father, with whom I had no contact for the past 20 years. That day was entirely emotional, a new culture, a different language, an empty room, and that bitter feeling of having left so much for a better future.

Little by little, I began to know and learn from my father, understanding things better and letting go of many negative feelings to give this new stage of my life a chance. Also, I began studying English and doing different activities in West Palm Beach to learn a little more about this country, because, despite everything, I was born here.

On December 6, 2021, I received an unexpected call from my family in Venezuela, telling me that my mother was seriously ill. Not even an hour had passed, and I was already on the way to see my mother in Venezuela. Thank God my mother was healed of the disease, unharmed after six long months of recovery.

2021, in general, was a year full of feelings and emotions I had never experienced. After my mom's recovery, I returned to the United States and started from scratch again. During my return, I promised myself that 2021 would keep all the negative things I experienced and that I would give 2022 a chance.

As time passed, I felt at home, comfortable with some little things in my new life, and trying to have more contact with my family in Venezuela, after what happened with my mom. Of course, I still have a lot to learn, but thanks to my incredible family and this school, where I met wonderful people, and who gave me the tools to start speaking English, this process of one year has been easier for me.

I am still learning English by taking ESOL classes and building new projects, taking advantage of all the opportunities. If I had to say what I have learned so far from this life experience, it would be necessary to be grateful that everything takes its time.

Ivanna Echemendia is an ESOL student at the Chuck Shaw technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Child's Play Turning into Reality

I remember one of the most exciting days that changed my life. Since I was a child, I have dreamed of living and traveling to many countries. It was one of my favorite things to play with my friend Suki. I don't have any explanation for why I have the idea to travel in my mind. I grew up in a safe and beautiful environment in Merida, Mexico with my lovely family as a spoiled little sister with three big brothers. I want to say, I did not have any reason to think of living in another country far away from my family. Anyway, the idea of living in different countries and knowing other places and cultures continued in my mind as I grew up.

The years went by. I got my bachelor's degree in computer science engineering. Then, I dedicated my time to finding a job. I delivered my resume to many companies, focusing on the big ones where the possibilities to travel were bigger. Fortunately, I got jobs, but unfortunately, most of them did not have the option

to travel. Patience and perseverance were the most important qualities that I used at that time. One day, looking in the newspaper, I saw the position that I had been wanting for a long time. An important international company was looking for a person with the background and skills that I had. Immediately I went to the company to deliver my resume and, after some interviews, I got the job.

I started working in that international company, living in my city as an assistant to the manager. Six months later, I got a promotion to a new position. The work was pleasant, but did not require me to travel either. One day, after six more months of working in that position, my boss called me to his office. He asked me if I wanted to participate in an international project that consisted of traveling all the time. My answer immediately was “YES, I want the position!” Finally, the opportunity that I was waiting for arrived. Since that day, my life changed. Thank God I have had the opportunity to work and live in different cities and countries that allowed me to know my husband, friends, many people, cultures, languages, beautiful places, and traveling with my children. The most important experience, the turning point in my life, is the way that God turns the favorite play of one child into reality.

Leticia Estrada is an ESOL student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

My Personal Story

My name is Marianela Fernandez Michelena, and I am originally from Venezuela. In my country, I was an OBGYN specialist. I have two master’s degrees and a Doctorate in Medicine. When I arrived in the United States, my life took a 360° degree turn, and this is my story.

I came to this country in 2016. My daughter was in the process of getting her citizenship. At that time, I cleaned homes, and I was also a host and waitress at “La Fondita de Leo,” a Puerto Rican restaurant. It was a wonderful and unforgettable experience. When my daughter became an American citizen, she made a petition for me to become a permanent resident. At that time, I applied as a Medical Assistant in different places because I had a

certification as a Registered Medical Assistant in the U.S.A.

From 2018 to 2021, I got a great opportunity in two jobs as a document manager and a medical assistant. In both jobs, I acquired important skills and knowledge. It has been an excellent experience. I will thank them forever, Dr. Disai at Manatee Gynecology and Dr. Romeo Acosta at Gulf Coast Institute OBGYN. They believed in me and gave me a terrific opportunity. My experience in adult education has also been a wonderful journey. I have always known that the first objective would be to learn English, because it is so important to communicate in an effective manner. While I was working in 2016, I enrolled in the ESOL program at Brewster Technical College (BTC) in Tampa, and I will always be thankful to my English teacher, Mrs. Koffman, at BTC.

In 2022, I enrolled in the ESOL program at Pinellas Technical College (PTC) in Clearwater. Both places have been one of my best experiences as an English language learner. I will also always be thankful to my English teacher, Mrs. Zanardini-Rojas, at PTC. Mrs. Zanardini-Rojas has been an excellent teacher. She is friendly and dedicated to her students. She uses interactive and innovative ways to create a fun teaching atmosphere in her classroom. I love and enjoy her classes every day. In conclusion, it has been a privilege and a great blessing for me to be living here in the United States of America where dreams do come true with hard work, patience, and perseverance.

Marianela Fernandez is an ESOL student at Pinellas Technical College. Her teacher is Mrs. Zanardini-Rojas.

Change of My Life

This is my story in the United States. My name is Sofia Gutierrez. I'm 18 years old and I'm from Bogota, Colombia. My life changed when my parents decided after the pandemic to move to the United States for a new beginning and new opportunities for us. We didn't know what was going to happen from now on with our lives, but we started with a lot of emotion.

When I arrived in the United States, it was at Miami Airport. The only thing I did at that moment cried because I left most of

my family in Colombia. And that's how on November 18, 2020, I realized that my life would not be the same as before, that I would have to learn a new culture, a new language and learn to be without my family even if I was with my parents and my dog.

A few months after coming to live here, I began to study in high school, and it motivated me a bit. Things were not good for me because I began to get very depressed, also anxious, and I reached the limit of not wanting to eat and being in my bed all day. I decided to seek help and I began to improve little by little. I also learned to do things on my own, to be more independent, to let go a little more of all that I felt and could not let go of. I began to work on my self-esteem by organizing things in high school and by providing the support that my parents needed.

The months passed and everything was getting better, but the death of a person I loved very much came, an aunt who was like my second mother. She took care of me when I was younger and I was always like her daughter, since she left, she arrived. This caused a very big depression in my life but even though life goes on She gave me a very important lesson and that is you must have a good heart with all people, that love has many facets and that I must be strong and brave to achieve everything I need.

So, thanks to the fact that my life changed after I came to the United States, I give thanks because it taught me the value of life, to respect, to be a support and to be stronger and braver each time.

Sofia is a student in Adult Education in Naples, FL. Her teacher Ms. Kris.

Medicine or Dentistry

I was born in Cuba. Throughout my early years, I was a bright student, and I arrived at the end of regular school, one of the top graduates of my school. Then came the time when I had to make a big decision that would have a tremendous and lasting impact on my life: I had to decide what I would study at college.

College in Cuba is different than in the United States. To

study to become a doctor in Medicine or Dentistry, at the end of high school, you go straight to college for 6 and 5 years, respectively, and earn your degree.

For years, these careers had been the most requested by students because of the many perks. In my case, I had excellent grades, allowing me to opt for any career I wanted. However, becoming a dentist was the most difficult among these careers because of the many applicants and the scarcity of spots available. Being a dentist in Cuba has many advantages over being a medical doctor. The wages are almost similar, but the work conditions and hours are much better than the rest of the doctors. Unfortunately, the year I had to make my application, more than 1000 students were applying for only 14 spots in the School of Dentistry. Luckily for me, I was one of those 14 spots at the end of the process.

Then I began my career. I was eager to know everything about everything. At the beginning of the dentistry and medicine careers, students receive many similar subjects among the basic sciences. On one occasion, I was receiving a lecture in Anatomy about spinal nerves. I remember the professor speaking about it and how we, as dentistry students, needed to know all the spinal nerves but that our focus would be on the first four cervical ones. At that moment, something inside me felt weird because I wanted to know all about it and not just focus on some part. The class continued, and the same thing happened to me with almost every class I took that semester. The year ended, and I felt bad about myself because I had understood that I would never be happy feeling that void inside me. Then, I made up my mind and decided that I did not want to be a dentist; instead, I would become a medical doctor.

Six years later, I graduated as a medical doctor, and to this day, I still feel that very moment in that class was a turning point in my life.

Javier Domingo Hernandez Barrio is a student at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. His student is Lisa Cox.

Waking Up In A Nightmare

I remember those days during my childhood, how happy I was living in the innocence that only children have. I miss the time when I knew nothing about this world, when even the smallest things seemed impressive to me, when you could appreciate the beauty in this world and that only while you are a child, it is possible.

Like so many others, my story begins in a small rural town. I could enjoy freedom exclusive to everyone's childhood when I was little. It is when we do not know the meaning of the word "responsibility," which is a prison in which we are imprisoned. I remember how happy I played hide and seek in the streets with the neighborhood children while we were barefoot and shirtless. I also loved to watch the sunrise between the Royal Palms in the middle of the field, and its beauty impressed me. However, how cruel is time that never stops? It drags us along with it as if we were a boat in a river, and the saddest thing about growing up is losing that characteristic innocence of a child, which frees us from this world and the horrors that inhabit it.

Yes, I realized I was not a child anymore when I discovered how naive I was whenever I wished to be an adult. As the years passed, I would no longer see the same landscape of my childhood, but I began to see the harsh reality. I lived in a country without freedom, where I grew up among lies told by monsters with human masks to imprison and exploit us. Seeing the sunrise in that same place that I used to enjoy as a child, I no longer saw its beauty; however, I saw how the royal palms cried as the sun rose, knowing that it was a sign of the beginning of the same nightmare that a nation has been living for 64 years. The nightmares that Cubans live in daily, prisoners in a jail that is their land, its bars are the sea, and the prison guards are the leaders who feed from our happiness and hope like dementors.

The moment that changed my life forever was when I lost the innocence of being a child and began to see the reality in which my people live, longing for that one day when Cuba changes its red dresses which oppress the people like a straitjacket, for clothing of freedom.

Nelson Hernández was born in a small village called Gabriel in the province of Artemisa in Cuba. His teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

The Resilience of the Human Spirit

I did not grow up surrounded by shattered glass or the tragic air that permeated the hoods of New York City. No, I was raised where the warmth and security of two loving parents encircled my very existence. They did everything in their power to provide their prince with luxuries and a promising future. But like the story of the Prince and the Prayer, I was drawn to the allure of the streets and would satisfy the void that resided within the very depths of my being.

I descended into an abyss full of drugs, alcohol, promiscuity and violence. The entire time I was telling myself that I was the captain of my ship, but truth be told I was still hollow within and my family and those that dared to love me were the only ones that suffered for my misdeeds. Living fast and reckless, I squandered many opportunities to be the success I was destined to be. I spent so much of my youth in and out of prison, repeatedly paying for my bad choices. I rationalized within that that these incarcerations were badges of honor that would add to my so called "Street Cred". Despite it all, I continued with an inner struggle because there was a deep-seated knowledge that this was not the life I was created to live, but the choke hold of darkness was too strong.

I never imagined that my life would end up this way, but I found myself once again locked up in a cell one night, with nothing but my thoughts to keep me company. That's when I noticed something etched into the ceiling, the word "Pray." It was as if the universe was giving me the key to unlock the greatness within. And it was upon putting that one word to practice that something miraculous happened. Mentors and leaders started to appear in my life as beacons of guidance. They began to hammer and chisel the rough edges and instilling in me the principles of integrity, purpose and responsibility. They showed me that I didn't have to be defined by my past and that I could choose a productive path. I was skeptical at first, but as I spent more time with these wise should the eyes of my understanding were divinely illuminated.

The journey in becoming my higher self has not been easy but it has been well worth it. I am grateful for the spiritual sensei's who have groomed me along the path of enlightenment and for the opportunities I have had to help others develop their gifts and talents by unlocking their full potential. I may have fallen into the abyss, but I have emerged stronger, wiser and with my purpose clearly defined.

So, allow my story, my testament to the power of transformation and the resilience of the human spirit encourage you to never give up becoming the best you!

Juan DeSantiago is a student at South Bay Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility. His teacher is Cheralee Morgan.

The War

War is the most terrible thing in life because it brings death, misery, breaks destiny, and changes the world.

I want to tell you about the war in my life. The war began suddenly for us on February 24th. We could never think that our neighbors would come in our town, in our country as enemies, not as a guests. At the beginning we thought that it was non-sense, an ugly mistake.

When my friend with her family came to me, I even said, "Relax, everything will be fine now; you are in my home". But the next day explosive shells were shot down on my house, to my kitchen, two meters away from me. This is how the war came into my life.

At first I didn't understand, "What happened?" My friend treated and bandaged my wounds. Her adult children put out the fire by killing it with water, and my friend said me: "Go away, because one shell did not explode. It can detonate any time".

We went to my relatives' apartment. We ran, waiting for a break in the shooting, hiding in porches, falling to the ground when we heard the whistle of flying shells.

There was no electricity, gas, water, or heat in this apartment,

but there were friendly neighbors. They made a hearth of bricks outside, near the entrance. On this hearth we cooked and boiled water for drinking. They helped each other with everything that they could.

If the shooting began, all people ran to the entrance and staircases of the apartment building. Our neighbors said to my mom, who is old and walks with a stick, "Stay at home. We can't save our life because you are interfering; you are too old".

All this time we lived, cooked, walked for water, and for food under shelling. And every day we saw death, new graves near the house, corpses wrapped in sheets lying near crossroads.

And we lived without thinking about anything, trying to live every day, just trying to survive, to save our lives. People tried to adapt to the new reality under the bombs, under the shells, under the shooting. In the apartment on the first floor a shell hit. A mine destroyed the apartment on the third floor, and our balcony. And finally the shell got stuck in the ceiling of a neighbor's apartment.

One day I understood that I can distinguish six different sounds of flying weapons. And this is not a normal life, this is survival.

This moment was a turning point of my life. The war changed my life, my destiny. The war took many people, my aunt, my home, my city!

The war is the most terrible thing in the world!

Tetiana Kononova is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Laughter and Your Life

Laughter is a balsam of health and happiness. The body and the soul need it. Yes, laughter is the language of the soul.

Two opposite words: sadness and happiness. The first one represents suffering and crying. The second represents health,

laughter, and happiness.

The face reflects the five senses of the human body. The face doesn't have words like you can express with your mouth.

When you look in the mirror, your face talks, reflecting how you are feeling in that dawn of a new day. When you look in your eyes, you can see if you are sad or happy.

Life is not easy for everybody. It's true. Life has ups and downs. We all must endure it the best that we can.

In my long life I have experienced sad and difficult times. I was separated from my family in Cuba when I came to the United States. After a long illness, my husband went on a long trip and never returned. But I know he is waiting for me in heaven. I prayed a lot. I understood how to improve myself. I thought and then told myself, "I'm sad. I don't want to continue this way. I need to change."

I learned that laughter is powerful. In my life happiness won the trophy over sadness because now I am happy.

I remembered this song from my childhood in Cuba: I'm happy. I'm happy. I'm happy. I want to be happy and I'm happy.

Please, try to keep in your mind those words. If I did, I'm sure you can do it too.

I started this short writing with the word "laughter." I would like to finish with these words:

La risa es amor.
Laughter is love.
La risa es felicidad.
Laughter is happiness.

La risa te da la oportunidad hacer feliz a los demas.

Laughter gives you the opportunity to make other people happy too.

Gladys Lago is an ESOL student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinel-

It's Never Too Late

las. Her teacher is Suzanne Carter.

It's The Moment To Start to Live

My name is Katherine, I am 18 years old, but when my life took a 360-degree turn I was 16. At this time I was sick in terms of mental health. I couldn't sleep, wake up or just brush my teeth; for me every action was a torture. I forced myself to breathe, eat or talk.

My childhood wasn't easy. When I was 8 years old I had to take care of my brother and a house because my mother lived in another country. My father worked all day and all night at his job, and when he got home, he just beat us. In addition, my father's family abused us psychologically and physically. In fact, I was sexually abused for three years. Finally, when my mother came back to Bolivia, she took my brothers and me to Spain.

This escape from the trauma in Bolivia was the beginning of my healing. In Spain, I started going to therapy and I'm not going to lie, it was a very hard process. You have to confront your pain and all the things that make you feel helpless. But it's worth it, because when you start to feel how life begins to be easier, how all the things that make you feel sadness begin to look like just a sad memory, all the pain when you confront your traumas is worth it.

Now I am working on myself, who I am supposed to be, and all the things I really want to do. So if you feel the same way, I really recommend and I hope that you start to ask for help because nothing compares to the feeling that you are okay, the feeling when you like to be alive.

Katherine Lisperguer is a student at the Adult Education In Naples, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Khris.

Becoming a Parent

Becoming a parent is wonderful and passionate; for many people, becoming a parent brings a lot of joy after marriage. They are all waiting for a girl or a boy to bring joy and happiness to

the family. To tell the truth, it was my and my wife's objective to bring a baby into the family; we were delighted when we learned we were about to have a daughter, but having a kid in the family just like everybody else, especially when it's your first child brings a lot of problems because our attention is only on the baby, not ourselves anymore.

We learned as new parents how to cultivate more patience and put our daughter first before anything else. We are thrilled about all the advice we've received from friends and family who helped us cope with our new role as first-time parents. We know it is a challenge to raise your child and give her the right direction in life, but we are confident we will be able to do so with God's help because He has given us this precious gift.

But some people may say children can be embarrassing sometimes and give you trouble. I agree with each person's opinion, but in our case, our child is a valuable jewel that helps us develop qualities that were hidden or didn't even exist in our home. We have gotten more compassionate, learned to hear better, understand not in words but in actions too, how to manage our time better, and set proper priorities.

In my place, you would have more to say, especially when your child is smiling with you constantly, bringing joy and happiness to the family that almost doesn't exist in the society we live in today.

Luckner Joseph is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Center. His teacher is Lisa Cox.

My Son's Dream

A turning point in my life was the time when my elder son returned from the U.S.A. where he was an exchange student and studied at an American public school for half a year. He returned thin as a stick, had lost 15 kilograms, but with a sparkle in his eyes. And he said, "I want to study in America". It was 1990.

We lived in the Soviet Union. My husband and I decided that this was not possible, but we did not dissuade him from this dream and decided to help him in every possible way.

We had to help a lot, and it had nothing to do with the learning process or grades. To pass the TOEFL test, it was necessary to pay for it in the Netherlands with a check in dollars. When according to the results of my son's test he enrolled Holy Cross College in MA, he had to get an exit visa first and then another entry visa. It was necessary to buy a plane ticket, which at that time cost several of our salaries. To do this, my son wrote a booklet "How to get a college degree in America" and sold its copyright. Then he bought the ticket with this money.

Now it is history. Everything is already much simpler. There is no problem with dollars. This currency is no longer banned in Russia. There is no problem with the exit visa. It has been canceled altogether. But at that time, he was like a pioneer.

Thirty years have passed since then. Now our whole family is here in the U.S.A. But the first step was taken by my son at the age of 17.

Svetlana Maslova is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

A Turning Point In My Life

Education makes all the difference in the world to me. Education is a top priority in my life. When I was in high school in Mexico, I had no choice but to leave school in 11th grade due to some problems. I was extremely disappointed that I had to leave school. However, a turning point came in my life when in 2008. I went to the United States of America, and I was then able to prioritize my education again. I began taking English classes even when I understood very little English. I worked hard, and I became a citizen of the United States. The United States is full of lots of opportunities if you work hard. I studied, and I was able to earn my nurse assistant license.

After I got my license, I started working for nine years in a home health facility. I have always had in my mind the goal of earning my GED. I will work on that goal because education is so important to me. Right now, I go to school to improve my English, and I am in the ESOL Level 7 class. I already had one year

of study, and it was challenging. Little by little, I will do it. I want to reach my goals within 4-5 years.

I work very hard because I have two dreams to reach. First, I want to earn and get my GED, and then I plan to attend college to earn my RN degree. Second, I plan to complete my education so that I can help older adults.

My ultimate goal is to build and start my own business. But, first, I need to finish my education. The turning point was when I came to the United States and pursued an education. Through education, I can and will reach my goal of having my own business and helping my family and elderly people.

I look forward to the day when I will be a nurse, and I will be able to help people live better and live healthier lives. I have goals and will achieve them through hard work, determination, and education.

Guadalupe Miranda is an ESOL student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Persecution in Venezuela

I was born in Venezuela where I practiced dentistry for thirteen years. I provided my services for free to students when they suffered dental injuries in political protests. About five years ago in San Cristóbal, on May 11, 2017, at about 4:00 p.m., I attended the March of the White Coats called by the College of Physicians and Dentists, asking the government's human rights representative to allow food, medical supplies, and clothing from a donor to be distributed to those who needed it. I represented my dentistry union.

When the protest ended, I went back to my mother's house to pick up my son. I put him in his car seat in the back since he was two and a half years old at the time and headed home. After a short while, I noticed several men on motorcycles chasing me. The motorcycles did not have license plates. On each one, there were two men, one of whom was driving and the other carrying a pistol. They were all dressed in red flannel, and their faces were covered with red handkerchiefs. On the front of their shirts, they

wore a logo that said Tupamaros, a Marxist-Leninist political party, one of the most prominent groups in the Maduro government in Venezuela. Although several Tupamaros participate in peaceful movements, some believe in the “idea of armed struggle as a means to attain power.”

One of the bikers managed to approach my car, yelling and pointing. The rider touched the window of my car with his gun and yelled my name. He said, “We don’t want to see you helping anyone. Stop. We are going to take you and your car.” Instead, fearing for my life, I accelerated my car and cut the motorcyclist off. As I quickly drove away, one shouted that if he saw me again helping those of my political party, he would kidnap or kill me. Many things went through my mind. I was so scared that all I could think about was how to escape and to protect myself and my son.

Linda Miranda is a student at Read Lakeland. Her teacher is Neal Steiger.

A Difficult Situation Makes Us Stronger

As soon as we decided to move to Florida, we sold out real estate property, business, and cars in Kazakhstan. After that, we bought an Italian restaurant “Feola” on Treasure Island.

We did not understand the specifics of doing local business. Without fluent English, it was doubly difficult. The restaurant business took up all our free time. We had never seen so many force majeure situations in our lives.

After a few months of our hard work, COVID came. On one hand, it gave us a lot of free time, but, on the other hand, we had to pay bills, including rent and salaries to employees. We decided to move our business to South Tampa. The new name of our restaurant was Factory South Tampa BBQ. It was very difficult to work during the pandemic. Money flew away very quickly, and we closed the restaurant.

We lost all of our money. We only had the amount left to pay for one month’s apartment rent for our family. This situation was a turning point for our family. We did not know what to do, our hands went down, and our fears rose.

More than six months have passed since then, and, little by little, we began to recover.

While we were working in the restaurant, we met many friends. They helped us start all over again. Our friends helped us find a house with a lower rent, and we moved to Saint Petersburg.

We started to manage different activities for our Russian speaking community. We organized several parties and holidays. At the farewell party, we made an auction. Our friends were happy to buy various items. This helped us raise money for a couple of months for our family life.

There were people from our environment who offered my husband a job in their medical equipment delivery company.

We launched a small radio station "Radio Zavod", Although it does not generate income, many people like it.

We continue to host events, games and holidays. Now we are getting ready for the Christmas party. We organize various games for adults, such as the Mafia and the Night Watch, as well as psychological games in the field of relationships, money, and self-development. In addition, we hold Informational and motivational meetings for adults and children. People who participate usually are asked for a donation.

Now I am sure that we are able to go through all the life situations and become the best version of ourselves. We open new possibilities and begin to appreciate relationships, the support of family, friends and higher powers.

Nataliya Mun is an ESOL student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

And So, I Learned...

Seeing a hummingbird quickly moving its wings resembles every moment of my life, growing your own wings to fly high without having to look at the one who left behind. And so, I learned, in a country in South America, that while raising my children - two girls, 9 and 6 years old, and twin boys, 5 years old - alone - because I decided to get a divorce to save my life - I found my comfort in the phrase "Look ahead..." I do not remember how I did it nor how I achieved it... but I understood that four kids needed me, and I made the decision to divide my heart in four equal parts to be able to address their joys, their sorrows, their questions, their words, and everything that they felt. And so, I began one of the most difficult flights of my life. I remember the time I helped with their homework and studies; each one had different assignments and due dates. Meanwhile, the night

would come and before they slept, I would give them a kiss and we would pray to the guardian angel. After that I would go to my bedroom, where I felt melancholy and sadness, but I realized that I had done the best that day.

At that time, an illness left me prostrate in bed and everything got worse; the medicines I had to take practically kept me asleep all day long. This frustrated me so very much that my children needed me, yet my parents helped us, and, for that, I will always be grateful to them. And so, I learned that health is the most important engine for a single parent, and I taught myself that life is a gift, that an obstacle is just a lesson learned, that a tear means continuing with optimism, and that you must be a better person than yesterday.

Today, my oldest daughter is 25 years old, and she is a professional in international business. My second daughter is 21 years old, and she is also a professional in the pre-kindergarten teaching career. My twins are studying Business and Radio and TV Broadcast Programming at Miami Dade College, and I was able to finish two master's Degrees in Psychology and Personal Coaching.

And so, I learned, finally, that God had taken my hand and together with him I have earned the best gift of all: love for everyone in this world.

PS: Writing this essay brought back memories of that moment in my life and those memories caused tears to run down my cheeks...

Claudia "Saskia" Munoz is a student in the English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Program at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Robert Kelso.

No More Fear

After I graduated from high school, I was very happy as I thought I had escaped from the terrible study lifestyle. I was only seventeen and I had no idea that my real life had just started. After passing through many months full of difficulties, I met something in a place that could guide me in finding my future.

This was the time of the biggest turning point in my life.

I used to waste my time on the screen watching movies, mobile games, and social media. One of the good things I did was I learned English language with my cousin on the weekdays. The only thing I had a passion for was cooking. Because of that, I fought with my family almost every day because I had no plan for my goals, ambitions, and dream job. I couldn't understand them, and I thought they were pressuring me. I felt sad for no support, tired of those negative words from relatives, got depressed and stressed because I couldn't even think about any target plans for my future. My head was full of bad thoughts and I spent sleepless nights crying. As a consequence, I had mental fatigue, closed in, and became ill very often. I spent many days at home for almost a year.

One day, I was looking at my mobile phone and I found an International Pre-University Program from a college on Facebook. I contacted the college assistant, got some information, and discussed the program. I became interested and I joined that program. I enjoyed it so much and I was able to get rid of my fear of going to university. But I still did not know what my real career goal was until I met my beloved Sir Kaung Loon who I admire the most. He came to the college and explained the subject of Hospitality and Tourism in detail including his experience. I decided to set it as my career goal because that major is related to my hobby and exactly the same as my family business. Furthermore, I attended Sir Kaung Loon's motivational seminar and listened to some motivational things about mentality and emotions which fully helped to cure my mental problem. So, I can make many different plans on how to move forward in my journey of life by myself with a strong mind set.

Now, I am not scared of any negative words from everyone as I am ready to face any obstacles and try my best to get ahead in the future. I am also not going to lose my way and cry anymore because I am going to stand on my own feet.

Su Oo is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Life Changes

When I moved from my parent's house for the first time, I thought it was going to be forever, and everything would be nice. Instead, I got my first job in another city with a fashion designer I aspired to work alongside.

The experience with the job was amazing, but life was too hard. The rent and personal things were costly. It was the first time I was away from my family and boyfriend. Although, personally, that helped me a lot with what happened in the following years. I am glad I could take advantage of that challenging experience for a year and a half.

In 2017 I went to work and never thought it was my last day at that job. We had a storm announcement on this day, and I drove to my house to be safe. A turning point came in my life when we had a disastrous hurricane where I lived named Maria a few days later. Puerto Rico was without electricity and phone service. We did not know about the safety of our own family, even those who lived in the same city. Since my boyfriend left Puerto Rico to study, he did not know anything about our safety for about a week.

My work facilities and the building where I lived were damaged. Also, we were without electricity for three months, so I could not return to that job. I found a job near my hometown, so I returned home to live with my parents for almost four more years.

It was difficult because I had gotten used to living alone and wanted to remain independent. But I believe everything happens for a reason, and time lets you know. In my new job, I had more flexibility and could save money. In addition, this situation allowed me to travel more and visit my boyfriend while he was studying outside Puerto Rico.

Those changes and challenging experiences, like the hurricane, prepared me for unexpected moments like the pandemic. The pandemic was yet another time away from the people we love, but we became stronger and increased our faith. Thank God that after the storm comes the calm, and I'm now living a new experience for which I am thankful.

Paola Ortiz is an ESOL student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education

Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

The Point of Finding My True Paradise

Last Summer, the Summer of 2022, my family and I had huge plans to venture on a vacation trip. We were living in Moscow, Russia and were dreaming and anticipating the idea of paradise with the rays of Sun on us, the soft sandy beaches, the maintained visions of nature, and the open and accepting friendly atmosphere of the people we meet. We then decided to visit Sarasota, because my husband had friends that were living in this city of Sarasota. So, we finally got all our plans finalized and we ventured into our vacation trip to Sarasota and immediately fell in love!

When it was time to come back to Moscow, we felt that sour taste to not want to go back and we only wanted to remain in the found paradise of Sarasota. This was the moment in time that was the turning point in my life, for a better life filled with opportunities. My children and I are living in Sarasota full time now and my husband travels back and forth from New York, where he owns four restaurants, and comes back every two weeks.

Sometimes it has been hard due to the change of life in a new country with other cultures and ways of living. But I love this feeling of freedom and being able to see people share their minds openly. I like the ways of tolerance and acceptance to be you, yourself, without the command of government.

I am overjoyed to see my children with endless educational opportunities for their future here and I am so eager to learn more English with the ESOL program I enrolled in this semester. I know that my children will experience freedom and self-confidence here. Our unplanned move from Russia to Sarasota has given me the realization that we are able to create a better life and give more to our kids.

I have almost reached the age of 30 and the great turning point that has evolved from a vacation trip into my new home has given me appreciation. Despite all the complications and adaptations that I have encountered, I am feeling that I am truly happy now!

Polina Perederko is an ESOL student at the Suncoast Technical College. Her teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

The Day My Life Changed

That day, I felt that everything was in black and white because I never thought that my family would separate and I would live without my father. My brother and I grew up together. So I always thought that we would be together forever.

In December 2020 everything changed. My brother and I would be separated. My life and my dreams changed little by little. I learned to live without my dad, I learned to be independent relying on my own effort without any help .

My mom and I got ahead together, we shared our happy moments and our sad moments. Many things happened and with those bad memories, I learned that sometimes in life you can't get everything you want. I couldn't fulfill my dreams, but I knew I had to fight to get ahead. I'm grateful to my mom for her love, patience, and help.

Kemica Popilaire is an ESOL and ABE student of Collier Adult Education, in Naples, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Khris.

More Than a Dream, a Hope

All started by a dream, a dream to have a better life than you had. You leave your country, family and friends behind, but not everything is as we think when you arrive. You always will have obstacles to overcome to fulfill your dreams.

I wanted to come to United States, but for that I would have to pay a high price. I was one month in prison after crossing the border, alone, scared and worried. Exactly, I came thinking that it would be easy, but no.

We were 4, my mom, my dad, and my little brother. I was

separated from them, in that moment, I didn't know why. In a few days, I thought that would be protocol, but now I think that was bad luck. My family left after 3 days, and I was transferred to the first prison. When I was there, I was in shock, I didn't know what to think. I was a good person, young, student, considerate and I helped everyone that needed it. They chained me as if I was a criminal, I was alone and I didn't know anything about my family. Then the guards gave me only one free call of 5 minutes, and I called my auntie and told her my situation. When I asked her if she knew something about my family, she told me that they were on their way to the house. My eyes became watery, but with happiness, I forgot all and told myself that I had to stay strong, with the hope of getting together again.

The days went and the conditions were not very good. I always was hungry, I lost weight and I was very cold. I felt bad every day until I adapted, but that wasn't all. After 15 days, they called me, and they told me that I had left. In this moment I was surprised thinking that I would go to my house. But they chained me one more time and I was transferred to another prison. Although I had been in that situation before, I couldn't avoid feeling worse.

There I was another 20 days, in a worse condition until the end. I remember when I saw my family after a month. We all started to cry, and we suffered, but we knew how to recover and go ahead. The most precious thing in life is to have the love of a family, they will give you all the strength that you need at all times.

Waldo is a student at Collier Adult Education. His teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Grieving Is a Real Thing

As the Covid-19 pandemic started, my life changed for the worse. My mom got a call that my cousin had committed suicide, I was sixteen years old at the time and for weeks I couldn't believe it. I was very young and didn't even know what to think. What is someone supposed to think? To blame yourself, be mad at yourself, because you didn't see the signs? Constantly, challenging and asking if you could've done more? I've done all of these things and it doesn't work nor change anything. I can't tell you much because those feelings will never go away.

Grieving is a real thing, even after years it passes through

my mind constantly. I'll tell you this though, day by day it gets better, and you learn to live with it and accept it. Three years later, it still hurts, but I have managed to learn how to live with it, accept it, and live with the fact that I'll never see him again. In high school I wrote about it as a journal entry, and it helped me make sense of it all. Now, I can confront it and find closure.

If you ever lost someone to suicide, don't blame yourself. There was nothing you could have done and most times you can't even see the signs. You need to learn to move on with your life no matter how hard it truly is. Think about it as you're making your loved one proud and pushing through the tough times. Be the best you can be no matter how difficult life becomes!

My name is Kayliana Quiles. I am attending South Florida State College, my teacher is Ian Lilly. After graduation, I will continue my education with a masters in pathobiology while working towards a career in veterinary medicine.

Eric Is The Reason

“Your children will be Parrots! How you talk! Please stop, for a moment!” My sister told me several years ago. My dream was being a mom of a boy. I wanted to teach him how to play chess and help him with algebra and calculus in school. However, the roles were switched. He was not able to talk like other toddlers. After his third birthday we were able to get him into a special education program at a local school.

I pushed the Pediatrician to get referrals with specialists, and when he was seven years old the diagnosis came to us. When they spoke about the life of my baby, I had to be involved, even when the experts were uncomfortable with my many questions & suggestions. I didn't want to be a colleague of the doctor; but this precious boy, who chose me as his mom, was depending on me to get this right.

I soon realized that we must be a dream team in advocating for our special kids. We must be their lawyers, fighting for their rights! I must learn & understand his disability. To educate others, friends and strangers has become my permanent mission. Once we accept that our kid is different, without labeling him,

we also realize he'd never be less than his peers, we'd never label him.

I focus on his strengths and not on his limitations. It's hard, but everything's a process. Every day is a new opportunity to fight because of him. We parents had to develop a thick skin against staring, comments and whispers. It's time to ask, what's the potential hiding in this challenge? It's probably learning how to turn problems into opportunities for giving, growing and finding new ways of living and loving.

Life is a constant test, I thought raising a mini me could be a nice and sweet challenge, but when this child has special needs, that means a double challenge, double time, double energy and even double frustration when the things are not going well.

Some people think that children before they are born choose their parents, why should a soul select one family over another? Now I'm pretty sure that he came to this world, to my life, to be my teacher, for some reason he chose us as his parents because he believed in us, trusted us, and wished to teach us a life lesson of unconditional love; then, adapting to become better versions of ourselves.

I dreamt of being a teacher & mom to my boy. Ultimately, I became his student. Now he is a sweet boy, a nice teenager of fifteen years, my little parrot still is not speaking perfectly, not yet, like me. I'm honored to be his mom and I'm very proud of him; that's why he is the heart of my essay!

Andrea Ramirez is a student of Ms. Richardson at Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota, FL.

Steps to Success

It is challenging to start a new life with many changes from all points of view, emotionally, socially, and geographically. So here I'm going to explain how I did it!

After being in Venezuela, well established in work and family, I decided to emigrate, leave Venezuela, and move to the United States of America. I had to leave everything behind and start

again. Moving to the United States of America was a turning point in my life.

The first step was to realize the situation and take action. I decided to travel to the United States and then to Ecuador. I took my mom to Ecuador when she was extremely ill from cancer. Mom died, but I had to keep going even without strength after losing my mother. Losing my mom was the most difficult time in my life.

I moved to West Palm Beach, Florida. I found a job I love: teaching Flamenco classes and performing shows. In addition, I had the opportunity to travel to Miami, Orlando, Dallas, Austin, New Mexico, and New York.

The second step is to create your opportunities. When I first came to West Palm Beach, I worked at a cosmetic factory and was on my feet all day. In the back of my mind, I have always dreamed about teaching dance. My boyfriend encouraged me to follow my dream of teaching Flamenco dance classes. So, I decided to quit the factory job and put my whole heart into teaching dance. I am happy that Palm Beach County Schools created Flamenco dance classes into their curriculum for the first time ever, and people have signed up to take my classes. I had been contacting friends and new people for months and sending my artistic resume to teach and perform Flamenco dancing. It all paid off because I am now teaching dance and performing. I make money doing what I love to do!

I'm working at Gitanillas Dance Studio in Miami, Florida, teaching intermediate and advanced students. I also teach adult Flamenco dance classes at Royal Palm Beach High School. Soon I will be teaching dance at Jupiter High School. I love the pedagogical process of teaching.

I finish with the third step: Keep organized and motivated! It is imperative to be organized and motivated to be successful now and in the future. I am thankful for the turning point in my life when I came to the United States of America, and I can now achieve my goals and live my dream.

Gabriela Perdomo-Reyes is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Becoming Myself

I have experienced many situations in my life that could be considered turning points. Each of these situations literally turned my life upside down. These were personal relationships, friendships, work relationships and events that happened around me. The frustrating part is that I could not influence nor prepare for them in any way. The only thing I could possibly do was to somehow survive and live to fight another day. Well, at least that's what I told myself.

In difficult moments, I began to ask myself why the same tragic things keep repeating themselves over and over again. Questioning myself and my circumstances was the point that my life dramatically turned around. These burning critical questions set me out on a serious path of self-discovery.

The process that guides my transformation is beyond fascinating. In the best sense of the word, I went through a lot of pain in the beginning. As I continued the journey of self-discovery, I knew that I had to face my emotions about the deaths of my loved ones, face the guilt heaped on me for leaving my home country, and many other painful realities that I had buried deep inside myself. If one wants to see the light, one must go through the darkness. I noticed that my internal setting was not the way that I wanted to live. Instead, I was people pleasing those who shaped me from birth, especially my parents, in kindergarten and school. I began to realize how many fears I had inside me. I had to open all my fears and start dealing with them and finally start answering my questions truthfully.

Many people whom I considered close suddenly left my life, everything started to change, and it was not pleasant. I felt so alone. On the other hand, new people came into my life and brought with them new energy and vibrations. The communication between us was different, the topics were different, and I understood that I was also thinking, acting and reacting differently. I started to feel "new."

Then, I began to notice how my thinking was changing, bit by bit. My thoughts were no longer rooted in fear. I was reacting differently to situations, and to people in my life who questioned

my thought patterns. It brought me relief, peace, and above all, self-acceptance. Although there are some who do not like this liberated new me.

Honestly, the feeling of inner peace and self-discovery is the most beautiful feeling I have ever experienced. It's a lifelong process and once embarked on this journey, there's no going back. It requires patience, persistence, & communication with one's open heart. After years of living the life everyone else wanted me to live, I'm finally becoming MYSELF.

Lucy Silvero is a student of Tonya Richardson in level 7 ESOL, at Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota, FL.

A Turning Point In My Life

In 2006, I made one of the most difficult decisions of my life; to migrate to the United States. Deciding to move to the United States of America was a turning point in my life. It was a very hurried decision that we had to take due to the family's difficult economic situation at that time.

The first reason for traveling to the United States was to find a way to cover our financial debts. The second reason was to generate savings so that at the right time, we could return to our country, Bolivia, with better economic status and have the possibility of opening our own business in our native country. This migration plan would be facilitated because we would meet relatives in New Jersey who would help us settle in the country to find work, housing, and school for our daughters.

In 2006, we arrived in Miami and then moved to New Jersey, where we only stayed for about three months. Due to the fact that cold weather affected my wife's health, we had to move to Florida with our other relatives. A couple of years after we arrived, the crisis of 2008 was already starting. This crisis made our adaptation process even more complex and delayed achieving the goals we had initially set for ourselves. These negative factors made our stay in the country longer than expected. Despite everything that happened with the 2008 crisis, I am thankful because during this time I was able to reinvent myself and find encouragement to practice one of my professions and create my own business. Also, we saw the great opportunities my daughters could have and decided to stay and settle in the United

States.

My business continues to grow, and I feel very satisfied with what I do. I continue studying to improve my communication in English as well as my professional skills. My wife works as an accountant, and my daughters obtained their university degrees and work in their professions. My stay in this country is possibly like many immigrants, surviving despite the difficulties but never letting those barriers prevent me from accomplishing my goals. I will continue to fight for my dreams to come true no matter how long it takes me to achieve them. We all have the same opportunities to improve our present lives and change our future if we work hard. I believe that people can accomplish goals and that dreams will come true.

Alex Solares is an ESOL student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Lisa Cox is his teacher.

Three Changes

A turning point in my life that has really changed me is when my brother died from cancer in 2021. It was very sad watching him die slowly. He was one of my younger siblings. Seeing that I couldn't save him will be stuck with me forever.

Another turning point in my life was the moment I became a grandma. My first grandchild was born in 2013 on May 29th, with three more little ones after him. My grandchildren motivate me every day.

For my birthday recently, my children surprised me with a surprise party. My children are another topic I'd say was a turning point in my life. Out of all of my six children, every one of them changed me in a good way with good impacts on me. My children remind me every single day without even having to verbally say how much they appreciate me.

Miglesen St. Fort is a student in the Village Readers Family Education program.

The Many Turning Point In My Life

My name is Marie Thomas. Today I am very glad to talk

about: the many turning points in my life.

I grew up in Haiti in a family of nine people, my father, my mother, five brothers, my little sister and me. I am the third born in my family. When my sister was born, I was 12 years old. She's the last one to be born in the family.

During the pregnancy with my little sister, my mother was very sick, and two years after that, when my little sister was born, my mother passed away. It was very hard for the family. The hardest part was that I couldn't go to school.

I couldn't go to school because I had to take care of my two-year-old sister and make food for my brothers when they came home from school and also for my father, for when he came home from gardening the plantation.

Some years later, I got married and had five children. Meanwhile, all of my brothers and my sister left me and came to the United States, where they eventually attended and graduated from college. By the grace of God, I finally left Haiti and came to the United States in 1980, at the age of 33 years old.

When I came to the United States, I left my three boys and two girls with my husband in Haiti. I started going to school and working hard to take care of my family and myself. Finally, I was able to apply for them to come to the United States too. It's hard to believe that it was around 20 years ago.

Now, I am retired after 26 years working as a Certified Nursing Assistant. I am pursuing my dream of a higher education, so I go to school full time. I also have been attending adult education classes at the Palm Beach Central Community High School for more than three years. Additionally, I attend a Theology school where I will soon graduate as a Pastor. I will not stop until I reach my big goal of going to college and graduating like my brothers and my sister.

I bless the Lord for the many turning points in my life; for lifting me up and putting me as a team leader in my family, in my church, and as the president of an organization that helps people in Haiti to eat and build houses for those in need.

Marie Thomas is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Metamorphosis

My name is Yunez Villar. I was born in Cuba in 1987. When I was six years old, my father left my mother and me to come to this country to look for new opportunities, so I grew up with the distance from my father and my mother taking the two roles.

Since I was a little girl, my dream was to become a teacher. I love teaching. At the age when I had to decide on a career, for government reasons, it was not suitable for me to choose a teaching career; thus, my dream was cut short.

I came to this country with my husband in 2015, sponsored by my brother. I lived in Miami in little Havana, and I began to take various courses to prepare myself to work with children. My first job was in a daycare center. Over time, I got other preparation to be able to start working in a public school as an afterschool teacher.

At this stage of my life, I began to feel that I was able to get a little closer to what I had always wanted to do. Over time I continued to improve myself until I was able to become a behavioral therapist for children with autism. It is my current occupation.

Everything was stable in my life, but then it took an unexpected turn. In a short time, I was separated from my husband, responsible for all my expenses and without a job. After two months of applying for jobs, an opportunity for one appeared in Tampa. So, I put together what I had in the car and moved to St. Petersburg.

When I arrived, I realized how necessary it was to learn English. I couldn't communicate and I felt frustrated and scared. A friend recommended me to study at the Clearview school, and without wasting time I enrolled.

Right now, my priority is learning English. I take classes in the morning but due to my work schedule, I can't finish my morning shifts. So, after work, I return at night to resume my classes.

I feel grateful to each teacher who puts in so much effort and

interest so that we learn and achieve our goals. I feel that every day is another day of progress.

Thank you so much to each of you!

Yuney Villar is an ESOL student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Coming of Age

I've been told by friends and family that growing up in a split home can have its ups and downs. It's supposed to be fun, right? I get to have two birthdays, two Christmases, pretty much two of everything. In all fairness, it's not fun whatsoever, to be at one house for three days, then end up in a strange place for four days, then a week with dad and, a different week with mom. I packed several bags each week with different items to suit where I was going. I was a kid living out of a tote bag like a nomad and rarely saw my siblings. This left me with a void that can't be filled.

I dreaded going to my mom's house, I never knew if I would get to eat that night or know where I'd be sleeping. She didn't have much, she lost it all in the divorce. The two of us would usually end up sleeping in the car. I wore the same clothes that I slept in at school the previous day. I witnessed my mom stealing food for me and my siblings, this is when you know your life is at an all-time low. Eventually, my mom went to jail for 3 years, and I never got the full details as to why. I had to grow up fast and while forfeiting my childhood.

My first job was at 15 years old. I had to help my mom pay the bills so we could have something to eat. I had always believed their divorce was my fault and I can't explain why, but I had these emotions at the mere age of 5. I miss my parents reading me bedtime stories that put me to sleep. I felt I was left behind and no longer existed when I saw my dad remarry and have a new son. How could he love anyone else besides us?

Fast forward to 14 years later, my parents continue to avoid each other. It's all rather selfish of them. They wouldn't take pictures at my dance recitals or at my softball games. My dad would attend away games and my mom would attend home games, so they didn't have to see each other. Growing up like this wasn't easy, I didn't let these heartbreaking events define me and lead

me away from my goals.

I took the course and am now 19 years old with 3 jobs, supporting myself and my brother without stressing over money. I made time and went back to school to continue my adult education and fulfill my dreams. Know this: God has a plan for everyone. I am learning this the hard way. I hit a couple of bumps along the way, but these struggles and hardships haven't stopped me on my way to success.

Jazmine White is a student at South Florida State College. Her dream is to open her own hair salon.

A New Life

When I was young, I always wanted to go to study business at a university in the United States. After I graduated from Foreign Trade University in my country, I went to work. I also had a successful career.

In addition, I travelled to the United States many times. I visited many beautiful places in the United States. I knew that the United States was very large. I never imagined that I would live in the United States.

Fortunately, our family moved to stay in the USA one year ago. My family came to the USA when Covid 19 was all over the world. Luckily my family has stayed safe and healthy. There are five people in my family: three daughters, my husband and me. The oldest daughter is about to graduate from the University of South Florida. My second daughter is studying graphic design in Philadelphia. My third daughter lives in Florida with my husband and me.

I like the climate in Florida because of the warm weather, great beaches, and beautiful parks. The Florida weather is similar to the weather in the South of Vietnam, my country. We enjoyed Florida very much.

Unfortunately, one day I went to see the doctor for my health check, and I was diagnosed with a serious health problem. My husband took me to the hospital afterward. At that time, all my dreams, my plans and many things disappeared. I was very disappointed.

I was thinking that my health was very bad and that my family, my children, are still very young and still studying at school. They can't do anything by themselves. My husband can't do it without me. I was overthinking and worrying about many things.

On the other hand, I thought that we were also lucky, I had to go to the hospital for my treatment even though there was Covid 19. The doctors and nurses helped me a lot when I was sick. After nine months of treatment, I came back home, and I continue to take medications every day.

I think that United States has given me a new life. I'm very grateful to this country. This is my opportunity to try new things in life. I also have an opportunity to study English. I'm very happy and excited to learn English here. I have met a lot of friends from other countries with different cultures. Very importantly, I met many teachers who teach me how to speak English. Today, I can write a short story. I'm very lucky and happy. I'm thankful for my teachers at Clearview Adult Center.

“No one can choose where they are born but everyone can choose where they live”.

I am XA RIN XO NA, I'm from Vietnam and a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. My teacher is Inguna Ozols

Escaping the War

My life hasn't been easy due to facing multiple wars. I still believe there is hope, and with perseverance you can overcome any obstacles in life. My story began in Crimea, Sevastopol. In 2014, Russia occupied Crimea, and my family and I had to leave and travel to Kyiv. I lived in Kyiv, Ukraine, until February 24, 2022. On that date, I woke up at five in the morning to a call from a friend, shouting, “Inna, the war has begun! War! We're being bombed!” Immediately, I got out of bed, went to the window, and heard explosions. Since then, my world has completely changed. On February 25, I had to leave home, gathering only a few things, and rushing to put the children and our cat in the car.

It was a very intense and challenging journey from Kyiv to Moldova with limited food and water, feeling nothing but fear, despair, and horror, with tears dripping down my face. In Moldova, I was lucky that were people who kindly took us into their homes. From Moldova, we went to Romania; once there, a Ukrainian volunteer offered to help us drive to Munich, Germany. After 23 hours without sleeping and alternating driving positions along the way, we arrived in Munich on March 7th. My family and I lived with a wonderful woman, and my sister and her husband, who lived in the city, helped us. I was lucky to have such fantastic support.

I was waiting for my husband in Munich; he was working with a company overseas, but they didn't want to let him go. After my husband's arrival, we lived in the city for almost three months when I found a sponsor for the program the US government offered for people like me who were escaping the war.

Kind Americans responded to my request, and on May 29, my family and I flew to Orlando. We were welcomed by our wonderful American family, their friends, and various journalists. A month later, we moved to Palm Coast. At this point, I was eager to learn English faster to communicate fluently with people and find a job. I was longing for an opportunity to become more self-confident in myself.

I found Flagler Technical College on the Internet. I found out that I could learn English to reach my goals, mainly because I want to communicate without being afraid of misunderstandings and become independent of translators.

I want to make new friends, meet new people, and do simple tasks like taking my children to the doctor without asking for help. I am assured that ESOL courses will change my life. I am happy to be able to share my story with you.

Do not be afraid; learn, try new things, and be grateful.
Appreciate every moment in life.

Peace to you!

Glory to Ukraine!

It's Never Too Late

*Inna Yakovenko is an ESOL student at Flagler Technical College
and her teacher is Claudia Strong.*

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received Was From My Grandparents

Grandparents are magical people who come to fill your life with joy, and above all to teach you with their great wisdom. My grandfather always told me to always enjoy the strength and beauty of my youth. Although I would not understand it until I was older, and now that I am twenty years of age I see myself understanding. How many possibilities lay before me and how pretty she really was. That she wasn't as fat as she imagined. He always told me not to worry about the future because the problems that are truly important in life are those that never crossed my mind, those that surprise me at 4pm in the afternoon or on any given Tuesday. He said Black Cats and Friday the 13th weren't bad, but if it was bad to lie and play with people's feelings, then I shouldn't worry who to spend February 14th with, if not Mother's Day. But above all, he believed in me, no matter how difficult the road may be, because if it were easy, it wouldn't be worth it.

Daliannys Arias Piedra is a student at Collier Adult Education. His/her teacher is Dayana Exposito

Forgive and Let Go

Throughout my life, I have received many different pieces of advice. Some give me strength and others guide my life. When I was having a hard time, people gave me strength and gave me their own advice. The suggestions people have given are all so good and it is hard for me to choose the best. But I believe the most valuable human advice I have received is the advice of forgiveness. My father used to give me a piece of advice "Forgive and let go."

"Forgive and let go" is the best advice I have ever received because it gives a message that fits me. I am a very angry person and I have made many mistakes in my life because of my anger. I am an impatient person. I don't like to be patient and I don't let go. My actions made me unhappy and burned me out.

One day, while my father and I were shopping, a man hit me with a shopping basket. He left without apologizing to me for his action. I was very angry and ready to get into a fight. My father stopped me and said being angry is not good. He admonished me to forgive and move on.

The reason I chose that advice as the best is that every time I forgive someone, I feel a sense of peace. I also heard a saying from my father that “We are human. No human is perfect. They are bound to make mistakes. So as human had made mistakes I should repent for them. If we don't forgive them we might not forget things, and this is not good for our mental health. Therefore, forgiving them and moving on with life is the best way to take care of yourself.” Those words have really changed the way I think about people.

That advice made my life easier and happier. It gradually heals bad habits and relieves anger. Because of it, I learned to look at everything from the good angle. It changed my life a lot. I will try to forgive everyone as much as I can and move forward in my life journey.

Nway Nandar Aung is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. She attends the Virtual English class taught by Rodziah Josephson.

If You Can Dream It, You Can Do It

Now imagine that you are in Bogotá, Colombia sitting in a restaurant with your mother, but you don't feel well. I felt empty and insufficient. When I got out of school around 2016, my mom took me to eat something and she noticed that I was not as happy as always. I am usually a very outgoing, cheerful and positive person, so she asked me what was wrong and I started to tell her what I was feeling.

Ever since I was little, I have felt that I am not smart enough. I always dreamed of being a chemical engineer and learning other languages. Since I started school, I never did well. I was irresponsible and undedicated, because I didn't think school was worth it. So that day, I began to get more demotivated. How can someone like me do what I want and dream of?

My mom was sitting and listening in silence. When I finished telling her all that, she said, “If you can dream it you can do it”, I thought she was going to say the typical things to motivate me a bit, like that I can do it, that I am intelligent, that I can do anything, etc. But no, she only said that sentence to me.

Since then, every time I think I’m not smart enough I remember that advice. When I started high school I became judicious with my studies. Now I am responsible, enjoy studying, and if I can’t handle something I ask for help. So whatever it is, I try to improve and my mother is always there to support me and help me.

Salma is a student in adult education in Naples, FL and her teacher is Ms. Khis.

Words of Wisdom From a Seventy-Year-Old

It is an honor for me today to share with you “the best advice” that I have ever received in my life. I was working as a busser at Peter Pan restaurant that is located on Oakland Park Boulevard. My days working there were typically good for me, but one day was so special for me; that was a Sunday when I met this woman. She was about 70 years old or something like that. Doing my job, I asked her whether I could take the empty plates away and she replied in a smiling face, “Sure, you can”.

After taking the empty plates, I went over to the other tables to clean them off when she came over to me and asked, “what’s your name”? My name is James, I replied. She said, “James you are a very intelligent young man”. “Thank you”, I replied. And then she continued. “I don’t want to take your time because you are busy with your work, but I want to give you some advice.” I was listening attentively to her. She said, “Do you know what? Do not ignore the kind of job you are doing today. You must do it because you need it, but do not get married too early. Go to school and learn something so that you will not do this job anymore and find a better one. Thank you for listening to me. You can continue now because I do not want the manager to get angry with you.”

After listening to her, I spent the rest of the day thinking about

what she told me, and for me that was the best advice I have ever received.

Jamesly Baptiste was born in North of Haiti in the city of Bas-limbe. He studied office computers and interpreting. He left his country in 2019. He lived in Brazil for 1 year and half. Now he is a student in Advanced ESOL with Ms. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida. His dream is to be a Computer Engineer and a Businessman.

Live, Love, Enjoy and Thank You

The best advice I have received was to live, love, enjoy and thank the people that surround me and the things that happen to me every day, even if they are not so good. Never forget the lessons, since those are the ones that will make me improve as a human being. This advice was given to me by two friends.

When they gave me this advice, I was very young. So, what I understood I applied to trivial things and situations. Those situations that did not generate great significance in my life. But even so, as they taught me, they contributed some lesson to my life. Over time I understood what they meant. Enjoy every place I visit, every smell and every taste. Love every sensation of what happens in my life. It is okay to feel sadness and pain. Thanking is a value that I should never forget. Forgiving is not done for others, but for our own peace. Living is not about having a job, a house, going to university or having children, but rather to be happy with what we are passionate about, be it a little or a lot.

They also taught me that pleasing all the people around us is an almost impossible task. It is easier to be kind, smile and be grateful. I only have to please one person, myself. I must not betray my passions, my goals. I must not allow anyone to cross my limits, but neither should I cross those of others, out of respect for them and for me Life is more beautiful, with a smile.

So, I applied in my life a phrase that I saw at some point, "Smiling gives you free thoughts". With this, no matter what happens, I will always be sure that I am going to deliver a little joy to anyone who comes my way because we never know what happens in the lives of others. Do what you can to help improve a day with a small gesture of love.

Daniela Barbosa attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson

My Mom

During my whole life, I have received a lot of advice. When I was young, I didn't talk to strangers, eat my vegetables, or get wet in the rain. I have always listened to advice, especially from older people. Older people have more experience. One of my favorite people, and the best advice I have ever received, is from my mom. My mom has always been a warrior woman, and I am proud of her. My older sister has also been like a mother to me. These two have been fundamental in my life. Not only for their advice, but also for supporting and waking me up whenever I needed it.

When my parents divorced, I was three years old. I am the youngest of three sisters. My mom is a brilliant woman; she graduated from University, has a great job, and earned a lot of money. My dad had a very successful business. When they were married and my sisters and I were born, my mother decided to stop working to take care of us.

My parents decided to get divorced. My mother struggled financially. My mom started teaching math at my house, desperate to earn money. At first, she didn't make much money, but later my house looked like a high school. When my sisters and I were old enough to work, we worked during the day and went to university at night. All three of us are university graduates. My father helped us as much as possible; his company closed, and it was challenging for him to help us. My father remarried and had two children. It was no longer a house to maintain, but two. My sisters and I worked to help our parents. Not all bad situations are bad. Thanks to these experiences, we learn the value of things and how hard it is to earn money, honestly. I have been independent since I was young.

The advice that my mom always told me, and she still repeats to me daily, is always to be independent, work hard, and don't give up on your dreams. If your husband is rich, you should work and earn money. Financial independence gives you freedom. Many relationships end, so it is crucial to work hard, earn

It's Never Too Late

money, and be independent.

My life experiences brought me to a beautiful country, working very hard, but I would do it again, and when I have children, I want to do a job as excellent as the one my parents did with me and my siblings.

Ornella Collado is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Their teacher is Lisa Cox.

To Know Me

At a time when I was lost without any guidance, I received the best advice ever. This advice helped me to be utterly contentious of myself. The advice gave me strength to have a positive attitude. The advice that was shared with me led me to "To Know Me."

To know me, I was no longer a procrastinator.
I then knew I needed to focus on getting things down.
To know me, I was no longer an overthinker.
I then knew I needed to think about one thing at a time.
To know me, I was no longer having a negative attitude.
I knew then I needed to adjust my attitude for a better life.
To know me, I was not motivated. I then knew I needed to be ambitious.
To know me, I was all over the place.
I then learned to strategize and take small steps.
To know me, I was no longer out of control.
I then knew I needed to be disciplined in my actions.

This is me now, learning me is to know me, is the best advice I ever received.

Howard Crumpler is a student at Family Support Services Network, Inc. His teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

Words of Wisdom

We have all received good and bad advice throughout our lives. Sometimes you feel that you need to give more of yourself and that you need to comply with others because many depend on you. For some of these people, you are all they have; that is

where your responsibilities increase. While at the same time, you become a life support for some of these people. You try to endure everything difficult in life, but sometimes you feel that you are so focused on others that you have stopped living your life just to live for others.

This happened to me, and like so many other people who also have gone through similar situations. Sometimes I have felt like I can't take it anymore, but I have to continue, not for myself, but for all of those who depend on me.

One day I got sick, I had a fever of 104°F, and I was working the night shift. I had to go home because I felt terrible, and I did not have any strength left. After approximately 20 minutes, I was finally able to get out of the car and go up to the apartment. It was there in that moment of loneliness that I thought, "if something happens to me, who will notice?" (My entire family lives in Colombia and had no idea I was so sick.) It was a very sad moment for me. I couldn't share it with anyone because it was 1:00 AM. So, the next day I called my dad. I told him what had happened to me, and as always, with his kind and loving voice, he told me that I couldn't worry 100% about others, that each person makes their own decisions. With me or without me, everyone would solve their problems, and I shouldn't worry before things happen. In most situations, there is always a solution.

At the time, it was hard to believe that it was true because I was still worried, but as time passed, I could see that my dad was right. He gave me great advice, and his words have helped me tremendously over the years.

Now, I try to solve the problems as they come, I don't overthink, I don't think about what could happen, and as a result, I can focus more on myself. The advice that my dad gave to me has helped me worry less, and I often remind myself of his advice when I get worried and need more peace, that each person is responsible for their own decisions. If needed, I will always be there to help others, but I do not feel as responsible, which has taken a lot of pressure off my mind.

Gelly Gallego is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Gelly's teacher is Lisa Cox.

Words of Wisdom

What is advice? The meaning of advice is an opinion someone offers you about what you should or should not do or how you should act in certain situations. Everyone has a wise person in their life who always advises them when they need it.

I have a lot of people in my life that give me wise advice, but my mother is the person who makes me feel confident. She guides me and supports me every step of the way. She has given me a lot of advice during my life, but as a child, she told me, “Believe in yourself; you can reach all your dreams.” That was the best advice I have ever received. We have a strong connection, and I feel blessed to be her daughter. She has taught me the importance of believing in myself, studying, working hard, and being a good woman.

Since I was a child, I have loved studying, going to school, and learning a lot, but when I had a test, I always felt nervous even when I knew the content perfectly. Right before I started writing on the test paper, I remembered the words from my mom. That became a ritual for me before I made an important decision in my life.

I'm 24 years old. I graduated in dentistry in Cuba and moved to the United States in November of 2021. I started a new life with challenges and fears, far from my mother, but she still advises me every day and makes me the happiest person in the world, even when I already believe in my capacities.

Listening to different people helps you in every situation, but the most important aspect of life is to believe in yourself and feel confident.

Esperanza Garcia-Gonzalez is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

The Pharmacy Course

Everyone seeks advice from someone at some phase of life. I vividly remember the time when I needed suggestions regarding my studies. After completing my secondary education, I was in a dilemma about whether to choose engineering subjects or pharmacy subjects for my graduation.

Luckily, I got advice from my cousin to go for a pharmacy course. He was pursuing the same course and explained to me in detail the scope and opportunities for job work after getting a degree in Pharmacy. Initially, I was scared to go with his opinion because I was less interested in the medical field. Still, I felt excited and thrilled when I started the pharmacy course as the subjects I learned during my graduation were not only interesting but also practical.

Additionally, I came to know the mechanism of action, side-effects along with the distribution, assimilation, metabolism, and elimination of various medicines along with their therapeutic actions. Moreover, I found an exhilarating chemical composition of many medicines that I read in my final year course. Besides, I learned how to prepare label matters and meet compliance regulations regarding the labeling of medicines in specific countries.

This pharmacy course successfully shaped my career. Eventually, I got an opportunity to work in a multinational pharmaceutical industry after completing my graduation course. This was all made possible because of that piece of advice given by my cousin when I was perplexed and ambivalent at the same time. Now, I feel proud to be a pharmacist who serves the individual, community, and societal needs.

Meenakshi Goel is an ESOL student at Chuck Saw technical Education Center. Meenakshi's teacher is Lisa Hanes-Cox.

The Power of a Smile

Are friends coming into your life for a reason? For me, the answer is YES!

Travel back in time with me eighteen years ago. I was a nine-year-old girl, and in the middle of the year, a boy with crazy hair came to my school from Madrid, Spain. He was quiet and said, "Hi, my name is Pablo Josue." He was so shy when we first met. My teacher sat him next to me, and after a couple of days of being together, he started talking to me. I clearly remember his accent was so funny and endearing, and when he read aloud in class, the sound "zzz" was present in everything.

We shared all primary school and high school years together. My relationship with Pablito was amazing, and he was the friend everyone needs in his life. We grew up together; he was always there with a big smile and had a solution for every issue.

He was a good listener, and everything became more manageable when I spoke with him about a problem or topic I wanted to discuss. In addition, he was a good helper because he could learn languages and more!

I always remember the day we made a project in the school library and talked about college and careers. That was the start of an extensive conversation about guidance, and I remembered his advice, one thing in particular, it was the most important advice for me. He said: "Always smile," and he explained to me that you never know if another person is having a bad day, and with one smile, you can fix their day. He was an amazing friend and thankfully, I was able to know him and call him my friend. Unfortunately, Pablito passed away in 2016, but I will always remember him with love and admiration. He was always a light to people who knew him, and when I smile, I feel he is near.

In memory of a good friend, thank you for teaching me about the power of a smile.

Ana Guillen is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

The Best Advice I've Ever Received

I have heard a lot of free advice from my friends, my pastor, and family members. Many pieces of advice have been helpful; this advice encourages me to stay in school, and to be smart. However, I believe the best advice for me came from my friend.

My friend told me, "If I'm afraid to try, I will not know the results. I must be brave to face them." This is the best advice I have ever received because it gives a message. It explains my life that if I do not try then I will never know if I will succeed or not.

I always use this advice in my life, sometimes I'm afraid to ask a question in church but when I think about it, if I never ask, I will never get an answer. Personally, this helps me do something that can help me whether it is in academics or my personal matters.

Furthermore, the reason it is the best advice, it encourages me. It motivates me to do something I really want to do. Sometimes I am full of doubt and I question myself but this advice gives me the mental strength to process things I want to do more often.

Finally, this advice gives me a sense of bravery in my inner soul that no matter what happens I should achieve my dream. I have to try or I will never know what happens if I do not try. I do not want to feel regret in everything I do in my life. I must be brave to face it. If I'm afraid to try, I will not know the reason I must be brave.

In conclusion, the best advice I have received is to never give up because it explains many aspects of my life. I try to apply it in my actions, my dreams, my speech, and my future plans. Thank you for your help and I hope God blesses you.

Yolande Jean Joseph is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education and her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Mother's Advice

At my youngest age, my mother taught me the lesson of success based on integrity, honesty, education, and management of time. In Haiti, young people in the middle class don't have much chance if they do not take their studies seriously. Further, Nelson Mandela said: "Education is the most powerful weapon you can use to change the world." The advice of my mother and the thought of Nelson Mandela helped me lead myself toward my studies. My mother always said, "lost time is never found again; it should be used reasonably." Success can not be achieved without making decisions. To succeed, I went to school and put into practice all my mother's advice about integrity and honesty throughout my life.

In October of 1995, I entered a vocational school named, in French, called "Ecole National des Arts Et Métiers." A Catholic organization led that vocational school. That was one of the most important goals of my mother because having a profession at a younger age was crucial for her. After four years of study, I became a dressmaker. I am also passionate about mass media and politics. I attended classes at a journalism school. In the end, in October of 2008, I made a great decision to enroll in the university. That decision has completely changed my life. By attending classes at university, I earned a diploma in business administration and a bachelor's degree in accounting.

Integrity is defined as the quality of being honest and having strong moral principles. After my mother's death, only the lessons she had taught me were left. She always talked to me about integrity and how to practice it throughout my entire life. "Do not lie for whatever the reason, never make compromises for money by destroying other people, do not take what does not belong to you, and do not waste your time," she said. So, while growing up, I understood that my mother had already given me all I needed to succeed.

I am inspired by my mother's advice to work hard so that I can be a valuable person to my country. To do that, I needed to set a goal. However, achieving a goal demands a lot of sacrifices because I would have to work and go to school simultaneously to pay for my studies.

The way to succeed is not easy. But, the more you work hard, the more you increase your chance of success. The weapon that I used to change my personal life is education. I spent my time doing good things, as my mother told me. But, without integrity and honesty, success in life is impossible.

Frederic Jn Paul is a student is an ESOL student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. His teacher is Lisa Cox.

Always Face Your Fears

The best advice I received was "always face your fears" so you can get results and choose the right path. Fear is an emotion that can make us run headlong without thinking about the consequences, or, conversely, stop us when we think about the possible consequences. With age, there are more fears. A small child has a fear of loneliness. Later it is a fear of falling or getting burned. And then there are more.

An adult has a huge number of fears, but the most important is the fear of starting something new. Immediately, thoughts about responsibility for their undertakings, about the consequences and beliefs, and about the futility of their actions begin to appear. It is usually easier to stay put than to take a step forward. While you are afraid and do not start, someone takes

it and does it. We all make mistakes, but it's better to try than to regret later that you didn't.

Doing what you are afraid of is very difficult for any person. But you must overcome it. Especially when it comes to what prevents you from living and does not allow you to achieve your goal. Overcoming the fear that hinders the achievement of the goal means building your success. Otherwise, you will have to regret a failed life all the time.

There is another fear that hinders success. It also needs to be overcome. It is the fear of doing something small. By doing it you will gain self-respect and rise in your own eyes. This is very important, because low self-esteem in itself can become a source of additional fears.

Successful people always have a high opinion of themselves and always achieve their goals. You need to fight fear with its own weapon, that is to STEP, go towards fear, do what you are most afraid of. There is no other way to overcome this barrier. If you want to learn how to swim, dive in the water! The whole secret of success can be embodied in two phrases: 1. Do what you are afraid of. 2. Do it as much and as often as possible.

You must fight your fears. They destroy life and absorb energy. And confronting fear adds energy and instills confidence. Moreover, your confidence will grow every day, because each subsequent step will be easier and easier for you. You will have to go through life on your own. Do not be ashamed of your fears, fear is experienced by many. Imagine what opportunities will open up for you when you overcome your fear. Let it motivate you and make you do something new every day.

Olga attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

My Mother

As teenagers, our life tends to be full of moments that adults consider irresponsible. Either we party too much, don't plan for our future in a meaningful way, or don't want to follow the path our parents want us to take. I am from Haiti, a country

where parents tell us what we need to do to succeed or make our family proud. Most of the time, their advice is to learn something related to health or be an engineer, a lawyer, all those “prestigious” jobs. In my case, that wasn't the situation, but inevitably I had been admonished by my parents for many actions that I was making and they considered unwise.

My mother always knew that one day I would be leaving the country to continue with my studies somewhere else, since Haiti is constantly in crisis and unsafe for most people. Because of this, my mother always told me: “Laurent, you have to be independent and figure out by yourself what your priorities are in life.” At the time, I didn't take the time to understand what she was telling me. I always thought it was just one of her other long lectures. Shamefully, I can say I was wrong, and I realized it was already too late. Now that I must make all the decisions for my future alone, my mother is not here in the U.S. to help me.

I finished my high school education in June. The day after, I received a call from the U.S.A. Embassy in Haiti, telling me I had an interview. My residency application was accepted. I had to leave Haiti before September 3rd for the application not to be canceled. Upon my departure from Haiti, on the plane, I realized what my mother words meant that I had to be responsible and independent.

My parents will no longer be with me to tell me what to do or advise me on whether what I'll be doing is good or bad. Once I left Haiti, all my decisions have to be made alone. If my mother had not given me this advice back then and made sure that I had the competence to be alone in another country, I would not be here at this very moment in ESOL 7 learning English, writing this essay. I would not be in this country doing everything possible to enter college in January.

I respect my mother for always having a good thinking process, and I cannot find the words to thank her enough for making sure I would not be lost in any initiative I will take on in life. This was the best advice someone had given me, and this is the advice I will give to anyone reading this: “Be independent, be responsible because you don't know what is waiting for you in life.”

Laurent Seide is an ESOL student at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Laurent teacher is Lisa Cox.

My “English Song”

I remember when I was a kid listening to my mom sing The Beatles songs like “Let it Be” and “Yellow submarine.” I also remember my grandfather listening to Elvis with his record player and a glossy black vinyl record. I think that was when I realized that there were more languages in this world and I was interested in learning how to speak English like the music artists that I heard.

After attending school all day as a first grader, I was eager to seek my adventure to learn English at “Instituto de Ingles New York”. The journey into this new language led me to the thought of being well versed in knowing English, especially when I was getting a double dose at regular school too.

I really enjoyed learning English during those years in life. I graduated from high school and learning English abruptly ended. Therefore, my enrichment of the language was at a standstill for the time being. I thought I won't use it in my everyday life and there is no reason why I should continue learning any more. I didn't have anyone around me to speak this language to besides my sister who at that time was faraway at college. I honestly thought that my English level was supreme but, oh boy, I was so wrong!

I started coming back and forth to the United States for almost 10 years after college to visit my sister. Then, I met the perfect man for me during my visits and after 4 years of dating him long distance, I then decided to stay in the United States and get married to him. That's when it hit me that I needed a little boost with my English proficiency. I realized that there's a huge difference between knowing English and using it as a part of your everyday life.

I decided to take ESOL classes in Sarasota and I found the best teacher. She was kind and patient with all of us and we learned a lot about American culture. She taught us idioms so we can understand them and vocabulary. I learned things that

I'd never heard before in my life and now I feel more confident having a long conversation and even making a fluent phone call without umming and awing like I used to do.

We need to understand this is a learning process and it is something that you can only improve with practice. I am so happy I made the decision to take ESOL classes. I am so fortunate that I took my parents' advice about what this language could bring in my life. I think their purpose was for my professional life. They are thrilled now that the unexpected happenings of everything else in my life was due to their advice to have me grasp the knowledge of English.

It let me discover new friends from different nationalities, but more importantly it let me unite with the love of my life. I'm just so grateful that my parents introduced me to this language and to my ESOL teacher that made me feel at home with confidence and security.

Ambar Soto is a student at Suncoast Technical College ESOL Adult Program. Their teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

Valuable Advice That I Follow

What's the best advice I've ever received? It is hard to choose just one, so I'm going to share the best two pieces of advice I have tried to follow every day since I heard them. The first one is "don't be afraid to be different." This one I heard for the first time when I started high school, so it was difficult to follow, but I tried. It feels good when I am myself, not trying to be similar to anyone else. Just me with my different thoughts and personality, and maybe with not many friends, but real ones who appreciate me just for who I am. Sometimes it's still hard not to be afraid of having differences and feel like I don't fit in, but I say to myself, "What if I fit in just being myself, being kind and open to know different people with different kinds of personalities?"

This last phrase brings me to the second piece of advice. This one was easier to follow. It is that we have to be kind and be open to hear and learn from everyone, because anyone can teach us something. It doesn't have to be super intelligent. It just has to be new for you. Maybe someone will tell you the name of something

that you didn't know and you probably will forget. However, in some cases, someone can say something minimal that you will always remember just because you heard from other people, and you were open to learning from them.

In conclusion, in my 22 years of life, I have received so much advice from different places, and I will probably hear a lot more of those, maybe better than the two that I pick, but for now, these two are the most valuable for me. So be brave, be free, and don't be afraid to be different, meet people and learn from them because everyone can teach us at least one thing.

Nicole Vásquez is an ESOL student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Hanes-Cox.

My Bravest Moment

Two Of Them

My name is Yocelyn Aranda. I would like to tell you about my bravest moment. My bravest moment is when I gave birth to my two kids who were twins. It was my bravest moment because it was my first pregnancy, and I was having twins.

I was four months pregnant when I went for my first ultrasound and the doctor told me it was having twins. I never imagined that I would have twins. I always thought I would only have one baby. So, was very surprised to find this out. My first thought was that I was going to die giving birth. During the pregnancy, I was very scared that my kids would be born sick or worse.

It was a very dangerous pregnancy according to the doctors. I cried a lot. After the pregnancy, it was very hard and difficult for me to take care of my kids because my husband was always working and there were two of them that I had to take care of. Thankfully my mom would help me a lot.

Unfortunately, the boy twin was very sick as a newborn. He had to have surgery because of an eating problem. This was very difficult for me because he was just a baby and I didn't think he could have surgery as a newborn. I had to take care of the boy twin while in the hospital. He stayed in the hospital for about a week.

Later, my husband and I would switch places, and I would take care of my twin girl at home, while he stayed at the hospital with the twin boy. During that time, it was very stressful and hard for me. This is why my bravest moment is when I had my twins and I realized that I could care for them.

Yocelyn Aranda is an ESOL student at the West Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

Be Careful With Ian!

In late September of 2022, the news was alarming people about a strong hurricane that was approaching Cuba and head-

ing towards Florida. It was our first hurricane experience, so my family and I were carefree about the news even though many of our friends advised us to take a lot of caution. Then, my English teacher from the college presented a special lesson where she talked about hurricanes, how dangerous they can be, and told us about some precautions and safety recommendations to consider.

Early in the morning of September 27th, the news then announced that the hurricane was passing through Cuba. At that moment, my parents went out to pick-up the recommended sand bags. In the afternoon, the news was even more terrible in Cuba, so my parents and sister kept putting away and arranging things outside. I was also helping. How? Well, I encouraged my family to keep going and organized their duties from my wheelchair.

By September 28th, Ian was closer, and there were still some duties to do. For example, my father needed to cut a dead tree next to the house. We probably would have gotten a big hole in the roof if he had not cut it. By this time, Ian was closer and we started to feel the strong winds. I was monitoring the trajectory on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) website and updating my parents. Suddenly, the power went out! No lights! No Internet!

Quickly, my mother went outside to finish saving some things, but when she tried to turn around, a wind gust hit her so hard that it hampered her return. She was terrified! My father still needed to move his car closer to the house for protection from damage by flying objects, but it was too late as the wind was becoming stronger and stronger. The loud sound made my sister and I hide in the laundry room.

Finally, Ian arrived in my city, Sebring. When it was passing over our home, we were all so scared. We were looking out of the dining room's windows and saw the trees violently swaying and moving. I was wondering, would our little house withstand the winds, or would it become a flying house? Then, I remembered that we forgot to buy some helmets for our safety, so my sister lent us both her pink and purple bicycle helmets and a plastic fire helmet. We looked ridiculous wearing them.

That night, all of us laid down on the sofa bed. Please under-

It's Never Too Late

stand we were very uncomfortable due to the noise and the space limitations. In fact, my father had to go to another room after five falls from the bed.

I hope you can see that this experience had some humorous moments for my family and at the same time, some traumatic events. I will never forget you Ian, our first hurricane.

Javier A. Capacyachi is from Peru and attends ESOL and GED classes at South Florida State College. His instructors are Ms. Miriani and Mr. Aguilar.

Another Way to Face the Reality

When I was a child, I used to always be with my family. We were all together, having good times. It didn't matter how hard the situation was, my mother always tried to find a way to feed us and make us feel good. She tried to give us the best education and bought the stuff that we needed to make us feel and grow up safe. My father was with us as a part of the family, but he never behaved and worked as a part of this.

One day the situation turned, and my mother decided to find a different way to survive because she was a nurse and she had been working for 30 years as a nurse. When the government changed, they fired her. She didn't have other resources to support the family, and she was the one who used to bring the food home. Then she decided to find another way to survive outside the country. Back then I was 15 years old, and I have two brothers. The oldest was 22 years old, and he had a kind of autism, - his mind was like a baby of 2 years. And the other brother was 12 years old.

When that happened, my father didn't support us and left the house. At that moment I was forced to face reality and take care of my brothers because I knew that it was for our future.

Alba Corporan is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Our Time of Resilience

During the years of 2012-2022, I visited the United States of America many times and I traveled to many places. I knew that the US was very large, beautiful, powerful, and many people in the world wanted to live here.

To be honest, at first, I did not want to live in the US for a long time. I only like to travel and find something new for my business. However, at the end of March 2021, my wife and I came to the United States to visit our daughters who are studying at the universities. Two months later, I got the bad news. My wife had a serious health condition, so I took her to the hospital. After that, it was a difficult time for our family. It took a big toll on us that cost us a fortune as well as time and resilience to overcome her medical problem. My wife then proceeded to receive her treatments. We were lucky that we had great doctors and nurses who helped us every step of the way.

Fast forward to now, a year later, my wife's health has improved greatly. She can go outside for exercise. We often take a walk through the forest of Seminole Park. We can hear the birds sing, smell the freshness of the grass and flowers, and enjoy the beauty of nature together.

Since then, I recognized that if I had not stayed in the US during the time, my wife could not have survived until now. In addition, I felt that living in the US was not as boring as I thought. It is a beautiful and attractive destination. Additionally, America is where children, elderly, and women get the most care and respect.

Finally, I have decided that my family will be living in the United States for a long time.

Huan Dinh is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Resilience in the Face of Adversity

The bravest moment I will never forget was a pivotal lifesaving experience. When I was living in Brazil with my uncle, life there

was not so good for us, and this is where my story begins. Rents were high and jobs were few, making everyday life difficult. Local people resented us as we were not one of them and they viewed us as intruders, taking their jobs, their food, and their livelihood. The struggle to survive precipitated our decision to leave Brazil and go to the United States for a better life.

We planned our route which took us through eleven countries. It took us 5 months just to arrive in Mexico where we stayed for six years to replenish our finances. Let me back up to explain our journey in more detail. Traveling became extremely dangerous moving through Colombia to Panama, the officials were not supportive, in fact, we found ourselves on foot climbing the treacherous mountains and this is where my strength was tested. You see, we had to carry only our belongings with us, and this made the trek even more strenuous. If that were not hard enough, my uncle's blood pressure went up so high he could no longer stand or walk. Of course, there was not any medical care available to us on the mountain, so, at this point, I was thinking about what I could do to help us survive. You see, I was determined to get through this journey no matter what!

With my brain spinning, and my head and heart pounding, my blood pressure was about to explode until this brilliant idea popped up! The only question was, could I succeed? I had no choice at that crucial moment, but to lighten the weight, so, I threw all the clothes we were carrying into the river, and I loaded my uncle on my back and carried him up and down the mountains through the dangerous water, until we were in Panama. There my uncle received medical attention and I just looked up and said thank you. With help from above and my own determination our lives were saved.

Kenaz Fenelon is a student at Atlantic Technical College. His teacher is Fayne Johnson.

Whatever It Takes

A few days ago, someone asked what the bravest moment of my life was. That was an easy answer; it was when I made the decision to come to the U.S.A. On July 4th, 2022, I left my home country, Cuba. At only 19 years old, I had big dreams, all my

memories packed in my suitcase, and a ticket with no return in hand.

It was a painful decision. I had to say goodbye to everything I have ever known with the added stress of not knowing if, or when, I would ever return. With tears in my eyes, I walked through the doors of the airport without looking back.

At that moment, the only emotion I could feel was excitement. I was so scared but at the same time, I was excited because I just wanted to start a new life with new opportunities. However, with that excitement came uncertainty. Nothing could have prepared me for what would be the greatest adventure of my life.

As I sat and looked out of the plane's window, I saw how my home became smaller and smaller as I flew further and further away. I was so nervous when the plane began to descend into Nicaragua where my journey would continue. I knew I had to cross four countries before I reached what I would call my new home.

When I finally arrived in the U.S.A., my priority was to learn English, so I started classes at South Florida State College. I studied hard, passed my test and finished the ESOL program. I am still going to class to continue improving my English. My next goal is to become an RN. I know it is not going to be easy, but I remember the words that my mother told me: "good things are never easy."

Six months have passed, and I can say I am a new person. I have learned how to speak a new language and drive a car. I am proud of myself because I thought I would never do it, but I did! I cannot say I did it all alone. My older brother and sister-in-law help and support me every day and I am grateful for all they have done for me.

Therefore, if someone asked me again what my bravest moment is, I would answer that it is waking up every day and choosing to live my life. I do not know what the future has in store for me, but I am not afraid. If I fall, I am going to get up and keep fighting because I know that I can make all my dreams come true and I will do whatever it takes to make them happen.

Maria Gabriela Lopez is from Cuba and attends the ESOL program at South Florida State College. Her instructor is Ms. Miriani.

Starting Again: A Moment of Bravery

In December 2022, I took a flight to the United States leaving behind my family, my dogs and loved ones. This decision was made 6 years ago when, unaware at the time, my life partner had decided to leave Venezuela to grow and fulfill his goals. We were both young at the time and had not yet completed college. The situation in our country was already becoming difficult. Honestly, I did not expect to continue with the relationship; but the day I said goodbye to him at the airport, it hurt. It hurt us enough to think about trying to continue and make a future together.

When my day of departure to the city of Miami arrived, I did not cry. I said goodbye to my mother and brother, and at that moment, I had a whirlwind of emotions - fear, insecurity, sadness- combined with nervousness. I kept my composure the whole time and I did not allow myself to cry. As an immigrant, there is always the fear that they will not accept you when you enter the country, but something told me that it would not be like that for me; and I was right when they told me, "Welcome." I think I breathed so deeply for I did not believe it, and I asked twice to be sure. I was received by my father-in-law with a big hug, and the feeling I felt at the moment was relief.

Even so, I did not allow myself to cry at the moment, and I did not give in to feelings of weakness. I sought to adapt to a new place, a new family, new customs, and to start again. Two weeks later, I realized where I was, that I had left home, and all the changes that had happened. That day, I cried until I could no longer feel free, vulnerable or human. I think that was the bravest moment for me.

Haudrymara Hernandez is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College Kendall Campus. Her teacher is Kelly Millard.

My Bravest Decision

I live in Florida now, but I used to live in Peru where I had my

own construction company. In the year 2000, I often called a friend who I thought might have a job opportunity for me, since he was an important executive of a big company. And one day, wow! There was a great opportunity to bid on a big job. He asked me about my job experience. I definitely did not know very much about the kind of work needed, but I convinced him to consider referring me for the bid. Truthfully, the scope of the work greatly exceeded the extent of my previous contracts, but I really needed the job.

Therefore, I invited some colleagues to collaborate with me and work together to evaluate the documents and blueprints to prepare an offer. We worked hard for several days studying and evaluating thoroughly all the paperwork provided for the bid. We completed the evaluation on time to get the offer ready and sent.

After that, I waited several days to receive the big news. I received a phone call from the client's representative who told me that, unfortunately, I had lost the bid. I hung up the phone and was completely disappointed. Suddenly, on the spur of the moment, I returned the call to the representative and asked him if I could make a significant reduction in the price of my offer to get a new review. He told me that he would not be able to help me, but he promised to tell the general manager about my petition.

The next day, early in the morning, the general manager called me to speak about my solicitation. We had a conversation in which I confirmed the lower price offered and the promise that I would accomplish the goals of the job. After a brief conversation about some other details, he told me that he would consult the board and would soon give me an answer. The next day, I received a call from the representative who gave me the news that they had finally approved my offer and given me the job.

The job was really of a big scope, challenging, and complex. I put all my effort, entrepreneur's ability, and professional skills into the job. With the collaboration of my personnel and some financial help, we got the job done on time and with outstanding quality.

I would say that I learned a big lesson through this process, and the reward of having done that job was a big step for my company and a great satisfaction.

Luis Matto is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center, and his teacher is Jeffrey Kallan.

My Bravest Moment

On August 3rd, 2021, I pulled into the parking lot of Learn to Read. My wife had signed me up to work with a tutor so I could finally learn to read. My wife has been an awesome supporter and has always pushed me to do better in life. As I stepped out of my car in faith, I was so nervous. I was scared to reveal the secret of my life - that I could not read. I was 35 years old and was determined that this time would not be stopped. I started working with my tutor 2 times a week.

At Christmas of that year, I could read enough that we invited my wife, my mother, my counselor and the staff at Learn to Read, to hear me read some short stories and lyrics to Christmas music to them. I was so nervous that I was shaking. This was one of the bravest moments of my life - but I did it.

In January of 2022, my tutor helped me write my story for the Florida Literacy program. My story was accepted, and my tutor and Joe (the director) strongly encouraged me to read my story in front of a huge crowd in Orlando. I was so nervous, but I took a leap of faith again, and did it.

That fall, Learn to Read surprised me with the Student of the Year award. This meant another big group to read in front of, at a fundraiser. My tutor was awarded the Tutor of the Year and it helped to be there with her and to have her at my side again as I read. For some reason, this was the hardest one of them all, but I'm not sure why.

But again - through faith - I was able to get through it. Now here I am again, January of 2023, writing my story again. I know that this year my bravest moments will be to keep pushing myself forward. Looking back, I know I have come a long way - but I still have a long way to go. I just hope that my story can help others to keep moving forward in faith. Keep being brave. I can do it, and you can too.

Eric Mitchell is a student of Barbara Horton at Learn to Read of St. Johns County.

Brave Start of Motherhood

My bravest moment in life was when I was about to give birth to my daughter. I started to have contractions and then I was rushed to the hospital. I arrived at the hospital with the nurses immediately helping me because it was obvious, I was in labor. One hour passed and my contractions were so hard to take, and my baby moved to a different position. The nurses had me move my body in a different way to ease the contractions.

I was in so much pain that I told the nurses that I was ready for the epidural. The doctor came in to give me the bad news that my decision about the epidural was too late. I begged for the epidural shot and told the doctor that I couldn't stand being in this much pain. The intensity grew with pain. "OMG," I thought, "how can they see that I am in so much pain and not help with easing this horrific pain?"

I was in delivery for 12 hours and my face was full of red dots and extremely sweaty from me pushing and being hot. When I saw her face for the first time, I realized that all that pain was worth it because I had the gift of a beautiful daughter.

Maria Ramirez is a student in the Suncoast Technical College ESOL Program. Maria's teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

Push Yourself and Be Brave

Making a decision that changes the course of your life, drawing a new route to walk on it, I define this in one word "courage". You become twice as brave by not regretting that decision and walking with firm steps. Many people think that a new life is easy, and it is not, but it becomes a test of improvement for the mind and soul. Learning to walk for the second time in your life you, take stronger steps and go farther, without looking back and living in the present.

Going back to study becomes exhausting, but it is the small

It's Never Too Late

stone that in the future will be the walls of your home. For these reasons, never regret where you are and what you have achieved. “Whoever is afraid of dying is not born.”

*Jose Daniel Rodriguez is a student with Collier Adult Education.
His teacher is Dayana Exposito*

My Goals and Ambitions

All For My Future

Ambitions are related to our feelings, emotions and desires. It is about the energy necessary to make dreams come true whether in the personal, social, or professional fields. An ambitious person is someone who tries to overcome challenges and implement strategies to grow. I consider myself a person with goals and ambitions that I want to achieve. My biggest goal since I was little is to become a great doctor and help people. What does it mean to be a doctor to me? It means to be admired, to be hopeful, to be supportive, to be warm, to be able to help recover health To be an instrument of God to maintain the life that he has given us of the professions, the noblest of the vilest trades. Why do I want to be a doctor? What inspired me to want to study this?

Since I was little I grew up seeing how people around me lost their lives due to a lack of medical personnel. I would like to be able to provide the families and patients with the help they need, and to feel that I can help people so that they don't go through the same thing. Being a doctor entails the biggest responsibility, because you have the health of people in your hands. For me being a doctor is more than just the title, it's feeling useful in society to help thousands of people, and to offer them my knowledge and support. It is a dream with a lot of dedication and patience, and I will achieve it very soon. The world is in the hands of those who have the courage to dream and risk living their dreams.

Rachely Castro is a student at Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Best Engineer

In a few sentences I will describe my goals and ambitions. First of all, my goal is to become a great civil engineer in the world. To become a great engineer, I must finish my secondary school. To finish my school, I must succeed in the baccalaureate exam. I would like to go to the faculty of civil engineering. To achieve this dream, I need to study hard and do a lot of math calculations.

It's Never Too Late

Second, my ambition is to be among the best students in the civil engineering faculty and among the best engineers in the world. I would like to work on the reconstruction of my country. It is one of my biggest dreams and ambitions. These are my most sincere feelings about my goals and ambitions.

Samuel attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

My Goals

One of my goals is to get a better job. I am already working on becoming a home health aide. This takes me to another goal which is buying a car.

Next, I want to buy a new house. I like the house I'm living in right now, but I want a change. I want a 3 bedroom and 2-bathroom house to live in with my family.

Also, I want to learn how to speak better English. Village Academy is helping a lot. Learning English will help make my life easier.

Finally, I want to bring my mom to America. I also want to be able to send food to help Haiti.

Marie M. Dumas is a student in the Village Readers Family Education program.

My Greatest Ambition

There are plenty of things we must face and deal with. Planification is mandatory to achieve our precious desires. Since I was little, I always said that I wanted to be a dentist. In Colombia I was studying to be a dentist, but my own decision was that I wanted to come to the United States to learn their language and the best work.

My goals and ambitions are to search for stability in this country, learn to speak English perfectly and start studying to become a dental assistant, so that I can work and be able to pay for my dentistry degree.

I want to achieve it and I will not rest until I do it, even if it takes me time and a lot of work, careful and patiently, because hard work always pays off. My specific destination is clear, to be successful. It's so meaningful for me to be successful that it urges me to keep moving forward. Starting from scratch will always be hard and even more so in another country because of its culture, traditions, language and so on, but it does not mean that it is impossible. That is why I will only think that nothing is impossible with perseverance and responsibility.

I see myself as a great dentist with a clinic in the United States and Colombia, building an empire and being able to help my entire family financially and learn more about my profession and work every day.

- *Anonymous Author.*

My Goals and Ambitions

Everyone has goals and ambitions in life. When you want to achieve something positive in your life and be successful, you must focus on your goals and ambitions. That is why in the following paragraphs I am going to talk about goals and ambitions.

In Haiti, when I finished high school I studied Economic Science. After finishing my studies, I opened my own business that was doing well. I believe in the future my business will grow to be even more successful. It is my dream. But unfortunately, the political problems in my country forced me to move to the United States. Regardless, my ambitions have not changed. The same dream stays with me.

For now, I am learning English at Atlantic Technical College. After finishing my English course, I want to study to become a nurse, have a decent job, borrow money from the bank to buy a house, and live with my family.

In the future I would like to build my own business. That's why I believe in myself. My determination keeps me strong to achieve my goals and ambitions.

Guerline Jeudy was born in Haiti (Gonaives). She has lived in the

USA since August 2022. She attends the ESOL High Intermediate Class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College Ashe Campus in Florida.

The Adventure of My Life

My name is Thalia Lozano. I am a young woman with an adventurous heart. I am from Colombia. I love to travel, I love animals, I love to watch the sunset, and all the simple things in life. I grew up in a small town, with a childhood that I generally don't talk about. That life was a source of inspiration for me to know, clearly, I wanted something more than just a simple life.

In Colombia, I achieved many things; I graduated in social communication and journalism from one of the best universities in the country. I have two diplomas in television presentation. In addition, I worked in an entertainment station, I was a model, I owned two clothing stores, and I worked for the Government.

I started writing the new chapter of my life when I moved to the United States. A chapter full of adventures, fears, uncertainty, sadness, and great challenges, but also many joys and opportunities for self-improvement. Fortunately, my aunt and my cousins live in the US and they welcomed me with open arms when I arrived.

In this chapter of my life, I want to go to school, learn digital marketing, have my own company, travel the world, have my own family, and live in a big house at the sea. I am already going to school to improve my English. I am taking online courses, and I am studying about digital marketing.

Although, I left behind my parents, my brothers, my puppy, my friends, and everything I built in Colombia, I can say that I am beginning to live my best version now. My family here, continues to help and support me on my new path. I am getting used to the challenges, the tears are slowly disappearing, and the sun is shining again in my life. I guess this is the natural process of change.

In such a short time, this country has taught me that I am capable of many things that I was not aware of before. Some days,

it is difficult to have the same motivation, but I have learned to discipline myself and to focus on my goals and dreams. Now, I see my days as a new opportunity to grow, to learn, to undertake new challenges, and to live the life I have always imagined for myself.

Thalia is a student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Niloofar Khalili-Bickel.

USA: Our Dreams and Goals I Want to Achieve

My name is Tan Nguyen. A husband, wife and four sons came to the USA on September 11, 1990, as part of H.O. program (H.O. is Humanitarian Operation) after Vietnam war ended. As an immigrant family, we carry our dreams and goals we want to achieve with three reasons: economic, education and freedom.

Jobs: America is the nation advanced in science and technology. So, it is open and welcomes all people; all immigrants come here. A thousand jobs were waiting for you and me and everyone else. We, my wife and I, have each had a regular 40-hour job and extra two days cleaning up hotels on the beach Saturday and Sunday. I have had over ten different jobs such as school bus driver for 10 years, and Tan Nguyen lawn services for 6 years. I have had these part time jobs: assistant cook for Dunkin Donuts, security officer, Goodwill retail store, front end loader, Crane operator help; all jobs I have had so that we can pay off the house mortgage.

We think the most about education for all our sons because, as we know, this country is number ONE in education. We're focused on work to support our kids to keep going to school and don't talk too much, but they always look at their Daddy and Mommy. We're motivated and lever that urges them to get an education, and then they finish college, get diplomas. They have a good job, a good family, a nice house, and paid-off student loans. They also gave us seven grandkids. We're so happy and the bottom line is that we can say that we're successful with our dreams and goals.

We have the third reason which is Freedom. I'm Vietnamese; I was an officer in South Government beside American soldiers who came to help us, but the Vietnam War ended. The South lost, and we became criminals. To be exonerated, we had to pay with over

4 years in the communist jails. Some of us died from hard work, lack of food, or severe weather. We were always dreaming how we would have the air of freedom. We also remember 1977, 1978, and 1979 when a million people from the South escaped by boat to the Philippines, Singapore, Indonesia, and Malaysia walking to Cambodia and Thailand. According to United Nations High Commissioner, it is estimated that between 10 to 15 thousand Vietnamese who were crossing the Pacific Ocean died. That was a big reason to think about dreams and wish to set foot and live in this Freedom Nation America.

As an old student like me at Clearview Adult Education Center, I'm so happy if someone asks me: "Hey, Mr. Tan, what are your dreams and goals that you want to achieve in USA?" I can answer: USA is not a heaven on Earth, USA is not dollar machines printing money, but America always welcomes you; all immigrants can come to work, to have an economic opportunity, education and have the air of freedom.

Tan Nguyen is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

I Believe I Can Do It

My name is Junior Obregon. I am from Nicaragua. I am 21 years old. My desire is to get ahead in my life through my goals and ambitions. I will focus and find the ways to achieve them.

One of my main goals is to be able to speak English. Having this language skill will help me get better jobs and higher pay. This is one way to seize the opportunity available to me in this country to progress and have a good future. I want to be a financial accountant and also a great cook. My aim is to give all of my effort to achieve it. Therefore, I will pursue my dreams until I reach them.

My ambition is to be one of the best chefs in Key West because I really like cooking. So, I need to be a legal resident and citizen in America. One day, I want to own a house and have a beautiful family.

The key to achieving my dreams is to pursue the pathways that

will lead me to get there. I need to be fluent in English, be career ready, find resources from people and centers that provide services that can assist me get closer to my goals and ambitions. So, I must ignore the mental barriers and achieve my goals. Breaking down these mental barriers is hard work. I must not be doubtful. This will affect my faith and discipline. I believe I can do it, I will.

Junior attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Patience, Planning, and Hard Work

My goals and ambitions are very important to me because they help me build myself. It's also very important to have patience, because sometimes it feels like you might not be successful in the future, but you should never give up when you feel like this. Many times, people try to rush in life, but that's not the right thing to do. I think being impatient is the reason most people fail. The best thing is to do things one step at a time and not give up.

Sometimes life feels difficult because there are so many things you must deal with. Planning is the most important thing to do if you want to achieve your goals. Three years ago, my husband and I planned to open a clinic in Haiti. We sent money and equipment to Haiti for years. This year, we were able to finally make our goal a reality.

If I work hard and be patient, I know I can do the things I put my mind to. I will never stop dreaming, so I will do my best to realize some of them. I am the person I am today because of my goals, ambitions, and dreams.

Viviane Petit Frere is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Goals and Ambitions

Like almost all Cubanos, coming to the United States was always a dream of mine. My life in Cuba was beautiful, with family always around, people in the streets, and always singing

and dancing. I didn't know what life would be like in the United States, but I knew there was no future living in Cuba. Although I would have to set my goals first, I would still be able to achieve everything I had dreamed of if I could get here. So, finally, I arrived in this beautiful country in 2019. I knew that my life would change, that it would be the beginning of a new stage.

I had difficult beginnings like every migrant, sorrowful days where I missed my family, and moments of frustration where I thought it would be almost impossible because of my situation. Still, as we all know, bad times are only moments, so I decided to focus only on the positive and set my goals.

Among my goals, the most important were studying and having a career. Although I did not know what I wanted to do, I knew I needed to improve. Therefore, I plan to continue my studies at the college when I finish ESOL. In addition, I completed my real estate course and passed the state exam, and I will now have a career in real estate.

Another important goal was to work hard. Saving my money and helping my family come to the country of freedom was another goal: to have them here with me, where they could have a dignified life. Another of my goals to achieve was to have my own house, a big house, the house of my dreams (in the sea), and to create a beautiful family where we meet on Sundays for dinner. This also included having the right man by my side, who always supported me and had the same expectations.

Although I am still working on my goals, I feel proud to have achieved a large part. When I got my papers, I was reaching part of my plans. Among them, purchasing my car was one of my greatest needs. I am close to having my family with me, and they will be so happy to be able to reach the country of opportunities and to be able to help me with everything I need. Every sacrifice has its benefits, because after having worked so hard and saved as much money as possible, I will finally be able to buy the house of my dreams with my boyfriend.

Yaimet Rodriguez Aloma is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Ready For The Change

At just 19 years old, today, I would like to share my experience in this short journey of my life. It is about how only a small decision can take me to a totally different world and outside the context of life that it usually takes a few seconds before taking a final step.

Since I was little, I wanted to be a musician. My love for music led me to my studies at the art school in my country, Cuba. I enjoy playing the saxophone. My family, especially my mom has been my main support.

However, things began to change. I had to give up my first goal and settled for my second one to major in biology and the environment. I spent several years at school studying to be a biologist. Well, that was not it, days before taking the step that my professional life would decide, I left everything behind and started a new future, outside my country, and far from my family.

Nevertheless, wherever I may be, I aim to fulfill each of my dreams and give my all so that they come true. Having my mother around again is so helpful because she is very supportive of me. Biology and veterinary medicine will remain my most desired goal.

Yaiselyn attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Friends

I think that the time we spend with each friend is what makes each friend so important. Friendships are built from bits—little pieces of time that one experiences with each person.

Maybe these are made of shared silences or a lot of sympathy that has no explanation. Today there are also many friendships made only from emails, our virtual friendships that make us laugh, think, reflect...

Time with friends is never a waste of time. It is time earned, taken advantage of, lived. There are memories for a moment, for

a lifetime.

Fanny Sanchez is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas and the Hispanic Outreach Center in Clearwater. Her teacher is Robert Baum.

Can Money Buy Time?

Around the world, there are a lot of cultures and lifestyles. In every country the people have a different ideology to live by. Sometimes, it depends on the country's economic system. For example, the U.S. is known as the most powerful country across the world, which has the highest production levels and money flow. The people who are there, they are always working, making money to spend. That's the cycle. That's the system. The life system is based on work and consumption. Is that the most appropriate? Is that the quality of life that you want?

It's not like this everywhere. There are some countries that work differently, such as France for example. In France they are in a hurry to live their lives. Clearly, there is a different ideology that puts personal life before work. In fact, the people prefer to work less, maybe earn less money, but have more free time for themselves. Time that you could spend traveling, in your own business, or just sharing with your families.

The question that we have to ask ourselves is, what do we prefer? Money or Time? That's a difficult question, right? Personally, I'm young, I'm a Millennial. Currently, the Millennial Generation have a different perspective on life. We have grown with the thought that you only live once, so do what you like, travel, meet new people, laugh, enjoy and live. Of course, there are many people who prefer economic stability over freedom for obligation or decision because unfortunately, today jobs have become a way to survive and not something to enjoy. Life is running fast and, in the end, I think it's better to have the experiences, moments and memories than money.

Honestly, I would like to be in a place where society knows that personal life is more important than complying with certain hours per week. But wait, this doesn't mean that life is going to be easy. You still have to get a job, you have to study if you want

to be competitive, you have to pay bills. Life in that society is also expensive and maybe the system is the same, but the essence is what changes.

After living in France for two and a half years, I got to understand a little bit about how their daily lives work. Now, one of my goals is to continue my studies, and then find a nice job with a good salary that allows me to get home early and still have energy to enjoy my free time. Perhaps I could start my own business to depend only on myself. I don't know, the future is uncertain so we will see. In the meantime, let's enjoy today because we don't know what will happen tomorrow.

Juan Camilo Tamayo is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. His teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Workng Hard to Learn to Read

My goal is to read better to improve my life. Early in my life I wasn't taught to read well. Because of that, I didn't finish school, and I couldn't enroll in the Army.

Learning to read will make me feel better. I will be independent from people reading for me. To improve my reading, I enrolled in school at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center. I met Mrs. Quethlyn White and Mrs. Nancy Fox. They worked hard to teach me to read books, math, writing, and spelling. In addition, they introduced me to three volunteers Nadine Vaught, Mrs. Ann Randal, and Sharon Bond. The tutors help me read better, and they work with me one on one.

These tutors followed me to Lakewood Community School when Tomlinson Adult Learning Center closed. Also at Lakewood Community School, Principal Godfrey Watson makes sure the teachers have what they need to teach the students in class. For example, a program called IXL on the computer helps the students with math, reading, spelling, and English. Workbooks and novels help us improve our reading skills too.

For the future, I will keep working hard with my tutors to con-

It's Never Too Late

tinue my education. I will feel better to be able to read my own mail. I will feel happy and joyful to have accomplished my goal.

Deborah Wells is a student in programs at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Elisabeth Nevins.

My Favorite Place

Happiness is an Inside Job

At the beginning of each new year, people usually set new goals so why not set new challenges that lead us to fulfil our desires and dreams? I started 2023 with my hands and heart full, my faith intact, and with great expectation of what is to come.

I thank God every day for family! My husband Pablo has been with me for so many years, my children, sons-in-law, and my dear grandchildren – I love them dearly. I am thankful for my lifelong friends and the new friends that I am making on this new path, with whom I share the change that moving to a new country represents in mature adulthood. With them I experience all the fears, uncertainties, often disappointments, but also all the hopes.

I have been in United States for two and half years. I lived in Panama for three years, but my beautiful country where I was born and lived most of my life is Ecuador. My son and his family still live there, so my heart is divided with a deep feeling because I miss there and I miss here.

However, each day brings new opportunities. Happiness is an inside job! I strive to be the best I can be and inspire others to be their best today.

I take care of my heart more than anything else and I always try to make it be my favorite place!

Maria Abad is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Mirador (The Looker)

This is not just my favorite place. This is the place that saw us all grow up in the family: uncles, cousins, nephews. Our memories, our joys and I must say our sadness are part of each one of

It's Never Too Late

us in this place as well. It is where we mourn our absent relatives. We made history as a family here. This place should have as its name 'home' not only the Mirador de Cordoba.

There is something about this magical place. It is actually a small farm in Cordoba (Quindio Colombia). It was given this name because if you look through the door of the house on this farm, you can see the whole town at the bottom, the houses, the church, and the center.

The most beautiful thing about this place is those who inhabit this house. A couple of old people, my grandparents. They would give their lives to be in this house. Waking up to the sound of nature, the crowing of roosters, and that rich smell of freshly brewed coffee on a firewood stove. The sound of the mill because my grandmother makes arepas with her beautiful hands. That is the best awakening of all.

There are many more. Listening to the radio with boleros. Then grandmother in her morning chat with my grandfather. Being able to all sit down at the table to have breakfast together as a family with my cousins and uncles and even neighbors who come to greet them because as in any good Colombian house where one eats everyone eats. So, there is always more food. My grandparents serve everyone as if they were part of the family.

After everyone has eaten, it is time to rest, the grandparents sleep while the rest of us stay in the dining room talking about our lives: what has happened in the time we have been absent from the farm, how our studies are going, and life in general. It is also a moment to remember those who are no longer with us. It is nice to have these moments with the family because we spend a large part of our lives there with so many nephews, uncles, children, and brothers. So, this is why my favorite place which gives me so many beautiful moments is the Mirador of Cordoba.

*Sarah Arumendi attends Monroe County Adult Education Center.
Her teacher is Rodziah Josephson.*

Going to The Coast

My favorite place is the coast.

I was born and raised near the sea.

The sea breeze and the sound of waves were always by my side.

When I am sad, it gives me peace of mind.

When my heart is tired, it cheers me up.

Even when I grew up and started living in the city, I always went to see the sea every time something happened.

Luckily, I live within easy reach of the coast now.

It's been 4 years since I came to America from Japan.

I often get confused by the difference in language and the difference in lifestyle

But the sea breeze and the sound of the waves are the same.

The sea is my favorite sanctuary.

Sachiko Bryant is a student at Literacy services of Indian River County and participates in the Conversation Club with tutor Michael Godown.

I Love New York

Visiting New York City has been my dream for as long as I can remember. Last year, in September, my best friend and I decided to go sightseeing in one of the most popular cities in all the world, New York City.

When we landed, we used public transportation but mostly we walked on foot to absorb the atmosphere of the city. We had a hotel on 8th Avenue, a 12-minute walk to Times Square and that was the beginning of our journey. Everything looked amazing including the gigantic buildings, the neon lights that illuminated the streets, the traffic, and the noise. Everywhere was crowded and people were rushing somewhere.

On the first day we took the subway to Brooklyn to see Manhattan from a unique perspective, and then we went back over the Brooklyn Bridge. The vista was breathtaking. On our walk back we stopped in Little Italy and Chinatown, which really felt like China.

The next day we went to Central Park specifically to walk around in the beautiful weather and take a lot of pictures. Most important for us was visiting Strawberry Fields, the area dedicated to John Lennon. We felt joyful walking and talking in this green, marvelous place in the middle of this city.

In the evening we attended a Michael Jackson musical on Broadway. We have always loved Michael Jackson and The Jackson 5. The musical reminded me of those old, favorite songs and because we were seeing it on Broadway it felt special, and we were so proud to be there.

The Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island is absolutely a must see in NY city. We took the ferry there and again enjoyed the magnificent view. The Statue of Liberty turned out to be smaller than I expected but the National Immigration Museum has an extraordinary collection of our Polish heritage and was remarkable to us. We found Polish money from 1922, pictures of Polish emigrants and a Polish menu with kielbasa and bread. It was the first step to achieve the American dream for a lot of people from all over the world. My Mom was adopted during WWII, because, most likely, both of her parents died in a concentration camp. I'll never find out if any of my ancestors tried to start a journey in this free country with all this opportunity. I wonder if some of my relatives still live in New York City.

Then, we went to MOMA, the Museum of Modern Art, the first museum devoted to the modern era with a lot of collections of modern and contemporary art from all over the world.

We went to The Edge, the highest outdoor sky platform on the 100th floor, 50 feet higher than the Empire State Building. It was so extremely high, and the panoramic view was spectacular. It helped me overcome my fear of heights. It was a completely new way of looking at the city for me and I fell in love with the experience.

My friend and I have both travelled a lot in Europe, but we promised each other to visit other wonderful places in the USA together. I'll never forget this journey with my best friend, Grace, and I am incredibly grateful to her that we had an opportunity to spend this amazing time together.

Anna Cerowska is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Kate Seipp.

Right Place, Right Time

At church several months ago, the priest said, "You think you have a plan but it is not your plan. Our decisions confirm that God puts you in the right place at the right time." Fortunately, I have witnessed that affirmation.

I grew up in Barquisimeto, known in Venezuela as the twilight city. In those moments when I took in the sunset or sunrise, I thought it was my favorite place in the whole world. My father encouraged me to explore. His advice: "First you have to know your home country and then you can visit the world." So, I traveled to many cities. Each time I saw the beach with sand as white as clouds and water with different shades of blue, I knew I was in the right place at the right time.

My first trip outside my country was to USA. How excited I was seeing the Miami lights as the plane landed. The city was full of color and life. I was thankful for being there. Miami became my favorite place. I was in the right place at the right time.

I studied in Oxford, England for six months. When I arrived, I opened the window of the red bus to see the image of a postcard. We were passing through an old stone bridge and next to the road a student in her black gown was riding the bicycle. Definitely, in that moment, Oxford became my favorite. Right place, right time.

When I saw the Eiffel Tower in Paris, my heartbeat accelerated. It was the same feeling I had visiting New York City. Just watching people go by is a spectacle worth appreciating. Looking at Christmas decorations on Fifth Avenue, I saw my husband's eyes full of gratitude to be there. It was the same expression he

had when arriving in Paris for our honeymoon. In those moments, I found new favorite places. Again, right place at the right time.

In 2020, I visited my cousin in Florida. After a few days, the pandemic started. That changed the world, more for some than others. My home country closed. I couldn't return. Days became weeks and weeks became months. After eight months, we made the most difficult decision to start over, even though I was two years away from retiring.

We moved to Palm Harbor, in the Tampa Bay area. From St. Pete to Clearwater's Pier 60, the area is filled with energy where you can enjoy magnificent views. The food is delicious in Tarpon Springs and downtown Dunedin is charming. The best part are the twilights like my home city. When I see sunrises and sunsets, I think, "What more can I ask for?"

Although my plan changed, I've definitely found my new favorite place. I am in the right place at the right time.

Maria Alejandrina Gimenez has a Master's degree in human resources. Maria has been working with volunteer Deborah Lawson in the Palm Harbor Library's Literacy Program for almost one year.

Looking for a Warmer Place to Live

My grandfather, Henry W. Gowman, was born in Ontario, Canada. The small town called Leamington was a beautiful place but very cold for him.

When he grew up, he moved to the USA looking for another place to live, in a warmer climate.

He started working as a traveling salesman, and he traveled to many places including Mexico. One day he came to a beautiful place, - a small town called Chapala. There is a big lake called by the same name, Chapala Lake.

"A wonderful place, with fresh air and nice weather," he was thinking as he was looking at everything.

Later he met a beautiful girl there, -"The sunshine of his life" as he used to call her.

Sometime later, when he was on a work trip, he found out that the first baby was ready to be born; it happened when he was out of town.

The baby was born alive and healthy, but the baby died because of mishandling by the "comadrona" - lady who used to help with birthing at that time at some places in Mexico.

Being in pain and angry, my grandfather decided to return to the USA where the family lived for some time in California and Florida.

Sometime later little Alice was born (my mom), and after her, two more kids joined the family.

When the time passed, and the kids grew up, they usually went to Chapala for vacations, especially in the summer. It was the best vacation in the best place.

And it was right there, the same place, the same town where Alice met the man who later became her husband, - Guillermo (my dad).

Now here I am, like my grandpa was, looking for a very nice and warm place to live.

Cecilia S. Gowman is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Happy and Safe

If I were to talk about a tangible place, the place where I have had more laughs and happy moments in all my life, the place where my family and I have shared unforgettable moments from the good to the bad, that beautiful and cozy place where I feel loved, where there are those people who will always support me, that place most definitely would be my home. However, if I were to talk about an intangible place where I have always felt safe,

where I feel nothing can hurt me, where I can laugh, cry or get angry about anything and no one is going to judge me no matter what, that place would definitely be the books or the fictitious places within which I have been created and thrived, the place where I can escape from reality and all its problems.

There are thousands of opinions about books and everything they represent, but people often do not know all the wonderful and amazing places books can offer us, all the places you can go with the power of your imagination, or all the things you can learn in a matter of hours. It is a world where everything can potentially change for better or worse in only a page because one should never underestimate the power of the pen nor the magical significance of words.

Camila Guerire is currently studying in the Adult ESOL Program at Miami Dade College and her instructor is Robert Kelso.

Dreams Are Worth Having

The most beautiful place for me is the Blue Ridge Mountains, the outer eastern and highest mountain range in the Appalachian chain in the USA. I have been dreaming about this place since the first time I saw the movie, "The Last of the Mohicans." Since then, I have watched the film dozens of times enjoying the beautiful views. I never lost hope because I knew that one day I would see this place. Last year, when I came to Tampa, I made my first trip to Asheville to see the place I had been dreaming about for years. The feelings that accompanied me are hard to describe; fascination with this place and tears of happiness.

When I was standing at the top and I saw this endless panorama of the mountains, I could stay there and watch forever. When you look at beauty like that, your brain stops thinking and your mouth automatically opens to breathe that mountain air. The dazzling view of the Blue Ridge Mountains impresses me every time I go back there. Since the first time I have visited these mountains, I love them even more. Since then I have visited the mountains four times, and I will go back there every chance I get. Every time I am there I discover more new places that I did not even know existed. Green mountain peaks, amazing river valleys and the wild nature make this my sanctuary where I feel so happy. The

color of the trees changes with the seasons. In autumn the leaves turn different shades of red, and the setting sun gives a dazzling sight. This is a place where I could stay or the rest of my life.

Nikola Kraszewska is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Nikola's teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My happy Childhood Place

I would like to tell you about my favorite place. It has a special place in my heart. It is my parent's house. My childhood was spent in a small village away from the hustle and bustle of the city. Not far from the house there was a lake and the river that fed it. In the hot summer we swam in this lake and went fishing. In the winter, we skated, sleighed, played snowballs and made snowmen. There are many fields around our village where I could observe how the sowing work is going on, how the wheat is earing and how the harvesting is organized at the end of the summer. Even as a child, I realized how much work you need to invest in order to have bread on our tables. My childhood is full of memories and impressions about the countryside and farm work.

I take this opportunity to express my gratitude to my parents for a happy childhood, for their love and support. In any life situation, no matter how difficult it is, the love of my parents gives me strength to move forward.

Childhood is the foundation upon which the rest of a person's life is built. It is in childhood that we learn to enjoy the simple things that money can't buy. In childhood we are sincere and trusting. Keeping a piece of yourself from childhood in your soul will make this world a little better.

I really miss my parent's house, and I hope I can go there with my kids and introduce them to the place where their mom grew up.

Natallia Kutsayev is an ESOL student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Favorite Place

I was born in a coastal city in Colombia called Santa Marta. Santa Marta has unforgettable landscapes in which the green foliage, blue sea, yellow sun, and sand make it beautiful. If you asked me which is my favorite place, I would tell you that it is the beach. I love going to the beach. Since I was born my dad taught me to respect and love the sea. The best days of my childhood were at sea. I have accumulated many memories and experiences at sea. When I was a child, we used to go to the beach every weekend. My sister and I learned to swim in the sea. We enjoyed swimming with my dad and watching the fish under the sea. We liked to watch the sunrise and sunset with my parents and at night I liked to see the stars with my dad. Another very nice memory was the first trip I took with my husband when we were dating. It was very comforting to eat and sleep on the seashore.

You can have different sensations being there. Walking on the wet sand, seeing the sea, and feeling the soft wind transmit a lot of tranquility. There's nothing more peaceful than the sound of the sea. As the waves lap against the shores, they create the rhythm to calm your mind and your heart. See the colors of the sunset, let the sun hit your face, you can forget about absolutely everything.

Martha Lucia Leon is an ESOL student at ACE Adult Community Education. Her teacher is Christina Epps.

The Bahamas

My favorite place is a Bahamas vacation. It is the time when my husband and I took a cruise to the Bahamas. We went through different types of cities such as Freeport and Nassau.

I enjoyed seeing the view, going to little shops, and looking at all the views Bahamas had to offer. The Bahamas offered a few amazing attractions and events while we were there. We did family activities such as boating rides and fishing. The water is so crystal clear that it is so easy to spot the fish. It was fun seeing the dolphins and taking tours around a few cities. The food we had was different in almost every city.

These are the main reasons why I love the Bahamas so much. That's where I would like to live the rest of my life on this Earth.

Clairemanie Lormond Jean Baptiste is a student at Village Readers Family Education. Clairemanie's teacher is Zach El Ghatit.

Kwai River

About 40 million people have visited Thailand every year before Covid-19 pandemic. Everyone finds something amazing for himself/herself. The Kwai River has become my most favorite place because it is magical. It is located in the province of Konchanaburi on the west of Thailand and flows through the dense jungle. The local hills are covered with a variety of tropical greenery and alternate with multitiered waterfalls. This is my favorite place because I have wonderful memories and unforgettable, beautiful views in my mind. Also, I experienced unbelievable and amazing emotions.

First of all, I experienced extraordinary emotions. To enjoy the beauty of the river, we rented a floating house. It was perfect and unusual living on the water. The sound of the river at night calmed my nervous system and I slept like a baby. Surprisingly, I became part of nature, and all my worries and problems were carried away by the river. There I felt completely free. My heartbeat matched nature's heartbeat.

Furthermore, the Kwai River has impressed me with its beauty. The landscape changes every hour. The sunset is especially beautiful when the sun goes behind the hills. When it highlights the clouds and everything around them with all sorts of colors, it creates a fabulous picture. In contrast, the sunrise is mystique. Everything around is hidden by fog rising from the water. I felt like being in a cloud.

Moreover, I have unforgettable memories. I rafted for the first time in my life. What an adventure! Our raft was tied to the boat. We had put on life jackets and after twenty minutes rafting, we jumped into the water. The current of the river carried me back to our hotel. At that moment I was overwhelmed with childish joy, happiness, and adrenaline. It seemed as if I was playing a game and the water was my partner. Sometimes I felt like flowers

carried by water. I completely let myself in mother nature's arms. What a profound peaceful moment!

As you can see, the Kwai River is a magic place. That is why I fell in love with it, and I will keep it in my heart forever. Please, go for it! You will never regret it.

Antonina Lynova is an ESOL student at Clearview Adult Education Center, and her teacher is Yllka Bejo.

My Favorite Place

Wonderful places exist all over the world. Quiet or boisterous is not important as long as it is our place.

My favorite place is in a small town in the middle of the mountains in my country. This place is amazing! There is a lot of vegetation and many trails where I can walk and relax and be in contact with nature.

Every time that I go to this place, I feel very happy, relaxed, and all the pain disappears. I have a little house in this place, and I also have a hammock, my bed in the air. When I lie in my hammock, I see the view to the mountains as if they are right next to me. This moment is magical. I feel like I am in the sky and the sensation is very peaceful.

Also, in my favorite place there are many animals such as cows, horses, birds, chickens, and vegetables. Everything we eat is organic because it is planted on my patio.

In this place I feel "me." I do not need fancy shoes for walking, or fancy pants, or a sweater, because the weather is wonderful, and there are no social conventions.

Every morning, I wake up listening to the sound of nature. I love to hear the river next to my house. I think that is a God gift.

My favorite Place has little things, no more is necessary... only the indispensable.

The people in this place are very simple, good, and real friends. The joy of one is the joy of all and the sadness one is the sadness of all.

When I go to this place and it is time to leave, my heart breaks because I have to return to my reality. A reality where that peace that exists in my favorite place is not breathed.

I hope in the not-too-distant future to live in my favorite place again.

Suyapa Marisol Ponce is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is supposed to be where someone feels good, protected, and out of danger. Of all the places in the world, my bedroom is my favorite, I like it because when I'm in there I feel calm and happy.

I can say I create my own world. When I take a break from what's going on in my life, I stay in my bedroom and try to talk to myself and play music that makes me feel connected and relaxed, so I'm sure this is the place I choose to be my favorite. I really love my bedroom; I will not change it for anything. That's my favorite place.

- Anonymous Author.

A Winter Forest

I was born and spent most of my life in Russia, the European country where winter runs for five months. In some regions, the temperature drops to -40°C (-40°F). However, this doesn't happen often. Usually, the winter temperatures are around -15°C (5°F). Residents of my native country have adapted to life in these cold natural conditions. They enjoy winter sports, ice fishing and swimming in cold water.

I loved winter, but I did not like extreme sports. I used to ski in the winter forest. How beautiful the winter forest looks, and how good it is for a walk! In winter, the forest turns into a magical place. This is the place where you come in search of inspiration and peace of mind. A thick carpet of white snow covers everything around. Branches of tall evergreen fir-trees are wrapped by small piles of snow that are similar to real caps. The winter sun shines brightly but it does not warm. The sky is blue and clear. The snow glitters in the sun, shimmering and playing in the sunshine with all the colors of the rainbow. It hurts to look at this luxury of nature. Frosty. Quiet. Silent in the forest. Only the snow is crunching and creaking under your skis, and you can

hear how the snow drifts are falling from the branches. My soul is singing and resting from everyday worries. After the forest walk you get an incredible charge of energy. Fueled by the power of nature, you know that you will soon return here again.

Now I am living in Florida where you can see only artificial snow. Sometimes I miss my relaxing walks in the winter forest, but I have replaced them with walks along the seashore.

Elena Ovsyannikova is an ESOL student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Jeff Kallan.

The Royal Palace in Mandalay

My favorite place is located in my hometown, Mandalay. It is the “Royal Palace” or “Mya Nann San Kyaw Shwe Nann Daw”. The last Burmese Kings lived in this palace. It has been restored many times and become one of the most enchanting places for foreigners and the most popular attractions to visit in Myanmar tours.

I went there with my school excursion group. I was very impressed by the historical architecture design. There are a lot of separated places with different names inside it. Around them is the Mandalay moat. When I was there, I was very excited to see the big palace and high wall. The Royal Palace was constructed by King Mindon when he chose Mandalay as the capital city. It took two years to build from 1857 to 1859. It encountered a tough time since it was built. The palace was renowned for its solid wall system. According to the history that I read, King Mindon and King Thibaw had live there, too.

There was also a watchtower inside the palace. I climbed up the watchtower for an hour. When I was at the top, I saw an amazing view of the whole Mandalay city. I also saw the sunset view there. It stunned me and I was breathless. That was a very beautiful experience. It is my most unforgettable moment.

Now, the Imperial Palace is completely under control and occupied by the Myanmar military. I hope the new government will pay attention to this palace because it was the primary symbol of Mandalay and a major tourist destination. This palace is my favorite place because of its beauty and I cherished it. I hope this place would continue to be a charming place. Perhaps someday it

will be the most attractive place in the world.

Ei Phyu is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. She attends the virtual English class. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

There's No Place Like Home

My favorite place. My favorite place has no permanent point on the map. There are a lot of wonderful places in the world such as urban architecture, inspiring natural scenic landscapes, and great historical sites. Although I love traveling and exploring new places, my favorite place is my home. Because this is the only place where I can get family support, a feeling of stability, and positive emotions.

First, my home is where my family supports me with an atmosphere of love, empowerment, and acceptance. We move a lot from place to place and one day my daughter asked me: "Mom, where is our home?" I answered that where we are all together is our home. It doesn't matter if it's a vacation rental, a hotel room, or the house where mail is delivered. Therefore, where my family is my home.

In addition, other places can't give me the feeling of stability that I receive at home. In a world full of stress, it is very important to have a place where you feel support and a solid foundation under your feet. Stability for me is a native language we speak at home regardless of the country where we live and a feeling of control over the home rules and everyday routines. At home, we have traditions helping us feel something permanent and unchanging. For example, we eat milk porridge every day for breakfast. Such habits add confidence to the future.

Being in a favorite place brings positive emotions. I charge my day with energy by making breakfast with my family and talking about the day's plans. There is no more peaceful and calm moment in the world than the moment when the children fall asleep and the whole house is immersed in bliss and sleep. I feel the happiest and most energetic to face the new day.

Summarizing the above, family support, the feeling of stability, and positive emotions make my home the best place for me. I

have traveled to thirty-three countries and found no place better than home.

Yuliya Popkova is originally from Russia. She moved to the USA in 2019 from Siberia with her family. Her goal is to get a US degree and the first step is to improve her English. Yuliya is a student at Literacy for Adults in Brevard. Her teacher is Terry Golestani.

Happy in Florida

My happy place is Florida, especially Sarasota. I love the warm weather, the beaches, the nature, and so much more. We have two months which are July and August when the temperatures grow to horrific highs of 100 degree F (40-42 degree C). The Spring is pleasant with nice weather, not too much rain and views of flowers blooming. The Winter is short which lasts about two to three months. It doesn't get too cold and there is just a small amount of snowfall, but there are occasions that the temperatures become way below 32 degrees F.

The worst season is the Fall. At the beginning during early September it is still nice weather. The temperature is nice and there are a lot of sunny days. When the time approaches October until as late as March, there is no sun, heavy dreadful rainstorms and unbearable coldness. The sun is always covered by dreary gray clouds which elicits the feel of a depressing time for all humanity. Ten years ago, my family and I decided to escape this dreariness and move to Boston. We loved the city of Boston, but we decided we had enough of the cold weather from the past and we needed to find our happy place with sunshine. The Boston cold was hard to deal with all the shoveling of snow and uncontrollable shivering from the outside.

It was about three years ago when we decided it's time to move to Florida. My husband's parents had been living here in Sarasota, so we were going to join them as residents of Sarasota also. When we arrived in Sarasota I felt that feeling right away that I am home now. I finally arrived at that place I have forever wanted to live. I love the warm weather, lots of sun, the endless white beaches, and last but not least the nature. I'm a floral designer, so I truly appreciate the vast trees, bushes, and flowers here in Florida. I'm happy to see the flowers, green grasses, and leaves all year long. I

am so happy to be surrounded daily by this nature and the animals that I never was experiencing with having the noticeable four seasons. I can deal with the humidity of the Summer because I know I will experience amazingly beautiful weather soon to come. I am happy stepping outside and ready for each day. I feel my life has changed to happiness since I have lived here in Sarasota. I feel in my heart that I'm home now.

Eva Schell-Sze'chenyi is a student at Suncoast Technical College. Her teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

My Favorite Place is You

I Want to start my story by saying that many people around the world have defined the two words "favorite place" as somewhere, or their place of origin, some country, perhaps their favorite restaurant or something as simple as their room.

A couple of months ago I also expected this. In the month of December, almost at the end of the year, many things happened that made me realize that sometimes a favorite place itself is not a place, but the person who makes you wherever you are. You sit calmly, something like if you were constantly touching the Stars.

Gladys Tamayo is a student with Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito.

My Safe Place

This name really belongs to that place.

Going to the beach is going to be my favorite plan always. At the beach, I can just relax, and I love to see the sunset and swim in the salty water. I love the way the sea can make me feel completely free; it is like everything else is gone and my overthinking disappears. It is just my soul, the waves, and the sound of birds without worries.

When I feel overwhelmed the only thing that I want to do is go to the beach because all the stress goes away. It is such a magical place. Related to this, one day I received the best advice. Someone once said, "when you are not feeling well, go to your safe

place.”

I think the beach will always be my favorite place, where I will go to have fun or to eliminate a troubled time. Apparently, the sea breeze has the power to take away and restore your mental health.

Oriana Urueta-Hurtado was born in Colombia (Cartagena) and has lived in the USA since December of 2021. She is a student in the CCR program at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus with her teacher Ms. F. Johnson.

My Favorite Place

I'm Aliz and I'm from México. I remember my first travel experience; it was with a friend. In that moment, she and I were studying tourism in the same university, so we decided to plan our first trip together. But it was not a good experience. We realized that we were very different from each other. She would prefer to take a taxi, while I'd rather walk around the city. Sometimes, she preferred to stay at the hotel, and I liked to enjoy every moment. She didn't like to take photos and I loved to take photos.

Time passed and I had the opportunity to visit many cities in Mexico. One day, I organized my first trip to Europe. I visited Spain, Belgium and France, and in that moment, I understood that traveling is my passion, and I don't have any words to describe the emotions that I feel when I visit and explore a new place. It is like a roller coaster in my life, and it doesn't matter if it is a big city or a small town.

The following year I continued my new adventure in Vienna, Germany and the Netherlands. It was my last trip as a single person. Then, the pandemic arrived in the world, and I had to stop my adventures for the moment. After that, I got married and I had to change my residence country — I had to leave my beautiful Mexico. Now, I'm living in Miami, Florida. Miami is wonderful and majestic, but I'm so far from my family, and I miss them so much.

One day, I was looking at some photos from my trips and I was

wondering, “What is my favorite place in the world that I have visited?” To tell the truth, I’m always thinking about traveling to my next adventure and I’m a crazy travel person. But it was just in that moment that I realized that my favorite place in the world is with my family. For me, no place in the world doesn’t compare with the feeling of being at home with the family.

Sometimes we don’t value the simple moments or things and we don’t realize how beautiful and important they are. For now, I can’t have a reunion with my family yet. It has been almost two years without seeing them. In this moment I don’t have an option, I just hope the day I see my parents, sisters and nephews again arrives soon. I have faith that I will come back to my favorite place called “Family.”

Alizbeth Yépez is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Robert Baum.

How Life in My Home Country Differs From Life in the U.S.

Seize the Moment

Seize the moment my teacher taught me that Monday morning, when the classroom was all alone and we were the only ones in it. It was 8:30 am, none of the other students had arrived at ESOL class and I was coming from working the night at the restaurant. The weird way we came up with that phrase was my attempt to communicate to her that I wanted to be productive, and she said it in an attempt to express my idea.

In the country that I come from, there are few opportunities to educate yourself, it is expensive to study in private institutions, and public institutions do not have classrooms in good condition, adequate bathrooms, enough seats for students, technology to use as a tool, or even teachers, since their pay is low and they must look for other jobs to eat. It is a difficult place to access education, or to stay in it since the conditions are precarious. In view of so many impediments, many do not complete their studies.

When I arrived in this country, I noticed the contrast: so many opportunities to learn and be able to learn, but I think what impressed me was not that, it was the students who took the opportunity to study for granted. I never told my teacher that morning that I was trying to say that I wanted to use my class time to do my best and study more, but she gave me the best possible phrase to give value to my words towards others: “Seize the time”, appreciate the small things and do something valuable, like learning. If you are looking for inspiration to motivate yourself, see the others in the class, we are trying to take this opportunity to be the best possible version of ourselves. We are trying to inspire others, overcoming our own barriers.

Daliana Cabello is a student at South Florida State College Adult Education. Her teacher is Denise Miriani.

A Subtle Difference... Immigrate – Emigrate

Throughout history, many families have made the decision to change their residence. It is not always to go to another subdivision or state in their country of origin. They may change their residence to a different country. All the questions to consider: Why? For what? What economic, social, and even emotional consequences does this decision bring? How does it feel? It is a decision often necessary. It is relevant to ask who we are when leaving our country and establishing a new country as our new residence. How does this change affect us?

The moment a person leaves their country of origin, they become an emigrant. One leaves their roots and leave their comfort zone in hope of improving their quality of life; and at the moment one arrives in a new country they become an immigrant. It seems like word game but in reality, it is much more than that. The subtlety of this change could also be very drastic, since one stops being a person at home to become a foreigner in a different part of the world, including the country where you came from.

Life changes the moment we make that decision to leave home. A huge learning process begins because everything now starts from scratch. You must learn to walk, eat, and speak all over again. You must know customs, rules, and laws. You must shed all the ways you have grown up with and take on new forms. Some people, depending on the country, and despite speaking the same language, must change the melody in their words

When one is away from their homeland, there is the opportunity to learn from the cultural diversity that found in their new destination. If the United States is your new residence, you can get to know the customs of many countries, seasonings, music, and that colloquial language that characterizes us Latinos. It is an enriching experience but, in my opinion, the price to pay for it is too high. You must get used to virtual birthdays, hugs from a distance and the nostalgia of dates that have a beautiful meaning in your life. You receive with joy the new members of the family and we send blessings and sadly dismiss those who leave this plane. Not to mention the terrible moment of pressing that red button to hang up the call.

Sometimes I think that we are not completely prepared when we make the decision. We can plan each step to take, investigate and define advantages and disadvantages, and prepare each action to take. But if we really want a change for the better in our lives, that is the hope, we must take the leap. The goal is to feel good, do good and at the end of the day, emigrating or immigrating makes us foreigners in the world... a very subtle way of seeing my nationality.

Danitza Fernandez Lares is a student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.

Life in U.S.A.

I moved here six months ago from Haiti. When I arrived, the first days were exceedingly difficult for me. I was extremely stressed. It was a new country, new things to learn, new laws, new rules, new life. I had to restart. Learning English was one of the big deals for me and I asked myself how I was going to do with that new language?

In addition to learning a new language, I had to learn the transit system. I never liked taking a bus, I always would get a bad feeling until now.

I must take the bus to go to school. When I get off the bus, I must run to take another one because I do not want to miss it. If I miss it, I will be waiting for thirty minutes to get another one and I need to take three buses.

I am starting to feel more comfortable with the new system and I get less stressed than before. Now I want to study for my career because I want to make money to take care of myself because life in the USA is not easier without money and I used to work in my country.

Now I am feeling a little bit more comfortable about living in the USA.

Martline Seymour is on level six with Ms. Fayne Johnson at Atlantic

How Life in My Home Country Differs From Life in the U.S.

Technical College in Florida. She comes to school every day because she wants to improve her English and succeed in her career as a nurse in the United States.

Someone I Admire

The Person I Admire: My Husband

The person that I admire is Miguel Montero, my husband. One of the reasons why I admire him is that he never gives up no matter what the situation; he always seeks to find a solution. Of course, there are other reasons I will also tell you about. One of his first challenges was the death of his mother. He was 17, facing the situation alone and running a home at his young age. He took on great responsibilities and he never gave up. In fact, he finished his studies and found a good job.

He is also an excellent father and wonderful husband, he always takes care of his family, he loves challenges. With his motivation, I started taking ESOL classes. He always tells me you should not be afraid of anything, everything in life contains goals and challenges. When he first came to the U.S., he arrived alone without knowing anyone, and without knowing English. In his first few months here, he got a good job, took English classes and brought us to live with him to build a new life. As he often says, "You have to be brave and lose your fears."

I do not regret moving here with him. He is my motivation and my favorite hero; he is a living example that everything in this life is achievable with faith and courage. He taught me that "no" is not a reason to give up but rather what drives you to find a "yes."

Tatiana Aleman is from Puerto Rico. She is a student in Ms. Miriani's ESOL class at South Florida State College.

I Admire My Mom

I admire my mom. This is why I admire my mom. My mom was a great mom because she's the person who cares about children, family and other people too. She liked to clean and she prepared the food for our family. She liked to help and to volunteer too.

I admire my mom because she did a good job raising me and

my siblings. For example, she needed to take care of her family and she was very generous to her neighbors too. She liked people in the world. When someone needed help she cared enough to give help. I love my mom very, very much. I remember before my mom died, there was a neighbor's family who didn't have any money to pay the school for children. She paid for them. She loved me the most out of my siblings. When she came home from work, she stopped by the store to buy something for me. When she got home, she secretly gave me treats like a cup of fried plantains.

My mom did a good job and was a good mother. When I was sad, she approached me to give me love. She gave me the middle name Maud. I remember the first time I went to Haiti to see her, she told me "Maud, next time you come back, see your Mom because I will die soon." In closing, my mom was great and a hard working woman. She worked very hard and was very good at her work. She was very caring with her family, her neighbor's, her friend's and other people.

Marie Ambrosie is a student at the Village Readers Family Education program.

He Didn't Have a Common Life

This will sound silly but I admire my father. He didn't have a common life when he was younger. My father did everything he wanted to do and met the people he didn't ever imagine meeting.

He worked for the government and, thanks to that, he met very important celebrities in my country. He learned to do everything and resolve all the problems of his life with the most positive attitude. His great personality, his incredible luck, and his self-confidence made him even bigger than the sun. That made him meet and make friends with Luis Miguel, a famous Mexican singer and the heavy metal group Metalica.

Thanks to his incredible luck and self-confidence, he entered the most famous and luxurious places such as the original government chamber in Mexico City.

Now, finally, I live with him, and he is a great worker, but his

It's Never Too Late

past life experiences are awesome.

His experiences made me think that he didn't have a common life. He had the greatest and most wonderful life he could have and managed to meet and work with famous people.

I hope that one day everyone will listen to his experiences and be amazed the same way I am.

Omar Angeles is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Omar's teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Someone I Admire

When I started to learn English, I met someone in school. The way she talked to me was very polite because I was afraid to talk. Since then, I feel more confident. This is the time to let the school know how I admire her.

I have known her since 2014 when I decided to learn English. From that moment, I have seen an angel in her who came to help us. She is so nice and she has a good heart. She doesn't have a teacher's pet because all of us are special to her.

When I went to level four, I saw a friend and a counselor in her. I started to know her more than before; she's always there for us. In level five she became a good friend to us. Everything we need to know she always tries her best to help and provide all the information we need.

So, I can say that Ms. Siena is an angel to Village Readers that God sent for us.

My family and I admire her so much. May God bless and keep her with a healthy life. This is someone I admire with my heart.

Marie Bonise Philibert is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Father

The person I admire most is my father. He was a noble man. I always admire him for getting ahead for us, his three daughters, despite the fact that my mother died when my sisters and I were little girls. He always fought for us. He worked very hard to educate us and always offered us the best he could.

His dream was to see all three of us graduate so that we would have a title in our life and that we would always be independent women. I always remember his words “Never depend on a man to get ahead in life.”

I could still visualize how strong he felt when he saw himself alone with his three girls. He never allowed us to be separated from him. He became a father, mother, friend, and confidant. He was always with us at all times. I thank God for allowing me to have had a father like him.

Iliana Lara attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Beyond My Pride

I admire my children immensely and I will tell you why. At barely 23 years old, my eldest son had to leave the country for reasons that led him to make that decision. Because it was an unplanned trip, he did not have sufficient resources to start a life abroad. Due to the political situation in my country, we could not send him resources to finance his stay or the rest of his needs. It was at that moment that he began to spread his wings and show his strengths as an adult, facing his successes and failures. Picking himself up and dusting himself off and continuing to add accomplishments to his new life plan.

A year later, my daughter had to make the same decision, but in her case, it was different because she was just starting university. So, her challenge doubled as she had to start working for the first time in her life and simultaneously, study.

My husband and I learned to enjoy their experiences, to be there for them, and to stay connected as a family. We appreciate

that they have risen to their challenges and that they continue with their lives without losing the sense of what family means.

When children become independent, it seems that the work is finished. In a certain way, it is, but we will always be their parents. If the relationship is strong and we accept their evolution towards adulthood with respect, the ties become much closer. I have learned that there is a lot that they contribute to us on this journey, since as adults, the dynamic changes enrich us with their wisdom.

A year ago, my husband and I changed our lives. It corresponded to us to live what our children touched them years ago. And it is precisely here where the pride I feel for them turns into admiration, since being an immigrant is undoubtedly one of the most complex experiences of a human being, even more so when it is carried out in a forced manner and without prior planning. We arrived in this country. Between the two of us we have been building a new life where we have faced challenging situations in which we have had to learn from our mistakes and enjoy the achievements. There is still a long way to go, but we are willing to move forward. How not to feel strong, if the example that our children gave us is our best engine and motivation to continue with determination and perseverance.

Maria Alejandra De Brandt is from Venezuela and is a student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Michael Godown and tutor is Fabienne.

Someone I Admire

The family you come from is important, but the family you create is your number one priority. I am so proud of many things in life, but nothing beats being a proud parent. I am so proud of my son because he is awesome. His intelligence, kindness and integrity have shone through no matter the challenge.

First of all, my son has always been very smart since he was little. He has received several awards like Principal's List, Honor Roll List, Student of the Month, etc. He has participated in math and science competitions and has won second place. He has always been very independent because he has strong self-esteem.

He likes to do everything alone. Although, whenever he needs help, he has never hesitated to seek it. He is a risk taker. Right now, he is taking hard courses in the IB program, and he is also working on a project to help children in need. He is a true model for his siblings.

Furthermore, he is very loving, kind, and grateful. He likes to help me a lot with everything I need. He also helps his father with the paperwork in his business. In addition, he takes over parents' responsibilities in difficult situations. When I get sick, he is always there for me. He takes his brothers to school, cooks, shops, and cleans besides doing his schoolwork. When he got his first check, he surprised his father on his birthday with *Mariachis*, a Mexican tradition. His father was very, very happy. What a blessing he is!

Above all, he is very brave. He is attending the IB program at Palm Harbor University High School. It is not an easy program, and we cannot help him with his academic classes, but he is doing great because he is always positive. One time he had difficulty with his assignment in Language Arts. He stayed up almost all night but couldn't finish it. He had the courage to ask his teacher for help and stayed after school to finish his task. He didn't give up but worked hard to hand in his project on time. His persistence and will pay off. He got the highest grade. Now he is a senior in high school, and he has been looking at different colleges. He is not afraid to live away from his family and experience new paths to achieve his dreams. He is the first one in our family to try new things to get a higher education. He will be successful because he knows how to fly his wings in every difficulty.

I close my eyes for an instant and I see that my little boy has become a man. I can no longer hold him in my arms, but I will always have him in my heart. He has given me countless reasons to be proud, but what gives me the most pride is that he is my son. I love him so much.

Teofila Espanol is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center ESOL Program. Her teacher is Yllka Bejo.

Perseverance

My name is Dalaney. I am 18 years old and now getting my GED. With my age, you would probably assume I just graduated high school. If you were speaking to me 3 years ago, I would have assumed the same thing. The beginning of 2020 was the start of a chapter in my life I thought I could never recover from. I started to not recognize myself anymore. I was doing things I told myself I would never do.

I have had mental health issues since I was young. Most people brushed it off as a phase or a trauma response due to the family issues that would occur. They say pressure makes diamonds, I was a diamond in the rough. My parents weren't the most consistent, especially my dad. I was always told by the people around me to never turn out like either of them. I knew right from wrong & promised myself that I wouldn't.

I had always been well behaved, most likely because I wasn't around the bad influences in my family very often. I have lived with my nana for as long as I can remember. I had a very respectable woman to look up to. Not long after I was born, my grandfather passed away. My nana always told me I was the light that brought her out from the darkness. She wanted to see me graduate and live a better life.

A few months into 2020, I got admitted into a psychiatric facility for the first time. I was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. Almost everybody in my family had it, so it made sense. My 16th birthday passed and things took a turn for the worst. I started to fall into a depression and due to the pandemic, school was virtual. It was easy to start missing classes without repercussions. At the time, I started to look for coping mechanisms to help with my depression.

The coping mechanisms that I chose weren't the healthiest. I quickly started to fall into the habits I told myself I would never get involved with. Addiction started to slowly swallow my life. By the end of 2020, I completely stopped going to school, I never once thought about how I was turning out like my parents. Fast forward to May 2022, 6 months sober, I realized that I wasn't going to graduate. All the promises I had made to myself, and more importantly to my nana, were broken. There was no going back,

no more redo's. It was too late by the time I had truly realized what I did.

I am now 18 years old studying to get my GED. My biggest inspiration is my nana.

Even with all of the broken promises, she stood by my side. I could never truly repay her for all of the love and patience she showed me through these difficult times. I can't fix broken promises, but I can always show my gratitude by creating a better life for myself like we always planned. I am beyond grateful to have this opportunity to make myself and my nana proud.

Delaney Lee is a GED student at Flagler Technical College. Teacher: Mariann Mahnke.

More Than One

I admire two people in my life. One is my dad, and the other is a professional soccer player.

I admire my dad simply because he is a great person, and he works hard to get his things and always wants to improve day by day. No matter what, he always wants to do it. But I admire him more because he went from having nothing to having everything thanks to his effort and dedication. He is my role model.

The other person I admire is Leonel Messi. I admire him because he seems to me to be a great person and for the things he has done, in soccer. I also admire him for the story of his life, he always made a focused effort and was able to get to where he is thanks to his dedication and talent.

So, these are the two people I admire.

Daniel Valencia Lopez was born in Colombia (Pereira) and worked washing dishes. He attends the ESOL High Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida. He is studying English to obtain certification as an Automotive Technician.

My Mom

Many people in the world have a favorite person that they admire. It can be friends, parents, siblings, or even their relationship partner. For myself the person that I admire the most is my

mother. The relationship I have with my mom is inexplicable. She is my world. In my lowest moment of my life when I feel sad, she's always right there for me, to encourage me to feel better. My mom is very supportive in everything I decide to do with my life. I can remember one day when I was sick and throwing up, she was the one that was there for me to make sure I felt better, and that right there showed me how much she loved me.

My mom has four children and she works two jobs and she is still able to put food on the table and to make sure all her kids are taken care of. That is what I admire the most in her. She's far from being a lazy mom. She never takes a break or gets tired of providing for her kids. I never once have seen my mom complain when things get tough. She always finds a way to resolve any situation that seems too difficult for her.

I always told myself if I was to ever move out alone, I would take my mom with me because I don't think I can survive alone without her. She has such a good heart, she's always willing to help others and put others in front of herself. My mom can be annoying at times because she can say things I dislike, but at the end of the day I know she says that stuff for a good reason. If I didn't listen to my mom with the wise words she speaks to me daily, I wouldn't be the person I am today and I thank her for that. I can literally talk to my mom about anything as if she's my best friend. The relationship I have with her is by far the best thing any daughters can have with their mother. I remember when I wasn't going to school for a while and my mom would always keep telling me to go to school, go learn something, and that showed me how much she cares about my education.

She always had high hopes for me to take my education very seriously. Even in moments when I'm not working and I need to pay some bills, she'll give me the money with no hesitation. She'll be the first person I can call on for help. I can sometimes be a very hard-headed child, but she is very patient with me and always finds a way to make me humble myself. My mom is the world to me and I will forever love and cherish her.

Francica Marcelin is a student in the Village Readers Family Education program.

My Father, My Hero

This is a quick story about my father: my hero in every way possible. His name is Andrew Martin. He served four to five years in the Navy before I was born. Dad served up to the rank of single chevron. This is equivalent to a rank of E4. He was in the position of an aviation mechanic on an aircraft carrier.

Although he has been out of the Navy for almost twenty years, Dad is still one of, if not the coolest, man I know. Now that I am an adult, I always find myself going to him for advice, life tips or even listening to one of his stories of his adventures as a sailor. Unfortunately, he has sternly instructed me not to share any details of his military escapades. So, just trust me when I tell you his stories are full of danger and courage.

Aydan Martin is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School – ABE. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.

My DEOS

This story is about DEOS (David Eduardo Olano Silva). He was my dad.

My dad was born in 1941. He lived in a small town with his parents and his siblings. His life was very complicated because his family was very poor.

They worked for another family. They had a lot to do on their farm. They took care of animals and worked the land for more than 10 hours a day with sun and rain. In the farm, they planted sweet potatoes, corn, yuca, corn, oca and ollucos, which is a family of potatoes.

He only studied at primary school. He started his school when he was 8 years old. He finished school at the age of 14. He wanted to be a policeman, but his mother did not let him. She thought that she would not see him anymore because he might die.

When he was 18 years old, he went to another town because he had found a job as a primary school teacher. DEOS liked to play the guitar, sing very sad music, and perform at school anniversaries.

He was an artist. He taught children only for three years. In this town, he met my mother, and after a year they got married. He made the decision not to continue teaching because his payment was only 3 reals, and it was not going to be enough to support his family. He thought it was better to be a farmer so that he could earn more money to support his family. Ah!! My mom's parents were the owners of half of the town in this area. She had money!.

His mother-in-law gave him a small parcel with a few plants of cacao and fruit trees. Then he bought 6 hectares of land. He had to cut many trees and then he had to burn the weeds. Later he had to prepare the land by plowing it by oxen, and he made ditches to bring water from the stream. Afterwards, he could plant the fruit trees as well as vegetables and rice. When I was a child, I liked to help my dad so that I could play with my siblings in the water and mud of the rice ponds.

My parents had two sons and seven daughters. In 1980 my mom died. DEOS was so sad that he did not know what to do with his life and his little children. He felt like the most unfortunate man on earth and asked God why he had so much suffering.

He began to drink every day. He did not realize that his children suffered more because they no longer had their mother and now, they were losing their father to alcohol. His father-in-law helped him a lot during this stage of sadness and being lost.

After this family tragedy her children grew their own wings and flew to a better life.

DEOS will always live in my mind and heart. Because of him I am who I am. Thank you very much, DAD!

Blanca Olano is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Sebring Middle School Football Coaches

“The reason you coach youth sports should be because you want to make a positive impact on the lives of kids. Not because you want to prove to other adults what a great coach you are.”

This quote perfectly describes Sebring Middle School (SMS)

Football Coaches. First, let me tell you who I am and why I am choosing this topic. I have been living in Sebring for 2 years. I am from Honduras, I am married to a great man, and I am the mother of a child. He is 13 years old, attends SMS, and plays football on his school team.

At the beginning, I did not know too much about the after-school program and how it works. I was surprised by the passion of the coaches, especially the head coach and the team manager. They really love what they do. Perhaps I never imagined that they were volunteers. Coaches dedicate a lot of time to our children. They don't just teach them how to play, but by showing them their value, they teach them discipline and that they should always seek to achieve their goals.

As time goes by, I am getting to know how it works to manage a team. They not only donate their time and knowledge, but also their economic resources to make it work. They are looking for funds to be able to finance the team. All of us can support our community by participating in fundraising activities and you can follow them on social media to learn the needs of the team.

SMS coaches are the best; they do a great job with the kids. I'm very grateful for their valuable work, passion, dedication and commitment to the football team. They have been an example to me to do everything with the same passion as them. It is a privilege for me and my family to be part of this beautiful community.

Carmen Alejandra Orellana is from Honduras and attends the ESOL program at South Florida State College. Her instructor is Ms. Miriani.

My Best Friend for Life

Everyone in this world admires someone for several reasons. It can be the person's personality, how nice the person is, or it could be their appearance.

The person I admire is my best friend. Her name is Rubenia. She is an outstanding person, and she lives in Atlanta with her mom and dad. To me, she is a good example, a motivator who started from the bottom and faced many difficulties to become successful. The distance appeared between us. She went to an-

other country. In the past, she was always there and always busy with her studies. It scares me a little to lose her because I am jealous, and I think maybe she has other friends. We went to the same school. Even though she moved to another country, we still respect, care for, and help each other. She is a person you can count on.

I really admire her as a friend, sister, and a good listener. I am proud to have someone like her in my life, and I wish that we could stay together forever.

Marie is a student in Adult Education in Naples, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Khris.

True Love

I admire my mother because she is an amazing person. Everything started when I was a little boy; I was born in a small town in Guatemala, and I lived in a humble house. Life wasn't easy, however my mother always watched over me. She always gave me advice and fought for me no matter what. She is an example of what true love is. Thanks to that I have grown up with a good education and respect for people around me.

After many years and effort, I have grown up and applied what my mother has taught me. Now I am studying at Lorenzo Walker and learning English, I know what I want is not easy, but I will put all my effort to reach my goal and so that my mother's effort is not in vain.

Manuel Sac is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. His teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Someone I Admire

Sometimes when we talk about blessings we only refer to things like money, materialistic things, and opportunities that have come into our lives which were good. In contrast, not much attention is given to the diverse ways a person can be truly blessed. Let me explain further.

In my family we are four siblings, three brothers and one sister where I am the youngest. I came from a modest family, living together in a truly little house and existing paycheck to paycheck because the household income was not even enough to sustain our family's basic needs. We barely were able to pay our bills and other expenses and did not have enough to send four of us to school. My parents had to make a difficult decision as to which one of the four of us would attend school. My parents chose my eldest brother because he was their first born. He was an extremely smart student and when he finished college, he earned a scholarship to Florida International University [FIU] to study business management. Everyone was overly excited for him.

Shortly after arriving to the United States, the financial situation of the family worsened forcing my eldest brother to leave the university to go to work so that he could support us. Unfortunately, my parents were getting older, and no longer able to work. Without any savings or retirement funds to fall back on, my parents were solely reliant on my brother for our survival. He was their last resort.

He took on all the responsibilities of the family and as far as I can remember we never missed anything. He did his best to make us happy every day, was always there for anything we needed and even now as grown adults we can take our concerns to him, and he is still there, ready and willing to support us in everything that we are doing.

As you may have guessed, the someone I admire is my eldest brother who sacrificed his career for my siblings and myself. For me, he is living proof that blessings can also be that one special person.

Luxon Saintilaire was born in Haiti (Jacmel) and worked as event planner for 5 years. He has lived in the USA since October 2022. He attends the ESOL Advanced class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida. He has an incredibly good attitude in class and is working towards his certification in nursing.

The Most Important Love

When I was born I became the light in her eyes. She changed

It's Never Too Late

her life to give me mine. She is the most wonderful person that can exist in the world. She is understanding, affectionate, patient, and sometimes she scolds me but I know it is for my good.

I admire her because she is a very smart person and studied many things. She is very sociable and she likes to help people. When I have a problem, she looks for a way to solve it. She is the only person who has taught me to be strong and is the unique person who has wiped my tears softly and lovely away.

Someday I want to be like her. She is my superhero and she is my MOM.

Lessons learned:

Be kind
Be patient
Be happy
Be strong
Be helpful

Lietis Vegas is a student with Collier Adult Education. Lietis's teacher is Khris Betten.

My Reason To Be

Admiration is something I feel for my dad. He is a very hard-working man, always fighting for family, even though sometimes things get difficult, he never gives up. He is a clear example that true love does exist. He has instilled in us many values that truly make your life better.

No matter how difficult the situation is, we must never give up and not give up on our dreams. My brothers and I are lucky to have a dad like him.

Angela Velasquez is a student with Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Diomedes Díaz

Diomedes Díaz Maestre was a Colombia singer-songwriter

and composer of Vallenato music. In the musical aspect, Diomedes Díaz is the biggest record seller in the history of vallenato, which is why he has been considered one of the greatest exponents of this genre. In 2010, he won the Latin Grammy Award in the Cumbia/Vallenato category with the musical album *Listo Pa' La Foto*. He was known as *El Cacique de La Junta*, a name given to him by Rafael Orozco in relation to the place of his birth.

His personal life was marked by family instability, controversial friendships, ups and downs with alcohol and drug use, accidents, financial and legal problems, especially the death in strange circumstances of the young Doris Adriana Niño.

He is a person that I admire for his talent and his romanticism and because I like his music.

Ramon is a student and Adult Education In Naples, FL. His teacher is Ms. Khris.

A Very Special Friend

My friend, Maria Luisa, is the person that I admire the most. Her many qualities are rare to see. She is dedicated to her job and helping others. Maria is noble, innocent and unselfish. She always looks for the good in others. It is a pleasure to be her friend.

When Maria realizes that someone around her is in need, she helps without a question and without making others feel embarrassed or less capable. Her nobility and warm personality are always well received. She is aware that some people can, and will, take advantage of her good ways, but that will not stop her from helping others.

I have witnessed her unselfishness when she takes care of others. I have seen her take care of the whole family for years. When she goes to the grocery store, there are always groceries for needy people. She makes it her responsibility to know who is in need and help them. Maria puts the needs of others before her own. She never expects anything in return.

In all the years that I have known Maria Luisa, I have learned

It's Never Too Late

many lessons. I learn not to judge others, not to hold grudges, and to care for my neighbors without expecting anything in return. I think that she is like an angel. Her generosity has no bounds. I will always be proud of our friendship and what her examples have taught me.

Judith Zambrano Rodriguez is an ESOL student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.

Personal Stories

Never Stop Dreaming

Most people don't die of age but they die when they stop dreaming. I am one of the people who believe that we are capable of doing absolutely anything. All you need is motivation, work and belief in yourself. Let's say you want to be a soccer player, the first step to be a professional soccer player is for you to believe it, look in the mirror and say I'm going to be the best soccer player the world has ever seen. You have to start believing it but believing it is not enough, you also have to work. I assure you that somewhere there is a person who is getting up at 8am in the morning and they're training 4 hours a day but there's probably someone else somewhere who's getting up at 6am in the morning and they're training 15 hours a day. Always look ahead in life.

No matter what you do you'll always have people who discourage you, they want to sink whatever you do and you will always have a group of people who will be telling you to leave, you suck. There are people who are going to take the time to tell you that you are not going to fulfill your dreams or more importantly, they are going to work to harm you. In one of his films, Will Smith says "people who are not capable of fulfilling their dreams; They usually tell you that you are not going to fulfill yours either, you are capable of yourself. Never let anyone let no one tell you how.

Julio Aguilar is a student at Collier Adult Education. Julio's teacher is Dayana Exposito

My Childhood

I am a Chilean woman, the eldest of three siblings. When I was seven years old, my little brother had a terrible accident, and everything in my life changed.

We lived in a house that had a large pool. On that fateful day, the lady who worked in my house was taking care of my younger brother. She was preparing her lunch and left him playing in the yard without closing the pool's fence. My brother fell into the pool and lost consciousness. He was only one year old. From that day on, my life and that of my family changed com-

pletely. Since I was little, I did not know and did not understand what had happened because no one told me. Of course, it was a terrible situation and as a little girl it was even more difficult to understand. Time passed and one day my mom told my brother and me what had happened: "Your little brother had an accident and is not the same as before."

As time went on, I was able to understand a little more about what happened. My brother could not walk, eat, see, nor move his body; he could not do anything. My brother was in the hospital for three months and then the doctor told my mother that nothing more could be done for him. When my brother came home, he needed nurses at home 24 hours a day. My brother could never be left alone. My house became a hospital.

Time passed and the situation never changed, and my brother never got better. At the age of eight, he died. I will never forget that day for it may have been the saddest day of my life. I could never forget what my mother was like; she was so sad she could not walk.

Time passes very quickly and now I look back at the past and cannot forget that day. However, I wonder what would have happened if this had not happened. I do not think I would be who I am today. All the life situations you must live through help you grow and learn from them. Due to what I had to go through, I decided to study a profession to help children. Today I am a special education teacher. I love my profession. I feel good when I help students who are struggling. I will continue my profession in this country; this is my goal. For this reason, I started studying at Miami Dade College to continue improving my English.

I am telling the story of my life because it is important to learn from difficulties and to understand that time always helps overcome the difficulties in life. Today, I can say that I have a little angel in heaven with whom I talk and who always takes care of me.

Fabiola Jerez is a student at Miami Dade College, where she is currently studying in the Adult ESOL Program. Her teacher is Robert Kelso.

Beyond the Limits

My start to life was not the best because 20 days after I was born, they discovered bacterial meningitis for which I was hospitalized for about two months in an ICU. The doctors lost faith that I would survive. The chances were very low; and it would

leave me in a vegetative state, without vision and hearing.

My first 5 years of life were full of therapies and visits to medical check-ups. For the health personnel, I am a miracle, since despite the fact that I lost half the neurons and I was very small when I contracted the disease, I did not have any long-term consequence of meningitis. The doctors and nurses told my mother that I would achieve great things in this world.

And they were right! From a very young age, even though my family was affected by my father's abuse and alcoholism, I had the opportunity to achieve great things. From a very young age, I have been passionate about helping others, which is why I participated in activities that helped the community, vulnerable groups and the elderly. When I turned 13 years old, I led and created a project dedicated to helping vulnerable people, who have been discriminated against or who have suffered from bullying. It's called "superlative" so that more people like me do not feel alone and manage to overcome this obstacle.

From a very young age, I knew that I was passionate about the world of health and wanted to be a doctor. Unfortunately, when I turned 15, my maternal grandmother was diagnosed with terminal cancer, which was very strong news for me since I was very close to her. For this reason I decided to start studying nursing assistant at the same time that I finished my studies in technical bachelor's degree in accounting. The cancer was so advanced that she died a couple of months after it was discovered. I finished my studies as a nursing assistant and started working in a hospital for a few months.

My goal now is to study medicine and acquire more knowledge that will allow me to help people and their families and to be an instrument for the improvement of patients. The world of health is not easy to navigate, but if you do your best you're rewarded with the gratitude of people, that is something invaluable. Now I can see that my destiny is to change the world.

Ana Marie Angel is a student with Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Following My Dreams

I arrived from my native country Colombia, on September 27, 2018, to the city of Atlanta, Georgia, when I was 54 years old. My sister Olga and her husband Ricardo were waiting for me. I did not imagine that from that very day, I would begin to enjoy the many blessings that God had among His plans and purposes for me. I came with small baggage, not more than a few personal belongings, but with many dreams, illusions, expectations, doubts, questions, and the occasional fear in my heart. I knew that in the coming months, I had to make a decision that would change my life completely, to stay in the United States or return to Colombia. Even though I had many fears and uncertainties, I decided to stay here.

The first fear I would have to face was also the biggest barrier for me, which was the English language. I know that my age makes it more difficult to learn a new language - but I can't let that stop me. Despite this, I continued until today on this new journey -full of surprises, new experiences, joys and a great sadness that I did not expect. One of the biggest surprises happened when I was introduced to a very tall man, named Farid, on February 8th, 2020. He was from Tunisia; he spoke 5 languages and he had lived in interesting places. We became good friends - and then got married on May 27th, 2021. We were so very happy - but then a tragic surprise - he died suddenly on June 11th, 2022. I was heartbroken. He had encouraged me to learn English and was very happy when I started taking group classes at Learn to Read. The tutors, with their dedication and support, have helped me take steps towards my goal of understanding and speaking this beautiful English language.

This fall I started working with a one-to-one tutor twice a week. This is helping me to overcome the language barrier - and it is a priority of mine because it has been so difficult to do things like making medical appointments, going to the bank, ordering in a restaurant, going to church, and even going out with friends. The cell-phone translator helps but it is not enough. There have been many times where I have felt ashamed or afraid of addressing people. That is why I put all my effort into learning so that one day, hopefully not too far away, I can enjoy the whole experience of living in this country without limitations and to be able to enjoy pleasant conversations with those around me.

I keep going, not letting my age, where I came from, or failures in my past keep me from achieving my ultimate goal of speaking English perfectly. That is why I want to thank God for my progress and what I have achieved so far. To the entire academic team, my tutor, and the administrative staff - blessings for the great work they do with each immigrant, who all, like me, arrived one day in this beautiful country to fight for our dreams.

Martha Arevalo is a student at Learn to Read of St. Johns County, Inc. Her teacher is Barbara Horton.

My Life in Syria Before the War

I was born and grew up in the City of Latakia, located on the Mediterranean Sea, surrounded by mountains, plains, and farmland. It is a very old city; the streets are narrow and always crowded with cars and people.

The first letters of the alphabet were discovered here, and it has many ancient areas, such as the Citadel of Salah Aldin al Ayyubi, which was built in the 10th century. It was made a UNESCO world site in 2006.

The weather in Syria is wonderful and it has four seasons. In the spring everything blooms, the soul, the earth, and the trees. I have not forgotten my visits to my relatives in the beautiful countryside, where spring colors are everywhere. I have not forgotten the summer days and sometimes spending the best days on the golden beaches and sometime in our mountain house. I have not forgotten the winter and going to the snowy areas with my family. The most beautiful thing about my city is that it is safe, as the crime rate is very low. Its people are kind and support each other in happiness and sadness. Most people are friendly and own their homes. The quality of education in Syria is high.

Although, with all these good things, I left my country to work as a math teacher in several different countries to get a better job for my future because the pensions in my country are low.

Not everything in life is beautiful. I got divorced when my chil-

dren were little. I took responsibility for their upbringing. It was a difficult time, but it was full of the most beautiful memories I have. After that, because of the war in Syria, each of us went to live in a different country. I left my job in Kuwait and came to America to take care of my elderly mother. My daughter and her 2 little boys live in Germany. My son lives in Sweden. They completed their studies and have a job. My son got engaged to the girl he loves and will marry soon.

Now, I have been in Florida for three years. When I came here, I didn't know any English. I had never studied English. I would like to thank the City of Clearwater and the City of Palm Harbor, which gave me a chance to learn the language. I would also like to thank everyone who taught me, especially my teacher Eddi and Nada in Clearwater.

My dreams are big, and I will not let the place or time stop me from achieving them. One important dream is that peace will prevail in all the world, and the other important dream is I hope to see my children and grandchildren again soon and to live with them.

Randa Arnaout is a student at Palm Harbor Library Literacy Council. Her teacher is Eddi Ozey.

God Is With Us Always

Hello! My name is Pilar Barrios. Last year I was honored and blessed to present my essay at the opening ceremony of the Florida Literacy Coalition. The title of my essay was "Prayer for a Princess House". In my essay, I spoke about my daughter's princess castle and how God helped me to help and provide for my daughter. The entire episode played a part in increasing her faith.

God gives us signals, sometimes uses people, things, animals, etc. in this case, God used a princess castle, when my 8-year-old daughter received a giant toy castle, that God gave to her through a very generous stranger that we had met at our church. My neighbor gave the castle, without knowing anything about my daughter having left her princess castle and her toys in our home country of Peru. The original toy castle in Peru was her favorite toy. God used my neighbor to give a blessing to my daughter

once we reached the US.

Now my daughter is 12 years old, she is almost a teenager. She is at the age when kids do not play with toys anymore. I told my daughter to give the castle to another girl. She loved her castle and did not want to part with it. I asked her to remember when she was playing with the castle. I asked her to remember how happy the toy castle made her. She thought about it, and finally, last year, my daughter agreed that it was time for someone to receive her castle.

It was a Saturday, she gently cleaned up the castle for the last time. We live on a corner of a principal street. She wrote a sign on the castle, it said "Enjoy as I have enjoyed it! It is free!" We put the castle on the corner, for someone, in just a second, in the time it took us to walk back to our house, a man stopped his car. He said hello to us and asked us if the toy castle was really FREE. We said Yes! He parked and opened his truck. He said something that my daughter and I did not expect. He said "Thank you! I am sure this castle will bring a smile to my niece, she lost her mom-my last week, she is really sad. I hope she will be happy with this castle. We looked at each other and told the man that we hoped the same.

When we returned to our house, I told my daughter how very proud I was of her. Her eyes were shining. She is so happy that the toy castle will make another little girl happy.

I am completely sure that God's timing is perfect. God chose the perfect way to show me and my daughter that God is with us, ALWAYS. Thank you God!

Pilar is a student of Ms. Richardson at Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota, FL.

My Story

My name is Jacqueline Bishop. I am presently studying at FTC to obtain my GED Diploma. I'm 66 years of age. My goal is to inspire people that are struggling with any type of drug dependency. I'm now in my 7th year of sobriety. I'm both thankful and grateful that God didn't allow me to die in the streets during the

many long years of that addiction. Even after the mistakes I'd made, it took me many years to WANT TO CHANGE. Jail and prison had become a revolving door in my life. I would enter the D.O.C a total of four more times, having been arrested 74 times in my entire life.

At the age of 22, I was sentenced to the Florida Department of Corrections for twenty-two years, serving a total of seven years, beginning in 1979 to 1986, only to be released and return again 18 months later.

In 2009, I was again sentenced to 24 months to be served at L.C.I., released and then convicted of shoplifting. This judge had gotten tired of my repetitive disregard of the law. She openly admonished me in her court, explaining to me that if I returned before her, she would automatically sentence me to either one of the two sentences, "career criminal" 30 years or "habitual criminal" a possible life sentence. I knew then I didn't want to die in prison.

Today, I've learned that when something bad happens, you have two choices. Either you allow it to tear you down or allow it to build you up, making you stronger. I strive to put something positive into society.

As I look back over my life, I realize how blessed I've been. There are many of my friends that have passed away and yet, I'm still alive. I choose to share this brief story with the hopes that it may inspire another to believe that God did this for Jackie, it can be done for ANYONE. I have this amazing story to share of having become an OVERCOMER. A self-learned inspirational chapter of my life I am inwardly encouraged to share. I thank God for all His love, grace and mercy that He has given me. Amen.

*Jacqueline Bishop is a GED student at Flagler Technical College.
Her teacher is Marianne Mahnke.*

Good and bad Days on the Cruise Ship

Failure builds strength. I missed the opportunity to work on

the first cruise ship because of my lack of English. I decided to try hard and suddenly the following year I had another opportunity with Carnival which I did not miss out on. The recruiter told me, "Daniel, welcome on board." Now I only needed the visa and medical exams to join. I felt very happy, and I traveled to Miami.

I had never left my country, I felt nervous but glad. I was alone. I left behind my girlfriend, friends, work, and my pets and left them with my mother, who I already missed so much. I arrived in Miami and an immigration officer approach me. He told me that I should not have arrived in Miami because Carnival changed my cruise to Carnival Sensation cruise. I am supposed to be in Galveston, Texas. Fortunately, the officer helped solve my situation. I was able to obtain 3 days all paid for in Miami in a super luxurious hotel with the best food.

After that, everything was smooth. I got to learn about many cultures while on the cruise. Friends that I never thought I would have, and beautiful people from Indonesia, Vietnam, Australia, England, South Africa, Japan, and from everywhere. I learned a lot. I worked a lot. I learned English, I earned money. I saw fantastic places in Mexico, Curacao, United States, Jamaica, and many islands of the Caribbean.

Finally, we got hit with the pandemic. Things were no longer the same. There was a lot of food, but no guests were on board, at the parties, movies, or games. As the days went by, everything ran out and the regulations increased and nothing could be done anymore, we were just waiting to go home.

Daniel Bolanos attends the English class Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My New Life in the United States

It all started on November 12th at dawn, going to Cucuta to say goodbye to some relatives we had there. Then the next day we traveled to Bogota to say goodbye to my mother because she could go by plane and we could cross the frontier. After staying several days in Bogota, my stepfather, my little sister and I caught a flight to Mexico and stayed there for a few days. In migration from Mexico, they had us locked up in a small room for a long time,

around 4 or 5 hours. We enjoyed a few days in Mexico. Crossing the border we were really scared but with our mind held high to meet a goal. When we arrived and passed, it was very scary, but we also felt happy because we were on American soil. They took us to a detention center that was known as “the refrigerator” because the rooms were going to be very cold due to the Covid. They separated me from my stepfather and my sister and I cried and didn't sleep for two nights being lonely in an unknown place.

You couldn't see the sunlight, you didn't know what time it was and the food was very bad. Three days passed, and on one of those days I was able to see my stepfather but we could barely talk because it was a favor that a guard had done for us because he wouldn't stop crying. As I said before, about 3 days passed and they put me on a bus to travel from Arizona to Texas to another detention center for girls. Go with my mom and so it was, after so many days returning to my family.

Camila Buitrago is a student with Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Khris Betten.

Life is a Race

When you are born the race begins, the race against time. One that you cannot win but still must run. As Ricardo Arjona said in his song, Vida - We are all born with Expiration Syndrome: One that has no cure and from which no one can escape, one that is diagnosed to everyone the minute they give their first cries of life, in that moment the race begins.

They have stopped to wonder how much time is left, how much has passed. We never do it, it is easier to continue without thinking about it. Most people are not even aware of time in their days. Society and humanity itself have taken care of making the days more enjoyable. TV, radio, the internet, and social networks were invented. And suddenly we spend more time looking at cell phones and TV, than going outside to enjoy nature. This is pretty messed up if you ask me.

I didn't think about time either until my life as an immigrant began and suddenly, I felt as if I had been born again, except that now I have almost spent half my life. It is like waking up one day

and suddenly you are in a new country with a different language which you do not speak. Also, where your university studies are not valid and even if they were, you need to know the new language to be able to apply the knowledge.

That's why now I measure the time. The time I need to learn English, the time I need to work, the time to become a doctor again. How much time do I have left in this life race? And although I have no answers to these questions, there is no other choice than to continue running in this race until I reach the finish line. Or to cross the line that leads to oblivion of existence and only at least having the happiness of having ran according to your rules and principles.

Luis Perdomo attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Personal Story

My name is Starlia. I'm 28 years old and currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correctional Facility, and this is where my life began to change. Before my incarceration I was out in the world hitting licks and staying up all night getting high. Then, suddenly, things went wrong, landing me where I am today. I thank God every day for where I am, and he saved my life and gave me a second chance. From where I started in the streets to where I am now is a 180 degree change for the better.

I went from hitting licks and getting high to sitting in education classes Monday through Friday from 1:00 to 3:30 p.m. I am trying to get my GED before I go home. I strive to do anything-positive now instead of being negative. I want to go home with as many betterments class certificates to show my family and most importantly of all my 10-year-old daughter.

My plan when I'm released is to continue this change in my life. I want to be the mentor my daughter needs in her life. I want to make up for the lost time with my family and let them see the new me. I want to show the world that a person can go from nothing to something if you truly want to make a change. I thank God for giving me this chance to make a turning point in my life. I also want to give thanks to Ms. Pugh for taking the time

to come to class each day and teach us. This is the turning point in my life and how I plan to keep good changes coming.

Starlia Davis is housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy Florida. She is in Ms. Barbara Pugh's ABE II Class. She is working on obtaining her GED.

USA & Cuba: Several Nuances

When I was a child in school, they gave very little information about the USA. Those of us who grew up in Cuba always wondered how different the U.S. would be from Cuba. Would there be similarities or differences between the two countries? Would they feel the same passion, the same love for the homeland and the same desire to live as the Cubans? After having lived in the USA for almost a year, I can now see that my perspective has changed. I will try to capture here the biggest differences and similarities that I have been finding.

The main difference between the two countries and what I consider to be the most important is the sense of freedom. One of the most vital historic figures in Cuba, the poet Jose Martí once said: "Freedom is the right that people have to act freely, think and speak without hypocrisy." In Cuba, after 62 years, we cannot speak or think freely, and if you say what you think, you will end up in jail. I think that this is where the strength of the USA lies especially, in letting people express their opinions and develop them.

Another aspect that is very different between both cultures is discipline and productivity. Cuba has spent years with a salary system that prioritizes those who support communist ideology more than those who do real hard work. This caused irreparable damage to the Cuban economy. The USA, however, gives free rein to the entrepreneur and highly remunerates the creative. Even in the biggest failures or the huge crisis, North Americans have known how to get ahead, as Henry Ford said: "Failure is simply the opportunity to start over, this time with more intelligence."

However, not everything is different. The Cuban always places the family first. Historically, we were willing to risk our lives for our families. I have found that family feeling in the USA, and I

have seen it reflected in holidays like Thanksgiving, Christmas and even the 4th of July. Culture also features many similarities. The North American always has their BBQ ready on his patio to enjoy a good meal and, although the food is different, the feeling of sharing is the same. The love for sports is also something that is seen to be enjoyed a lot in the USA, as well as its Cuban neighbors. The love and passion for baseball can be said to be practically the same. As you can see both countries have similar nuances. Understanding these will help you to get the best of both worlds.

I know I have a long way to go. Here in the USA, we have the possibility of getting the best of both cultures. It would be good to see some necessary changes in Cuba, especially the negative things that the USA has been able to solve over time. Hopefully one day both countries could see their peoples more united, without the mediation of politics and dictatorship.

Ruben Delgado is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. His teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Journey To America

This is a true story of my life, my husband, and my daughter after we made the decision to come to the United States. It all started as an idea, as a possibility and with the desire to be able to meet again with my mother who had already lived in the United States for some time, and with the rest of a family we barely knew.

Everything went very fast. We had to start getting rid of everything we had in our house to raise money to help my mother financially and to finance our trip. Little by little and in less than a month my house was empty. I had to leave everything behind, memories of my comfort zone, my family, my pets, the rest of my family, my friends and everything we had. We hardly packed three backpacks, there was room for all our belongings. The most difficult hour has arrived. It was time to say goodbye, to break the link with everything we knew, and it was time to board a plane to Managua, Nicaragua. The flight hours were long.

We finally arrived at the Nicaraguan airport and the people who were in-charge of our trip were waiting for us. We arrived at a very humble house and with a very different reality from the one we left. I realized that my family and I would not be alone throughout the journey that awaited us. In a small room, there were more than 17 Cubans with the same goal as ours - to get to the United States. What hurt me the most was seeing my daughter who did not understand what was happening and why we were in this place. I only had the breath to tell her that it would all be a game that we would have to pass and win several levels and that the reward was to get to her granny.

So, we started the game. We only had time to rest for a while or at least try. We started the trip by car to the border of Honduras. Honduras, a country that has a beautiful geography. But for me its mountains made me feel part of a fast and furious movie. Incredible, we only had to look at the road and ask God to let us get to where we were going.

After passing through the mountains of Honduras we continued our journey until we reached Guatemala and then to Tapachulas, Mexico. Then, we had to cross all of Mexico. It took us a whole month to reach the border and we were finally able to turn ourselves in. And the long-awaited moment of a big hug with my mom and all my family arrived. What a relief. We are saved. We are here. We are grateful.

Yenysleydy Diaz attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Family Night

It is hard to spend time together as a family. We are at work or at school. This is the reason why, in my family, we try to have dinner together every night to talk, dream, laugh and make memories. It is a special time to show them support and appreciation.

As parents, my husband and I want our children to know that we will be there for them. No matter how busy the day has been, we must find time to talk and be together. We put our phones aside and we talk about our day, how it was and what we did.

In addition, we plan our future, asking our children about what they would like to study and which college they would like to attend. We plan where we would like to go on vacation, to the beach or the mountains, because we really like nature.

After dinner, we sometimes play table games; we joke and laugh. I love having dinner with my family, having a good time, laughing and creating memories for when they grow up.

I would like to see more families take time to be together. Many young people look for gangs because they look for something similar to a family. Our children need our attention and support more than a tablet, cell phone or toys. They need us to connect with them. They need to talk about their concerns. Only parents can help their children grow up with love, appreciation, recognition, security, approval, respect, acceptance, confidence, and encouragement. They need to know that they are important and valuable to their parents. Our children will remember the time we spent with them more than the things we bought them. This is why family nights are so important in our family.

Eunice Esquivel is from Mexico and studies ESOL at South Florida State College. Her instructor is Ms. Miriani.

Where Is Home?

How long do you have to be in one place to call that place your home? I thought that after three years of living in the United States, I would finally feel like I was in a place where I belong. However, you carry this constant feeling of not fitting in when you are an immigrant. I recently experienced this when I went back for the holidays to my beautiful island Dominican Republic.

The thought of going back, especially during the Winter, was like a dream. I was delighted; I was returning to my home. The place where I grew up, the place where I would finally belong. I spent 12 amazing days full of love, hugs, and lots of food. I saw my family, friends, and strangers who somehow knew me. I was finally in the right place and with the right people. You may be thinking, the place where you finally belonged! Well, no, I was wrong. The feeling that I didn't belong didn't stay in The United States; it followed me to my home country. I soon discovered time

did not stop when I first left my country.

As I was changing in the United States, my country was also changing. My high school friends were not the same anymore, my family also changed a lot. Everything was different in a way. I left my country when I was a teenager and now, I'm soon going to be a legal adult in the states. I also noticed that when I was on the island, I was missing my life in the United States. I remember I thought to myself if I don't belong in the United States and don't belong in the Dominican Republic where do I belong? I once heard a phrase in Spanish that says "Ni de aquí, ni de allá" which means neither from here nor there. This is a very profound feeling that many immigrants experience daily. I soon discovered this was a feeling that I would have to accept.

I learned with time that home isn't a specific place where everything is perfect. Home for me is where I feel connected and content with myself and others. Home is my family, my friends, music, and more. Home is this place of comfort that lives inside us. Even though we as immigrants may feel we don't have a place where we belong. Our real home lives in every smile, in every hug, and in all the love we share as a community. Life changes every day, whether you are here or there. Always remember you are not alone because deep inside you, you are home.

Luis Estrella is a student at Learn to Read of St. Johns County. His teacher is Barbara Horton.

Escaping Diablo

The story that changed my life happened in Venezuela in September 2015 when my husband James was driving to the airport early in the morning and he was kidnapped by two National Guards (government police). These national guards also put a dead man in the car, and they threatened my husband to take responsibility for this death if he didn't do everything the national guards wanted.

My husband was released after three hours, and three weeks later one of the National Guard started to follow my husband and threaten him with a death because they wanted my husband to force his brother to resign from politics and stop the complaint

against the government (my husband's brother was elected by the population as City counselor and he was conducting investigations against the government and made many complaints).

After many threats and a second kidnapping of my husband in November, he decided to leave Venezuela on December 6, 2015 and I had to hide myself in another city while I got my passport to leave the country. We never wanted to leave our country but the dictatorship in Venezuela forced us to do it. My husband and I had to give up all our things like family, professions, jobs, friends, properties, and to start a new life in a new country with a different language and at this point all my insecurities came out because we never thought to leave our country but the dictatorship in Venezuela forced us to do it.

We thought that our stay in the USA would be temporary and maybe we could go back but in August 2016 my husband's brother was murdered and our dreams of returning to Venezuela also died. 3 months after the death of my brother-in-law, my father-in-law passed away from a stroke due to constant threats from the government. My husband knew he couldn't go back because he might have been killed himself.

Our beginning in the USA was hard but for me was worse because of the language, but one thing was certain, my husband was alive and safe, and it was enough and the most important to me. Learning English as second language has been very difficult for me, but now I understand that USA is my country the place where my husband and I feel safe and protected and my main goal is to improve my English skills every day and achieve with my husband all the dreams we couldn't make comes true in my country and we know this country is a great place to do it.

Eliana Flores is a student of Ms. Richardson at Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota, FL.

My Advice To You

My history is a difficult and long one. I will summarize it hoping that maybe someone can learn from it. During my journey, I learned many lessons. I will write about three of them. Learn

to face obstacles. There are many to conquer! Never back down. Once you are on the right path, stay on it! Never surrender in front of adversity or temptations! It will be difficult, but not impossible.

Never evade obstacles. Face them. Obstacles will always be there and can come from family life, friends that one chooses, or everyday situations. Conquering obstacles will make one stronger and hopefully wiser. The future depends on it and your will to do it. When the time comes, make the right decision and do not look back.

Don't back down when life gets rough. Circumstances can be challenging because of your surroundings. There are always two choices, the good and the bad one. Make a good one! It could mean more work, but the reward is always better. The bad one can be attractive, and even easy, but it will harm you and sometimes others.

Never surrender. This is hard to do. There always will be problems. When tired of fighting for your dreams, keep on fighting. Fight with all your heart knowing that you are on the right path. Do not listen to the ones that discourage others. Concentrate on your goals and keep walking.

If there is anything to learn from this, learn how to face obstacles, do not back down and never surrender. It is your life and what you make of it! My life was rough, but I fought and never gave up. You can do the same. Do not let your fears stop you from going on in life.

Ulises Garcia is an ESOL student at South Florida State College. His teacher is Larid Lopez.

My Story and My Dream

First, I would like to thank God who gave me the opportunity to live in a country like the USA which gives me so many opportunities to help me achieve a dream that I have dreamt my whole life, to become a Nurse Practitioner.

After I finished high school, I got married right away. Two

years later I gave birth to my first daughter. My overwhelming love for her allowed me to stop my school activities because I wanted to stay home to care for my child. One year later, I got pregnant again and I chose to care for my two children in school once again, at least until they were in school.

One year after my second daughter's birth my family and I returned to the USA, due to the situation in my country, Haiti. My family and I were attacked by thugs who were trying to harm us, so we had to flee. Finally, stable in the USA, I became pregnant with my son, my third child. It has always been a dream of mine to have a son. Six months later I became pregnant again with my fourth child, another son. I was happy, but it was a big responsibility I had to take; my children are my whole life. I had no time for school even though I was suffering greatly and wanted to make my dream of going back to school a reality.

Sadly, my two boys have not yet had the chance to know Haiti, which is the country of origin of their father and mother. The girls have had that experience because, three months after giving birth, I always returned to Haiti. With things being so rampant, with insecurity, and unemployment we have not been able to return. My husband was a doctor in Haiti, but in the states, we had to go back to zero. Regardless we decided to stay in the USA for a better future.

After two years in the USA, I decided to finally go to school to learn English. There I can also start my career in nursing, which has always been my dream. I know it is a big responsibility to take care of a big family, especially when we are on our own. Aside from my husband and me, I know God will help me with my desire to reach this goal.

My advice to everyone who has a dream, especially mothers: success is not easy and there are obstacles and sacrifices. But with your determination and prayer, one day you will not be disappointed with your sacrifices.

We are moving forward with the children for their pride and to set a good example for them.

Leonne Jean Georges is a student at Atlantic Technical College. Her teacher is Fayne Johnson.

Joy for You and Me

Joy is the expression of the heart someone puts in you through expression of kindness and vice versa. I remember when I was a little boy after the first day my mom drove me to school. A boy who was taller than me had the responsibility to accompany me. From the school to my home there were canals to cross, but I was too little to cross over. Two boys held me by each arm and flew me over. I was so excited. I can still visualize it.

Now, I am a preacher of the word of God. My mission is to share the Gospel and lead people to know the mysteries and the will of God. Similarly, when I was little two boys helped me because I was not able to do it myself. Today is my turn to help others close to me. No one can grow by himself.

A wise man says do not despise the smallest or weakest, because everyone, whatever their size has qualities and can bring something to someone who is big, strong and powerful. My joy was given by the people around me. It is good to make people happy.

Nowadays, people can hurt each other because of their bad behavior. Almost everywhere in the world, there is bad behavior or foul language. It seems people have become so bad and they are not capable of bringing joy to their fellowman.

It is important to be a blessing to our neighbor, especially in this land of fatigue where we are traveling and where there is a lot of confusion. Many people know wealth cannot bring happiness because satisfaction cannot come from our income. It is time for people to understand our mission for each other.

Jean M.Henri attends English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Learn to Speak English

It was in May 2022 that I left Haiti to come to the USA because of the insecurity of my country and to have a good life. When I arrived here, I found a problem. It was the English

language that I could not speak. It gave me a lot of difficulty to express myself. I needed a translator. It makes me feel sick every time I need to address someone in English.

I am not ashamed to ask someone to help me, but I am ashamed of the challenge the language presented to me. Therefore, I decided why not go enroll in an English class. After 2 weeks, I saw that I was already able to greet a friend and people at my work. Indeed, it brought a lot of joy to my heart, even though I have to put in a lot of effort to learn it. The goal is to speak the way I would like to.

In fact, I attended American churches to see if I understood what they were saying. It was not easy at all. Out of 100 words I could understand about 15. I continue to listen, learn more vocabulary, and hear the pronunciation, as well. I tried to talk to my classmates who are more advanced than me. Every day, I give myself the mission to learn 20 vocabulary words.

I want to encourage other Haitians like me to learn English because here is where we live and work. Some of them understood that they need to register in the English class. I motivate them in the church where I worship. Immigrants must understand that when they know how to speak English, they can earn more money. They will be respected because now they don't need help from anyone for translation. It is really useful to all who really want to advance. It is a wonderful thing to realize how English can make a big difference in our life.

Wilnor Joseph attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Rodziah Josephson.

Never Give Up

25 years ago, my parents met each other and got married. They won a Green Card and emigrated to Florida in the United States. They came to Saint Petersburg, and on February 18, 1999, I was born in this city.

My life in United State wasn't long. When I was one years old, circumstances caused my family to move back to Ukraine. All my life I lived in Ukraine, and I love this country with all my

heart. In Ukraine I have a big family. Thanks to them I had a happy childhood, and family values are very important to me.

For the last 6 years, I have lived in Lviv. The city is very ancient and beautiful. In Lviv, I started my medical studies at the university. This year I graduated. Being a doctor is my childhood dream. In the university, I had lots of friends. It was a very fun and carefree time; I miss this student life.

On February 24, 2022, the war in Ukraine started. It was a difficult choice for me, but I prefer to be safe. I went back to where my story began. Now, I live with my aunt and uncle. They help me a lot and have become like my new family.

Now it is difficult for me in the United States because I do not know English. I work at a job that is not my dream. I do not have any free time, and I really miss my homeland and my family. But I think everything is in our hands. My motto in life is "Never give up".

USA is a country of opportunities. I think if you put in enough effort, all your dreams can really come true here. Step by step I do everything I can to make my dreams come true.

Christina Krasilechuk is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozlos.

A Horrible Story

The story I would like to share with you happened when I was 14 years old. I would like to tell you a horrible story.

One night it seemed to me that there was someone beside me in my room. I opened my eyes and saw a woman's shade at the window.

She was very tall and thin, and she stretched out her arms to me. I was scared and I screamed as loud as I could. I was sitting on the bed and crying. Suddenly my parents ran into my room.

They were very frightened. Dad turned on the light, and I stopped screaming. It turned out that in the afternoon, my mother

brought a huge palm tree in a large pot from the hall into my room and she put it behind the curtains. That night there was a full moon and it seemed to me that it was a ghost.

I have never been as frightened as during that night...

My name is Nice-nick. I'm from Ukraine. I live in Tallahassee FL.

- *Anonymous Author.*

My Goals, My Future, My Story

My name is Eva Lanza, I was born in Honduras in a little town. In that place I had the best childhood with my big family despite difficult situations. Through this writing, I want to share with you some processes that I lived and goals and ambitions that I have for my future.

All my childhood, since I was 7 years old, I worked hard because my family had a low income and we needed to make money to support the basic needs. My mother was a mother and a father to me. She worked hard and always gave her best. My father was an alcoholic. He spent his money for his vices, and he was never responsible.

When I went to school, sometimes it was very difficult. I didn't have the same opportunities as other children. They made fun of me because of my father and because I walked barefoot. I remember that I bought my first shoes when I was 12 years old, but that served as motivation because I made every effort to obtain good grades and apply for scholarships so that way I could complete my education.

Later, I finished college and I applied to different jobs. Unfortunately, I was unable to get a job. For that reason, I decided to come to this country in search of opportunities like everybody else. I have been here for 3 years now, and I give thanks to my God because I see his blessing in my life.

I met with my husband 2 years ago. We have a dog and we're happy because we're creating our own business. Currently, I'm

working on my plans to visit my mother in Honduras. Also, I want to improve my English and travel to different countries around the world.

One of my goals is to study to become a social worker, to help people with low income and women who are being abused, especially in my country. I hope to achieve my goals. I know it can be hard, but nothing is impossible.

Eva Maria Lanza is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Love Without Borders

This is a love story of two families that migrated to the United States, where circumstances or fate unite them. These are my husband John R. Wood's grandparents.

It began with his mother Bernice's family in the 1900s. Joseph and Antoinette Rouche (John's grandparents) arrived from Lithuania with two of Joseph's siblings and their families. After a brief stay in New York, all the brothers moved to Illinois, where they started hog farms, growing corn and wheat. As the families grew, one of Joseph's and Antoinette's thirteen children was Bronislawa (John's mother). The family changed their last name during World War II into Roach, and Bronislawa changed her name to Bernice (John's mother).

By the same time, his father Glenn's family, Agnus Pennington (John's grandmother), was mourning her father's death in an English shipyard. Agnus, her mother and two brothers arrived in St. Louis Missouri. There John's paternal grandparents met and started their family. Agnus and John Wood were married after John's service in the Marine Corps during World War I. They had a family of 4 children, John worked on the railway and Agnus on the small farm. One of the sons was Glenn (John's father).

Glenn lived in St. Louis and Bernice in Illinois. Bernice's father worked at the same local chemical plant where Glenn worked. Glenn had a little money and usually didn't have money

for lunch. Bernice's father, noticing this, started appreciating him and inviting him to his house for dinner. That is the way he met Bernice. It was not love at first sight, because Glenn thought that Bernice was rich and a farmer's daughter and that she would not be interested in him, however they continued seeing each other, until Glenn went into the army during World War II. Bernice worked in the slaughterhouse and Glenn traveled all over the United States for training until he was sent to England and Europe. After 4 years in Europe and many love letters, Glenn came back home getting ready to be sent to Japan when the war ended. In their letters they dreamed of having many children. Soon after they married and they had 4 children. Glenn went back to work at the chemical plant, and Bernice raised the children. One of them is my husband John R. Wood, who was named after his grandfather.

Coincidence or fate? Their love story was repeated, John met Katty while she was on vacation in Florida in 2008 from Ecuador. They got married in 2021 after 13 years of long-distance relationship, love knows no borders.

- *Anonymous Author.*

My History of Immigration

This story begins in 2014. I already had my second child and I felt very good but the country where I come from economically and socially was being destroyed. My husband and I had participated in the United States Visa lottery the previous year (2013), but we never imagined that I would be chosen among millions of people as the visa winner.

On May 1, 2014, we were surprised to check on the USCIS page that we had been selected with a great prize, which would be to reach this great country legally. Faced with such a surprise, we feel blessed and at the same time scared. We had never lived in another country other than where we were born.

We began to do all the paperwork to be able to leave our country with all the necessary information and whether to start from scratch, without a job, without a home and without an English language.

Despite all the difficulties that have been encountered along this long road called IMMIGRATION, I do not lose faith and the desire to continue contributing to this great nation, and that my children live in freedom, are bilingual and have all the opportunities that are within your reach. U.S, we are thankful to be among all the people who continually work to be better every day.

Thank you very much USA!!

Yuli Mata is an ESOL student at Literacy Services of Indian River County. Her teacher is Faye Sheppard.

How My Childhood Affects My Life

My name is Myrlande Matine, I am from Haiti, a beautiful Caribbean island that, unfortunately, suffers from political unrest and an inefficient government. I come from a family of two girls and I am the older. Tears, joys and faith have all formed my life. Today, I want to talk about how my childhood has influenced who I am today.

I came from an impoverished family with a long line of suffering. My mother lost her parents in her childhood and her older sister treated her like a slave. During my father's youth, he discovered that the person he took for his mother was actually his grand sister but she was kind to him. After a failed romantic relationship, she was forced to move away with my dad.

As adults, my mother was very distrustful of my father because he was a born cheater. They had many arguments. When she became pregnant with me, her first child, those unhappy conditions overwhelmed her. To help eliminate her stress, I became her emotional and physical punching ball.

She often said she did not love me, and criticized me for my dark skin color. She constantly compared me to my little sister. I was the person she punished for everything, even for my little sister's mistakes. She tried to berate me by saying, "You look like your father," the person she hated.

Things became worse when I became sick; perhaps the consequence of emotional and physical hurts. I lost the two first

normal years of school. Of course, in my mother's eyes, the many hospital bills were my fault. "Did I introduce you to your husband?" I thought. These constant hospital visits made me want to become a doctor, my first career choice.

Finally, I found an escape. Unbelievably, I taught myself to read and write. To this day, I do not know how I did that because my mother was illiterate and I was a loner who did not want to play with other children (even my sister). With this skill, I became a model child in my neighborhood. I helped other children who had difficulty reading, I wrote letters for the elderly too. When I finally started kindergarten I was already a star!

Even with my newfound status, the punishments continued but at least they became less severe. Encouraged by other people, my mother bought books for me. Reading was how I could escape my toxic social environment because the arguments never stopped between my parents. Growing up, I promised to be a better version of myself and now I am able to take criticism as a way to improve. My past lessons enabled me to raise my children with love and never criticize them for things beyond their control.

Myrlande Matine is a student at South Florida State College where she is studying to be a nurse. She also attends Ms. Miriani's ESOL class.

Going Back to School

I have always wanted to go back to school. When I was in 12th grade, I wasn't learning anything in school, so I quit. I was working as a single mom. I never thought about going back to school until I took my niece to Columbia City Elementary School, and I talked to them about going back to school. They said to go to the library. The library found me a tutor in Lake City. Now, I love going to my classes. It is my favorite thing to do on Fridays.

When I went to get my driver's license, I couldn't read the test, so someone had to help me. If something happens to my husband, I don't want to have to depend on someone else. I want to succeed in class so I can start my career one day. I can get a better job for myself with benefits. That is why I listen to what my tutors have to say. I want to be a teacher to help young kids to read like me, so they can go to college and be successful in life. I

will succeed in my class until the end of my schooling. One day I will walk the aisle and say, "I got my diploma!"

I'm so thankful for all the tutors who have helped me. I went to night school in Saint Petersburg, but it was closed because the teacher left. I had several tutors at the library in Lake City. My tutors and I have worked together for a long time. Some quit and some passed away, and some I did not get along with. They spent lots of time with me. My reading and math are getting better every day.

I'm glad that I went back to school. I want to challenge myself to do more and more. I don't give up on it. I want to learn how to read and write and get better. I want to get my G.E.D. one day, so I must study hard for the test. I'm not going to give up. I'm a fighter, not a quitter.

I have fun in class. We laugh and talk every week. I enjoy coming to class and learning every day. I'm happy that my tutors were there for me. They help a lot and can see me improve every week. I'm so happy that my family and friends support me. I'm going to be successful in finishing my class.

Marsha McDonald is a loving wife and grandmother who likes making people laugh, going to church, and listening to music. She has two dogs, Clutch and Star. She enjoys going to her reading and math classes at the Columbia County Public Library.

Personal Story

My history starts when I was born on August 26, 2004, coming into the life of my parents as their first child. My dad came to the United States when I was 2 years old, and I was alone with my mom for 6 years. Over time, my mother taught me to be a respectful person and many values that now make me the person I am.

My kindergarten graduation was my first educational achievement, something I achieved thanks to my mother. She was the one who spent nights helping me with my homework even though she is a person with limited education. However, there was always someone missing from my birthdays and religious

ceremonies to my first soccer games. That person was my father who was struggling to give me a better future. At that time, smart phones didn't exist, and I only looked at him in photos and only heard his voice when he called mom and talked to me. One day my father and mother scheduled a video call through a computer, my mother had to go to a place called Cafe to use the Internet. That day became one of the best days of my childhood. That day I saw and spoke for the first time with my dad. On December 21, 2012, my father returned to the country, back home.

That day, I cried with happiness when I saw my father in person for the first time and a new stage of my life began. On March 19, 2013, my sister was born, and two years later my second sister was born.

It was a lot of years of happiness. In 2015, my family suffered from the economy and even my parents pushed me forward. They give my studies to me and my sisters. On March 5, 2018, my dad and I left our country for the United States, for a better future. It's very difficult for me to be without my mom and my sisters. That makes me sad.

Now I'm working in a restaurant, and I'm studying at Lorenzo Walker Technical College to get my GED and give a future to my family and help my parents and fulfill all my dreams.

Julio is a student in adult education in Naples, FL. Her teacher is Ms. Khris.

Repaying the Debt of the Water Element

When I was a teenager I went camping with my parents and siblings. My parents chose a well known place on the San River. We pitched a tent together, and we were in good mood.

Then we went down to splash in the river. The water was shallow; the current was gentle. It was warm, and the golden-yellow sand pleasantly massaged our feet. I spotted a fisherman on the other side and slowly started heading in that direction.

Unexpectedly, the ground on which I was standing collapsed. I felt some mysterious force pulling me under the water. I didn't

know how to swim, I couldn't even scream; I couldn't breathe ... I saw darkness before my eyes. It only lasted a moment, but for me time seemed to stop. For a moment I felt like I was looking at myself from the side and seeing myself sinking.

Then I felt a tug on my shoulder, and the next thing I remember was gasping for fresh air. The fisherman had noticed what had happened to me and jumped to my rescue. He took me to my parents and yelled that they didn't look after me. Next, he explained that a seemingly calm river naturally creates whirlpools that can pull in even an adult person who often ends up drowning.

Less than 10 years later I was sailing with my crew on Lake Solina. This area is difficult to navigate and requires good skills and patience. The lake is located between mountains, and the wind doesn't blow from one specific direction. The wind can spin and surprise us behind the next hill.

It was a glorious sunny day. We entered a huge open space—the main part of the artificial lake created by the dam. My friends were sunbathing on the deck. We chatted cheerfully like four young girls on vacation. I was at the helm of this yacht because a few years earlier I had learned to swim, passed exams, and obtained a captain's license.

At some point I noticed an overturned kayak in the middle of the lake. I got worried; no one was calling for help, but I decided to check it out. We went closer, and it turned out that a small boy was clinging to one side. He was without his life vest. As soon as we came close, I lowered the sails, we stopped next to the kayak, and I held out my hand to him. The boy was so scared that he climbed over me like a monkey and immediately hid in the cabin. When we checked the kayak, it turned out that his father was underneath. They had gone too far from the shore when the water was calm. Suddenly a strong wind broke out; huge waves rose and overturned the kayak.

Alarmed by our behavior in the middle of the lake near the dam, the lifeguards come to us. They took the father and the kayak on board. The terrified little boy, wrapped in our towels, cuddled and reassured by my friends, didn't want to leave the cabin to return to the shore in a motorboat with his father and lifeguards. He was even afraid to touch the water and preferred to

stay on our boat. We set the sails and followed the guards to the pier. There, on the shore a terrified mother was already waiting.

Once someone saved my life; now we saved these two. Life gave me a chance to help someone in need and pay my water debt. The history has come full circle.

Dominika Nepelska is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Dominika's teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Depths of My Soul

My daughter is my world. Though I know little about her, she's still the highlight of my life. Her birth name is Sa'Love Dorn. She's 15 years old and I love her more than anything.

I gave birth to her during a trying time in my life. I thought I was ready to be a mother. Truth be told, nothing can prepare you for hands-on parenthood. There isn't a day planner that can prepare you for it. Every day is a challenge for me. I don't get to see my daughter due to my past addiction and life of crime.

My daughter ended up being caught up in the system. I won't go too deep because it is and always will be a very sensitive subject for me. I named my daughter Sa'Love in hopes of always having someone to love me. I signed over my parental rights in hopes of giving her something that I as a mother "could not". I felt that she could get it from someone else - this was stability.

I was headed to serve for five years, and I had no one close to me with a clean record to take care of her. I've posted a picture of her from our last beautiful moment. I posted on Facebook, Instagram and Snapchat. I always speak about how much I miss and love her. I impatiently await the bittersweet moment when I'm blessed to see her again.

People say grieving the loss of a child in any way is hard and I totally agree. But try having a child out there somewhere and not knowing if she's cold, hungry, being neglected or abused. I have never had any peace of mind since I made that decision. My baby girl is out there, and I know she needs me because I need her.

My name is Savenia S. Nevins, I am a "Childless Mother". Allow me to welcome you to my world of painful love.

Savenia Nevins is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility. She is enrolled in GED class and is in the process of obtaining her GED.

Dreams Versus Reality of My Life

We all have a dream when we are young. We imagine that life is going to hand us a better future without suspecting that it will hold surprises. When I was little, I dreamed of being a mother of 3 children, of having a good husband, a house, a very good job, animals, of being surrounded by all my family and friends in harmony. My dream was to have a life like in the fairy tales.

Unfortunately, as I grow up, reality catches up with you and I realize that everything is a fantasy. Life is made of ups and downs, with great happiness and great disappointments that will make me happy and unhappy. These small joys or big fights will build my character.

People will come into my life as if they were part of my family and leave as if I had never met them. My parents raise me to be a good person, but my wants and needs are not the same as my parents, so I try to make the best of it and go on with the weapons life gives me without being a bad person.

My dreams have changed but I don't regret anything. I don't have children, I got married twice, I traveled a lot, I had great studies, I had jobs that didn't fit but I always did my best to satisfy my employers and the people around me. I met a lot of good and bad people. I have lost family and friends who were pillars in my life, but I do not regret anything. All these events made me the person I am now.

Currently, my dreams are smaller and more realistic. I go through life as if it was my last day and I enjoy every moment without regret. I stay positive and surround myself with positive people. I know that in spite of everything that life will still reserve me very good things, that God exists and that in the stars

I have guardian angels who protect me. I love the life I have now because I have nothing to prove to anyone but myself. My heart is at peace and what awaits me will only be happiness.

Samia attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Living Alone

Living alone in a foreign country can be an exciting, yet challenging experience. Moving to a new place where you are unfamiliar with the language, culture, and customs can be a huge adjustment. Despite the challenges, living alone in a foreign country can offer many opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery.

One of the biggest advantages of living alone in a foreign country is the opportunity to gain independence. When you are in a new place, you are forced to rely on yourself for everything from making new friends to finding your way around. This can be challenging, but it can also help you develop new skills and build confidence in your ability to handle difficult situations. Living alone also gives you the freedom to create your own schedule and pursue your own interests, which can be a welcome change from the routine of everyday life.

Living alone in a foreign country can also offer the opportunity to learn a new language. Immersing yourself in a new culture and language can be a great way to improve your communication skills and better understand the customs and traditions of the people around you. This can also help you to build new relationships and make connections with people from different backgrounds.

Despite the many benefits of living alone in a foreign country, it can also be a lonely experience. Being away from family and friends can be difficult for some people, and adjusting to a new culture and way of life can be overwhelming at times. It is important to stay connected with loved ones and to reach out for support if you are feeling lonely or homesick.

In conclusion, living alone in a foreign country can be a

It's Never Too Late

life-changing experience that offers many opportunities for personal growth and self-discovery. Despite the challenges, it can be a rewarding experience that helps you to develop independence, language skills, and a new perspective on life.

Sebastian Olvera is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. His teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

The Passage of Hurricane Maria

Hurricane Maria changed the lives of many on my island, Puerto Rico. It made landfall on September 20, 2017.

After Hurricane Maria landed on the southeast side of my island, it got closer and closer to my home. Despite this, I felt a certain calm because my immediate family were all with me. Our house was solid concrete and both houses on each side were equally strong.

We were all in the living room listening to those roaring sounds of wind that sounded like a combination of an incoming train and a plane about to land on top of us. That night, we could hardly sleep. When daylight came, we could see the horrors that those 174 mph winds brought with it. Every wooden structure around me was in the air within seconds, not to mention huge trees just flying away.

In the aftermath of Hurricane Maria, the water came back after 6 months, and the electricity came back after 9 months. While we waited for these services to return, we had to wait in long lines for water, ice and gas. This is a little bit of my experience of Hurricane Maria.

Ashley Ortiz Fontanez is from Puerto Rico and attends the ESOL program at South Florida State College. Her instructor is Ms. Miriani.

Love

Love just happened. For love there is no age, race or culture. Just love.

I have been with my husband for 13 years, and I know that love can go beyond age. When I met my husband for the first time, I was 27 and he was 55 years old. Our age difference is 28 years, but I never cared about it. I was in love with him and that was the most important thing for me.

At the time, I was studying psychology in college and was in therapy with a psychologist. The psychologist tried to fix me. She believed I had father issues and also childhood problems. Of course, I had many problems with my family, but in this case, I was just in love, and nothing was broken to be fixed.

For my mental health I chose to live what I felt and quitted the therapy sessions. For me, love is above and beyond everything.

Ligia Palmieri is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

My First Year in the United States of America

I will write about general things that I have been observing. I was surprised by the good health system, the opportunities for education for American citizens and immigrants, and the order in the process for my residence. Other things that I want to mention are respect for the people, respect for traffic rules (really!) and the cleanliness in the cities.

In addition, I like Florida for the weather. I love Saint Petersburg, and I love Safety Harbor, too, because it is a quiet, small town where I can walk, and it is not necessary to have a car. I like the landscape.

Finally, I want to know more about the United States of America.

Maria Perez is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her teacher is Robert Baum.

The Importance of Family

Family is one of the most important and valuable gifts in my life. Family is an important word. For me, it means feeling secure with the people around you, those who you can always count on and share your problems. Real love can exist within a family, even though sometimes a family is composed of good friends rather than blood relations.

Family can be very helpful and supportive in any circumstances. In bad situations, they try to help us reduce our stress and build our strengths. No matter who you are, your family should still accept you. In good situations, they encourage us to explore new things and show gratitude. They always try to give us the best advice. They encourage us to follow our dreams and pursue our goals.

Familial love is special in that it allows you to love and trust each other. A family will always be a family. From the day you are born to the day you die, they will always try to be there. When everything is a mess and nobody is on your side, they will never let you down. Even when we live alone as adults, they will be there through thick and thin, there to give us a hand up.

Our families not only model love for us but also teach us how to be loved. They still love us even with all our mistakes. Family is our light, our strength and our protection. It is best to have good communication, strong connections and frequent talks with them. Of course, every family is different. There is no guarantee that every home will be positive, but for those lucky ones, familial love is indeed something sacred.

Roodnie Petite Frere is from Haiti. She attends ESOL classes at South Florida State College and her teacher is Ms. Miriani.

Learning English

When I first came to the United States I was so excited to start a new experience in a different part of the world. I've set many goals and I still believe that if someone wants something really bad, nothing can stop them. To start with, I thought that my speaking English would be enough to at least talk with people

and do all things by myself.

So my friend and I looked to find a school, Village Readers, where I could learn English and find ESOL classes. I enrolled and it all started from there. I started the experience by going to school, seeing my friends and teachers, and most importantly learning more English. Sometimes I can't come to school every day because I take care of my kid but I still come whenever I can. My English is getting better every day.

Natacha Medor Pierre is a student at the Village Readers Family Education program.

Where I Come From and Where I Want To Go

I was born on one of the largest islands in the Caribbean located in America known as Haiti. I was born into a middle-class family. I have siblings, 2 brothers and 3 sisters. My mom died when I was 5 years old and my dad and siblings lived in the USA, so I grew up with my aunt, sort of alone.

During my adolescence, I experienced a very great depression because of the political system of my country. The different crises of the country affected in particular the education of the youth. I had to face many things. Life has not always been easy for me. In the past, every day, when I got up, I wondered what I was going to do with my life, but today that's over. I left all the worst difficulties behind me.

Now I am in a country that offers me opportunities to have a better future. I want to succeed in all my projects. I am improving my English and I will work to take my GED exam. Then I will study medicine to prepare for my future and I want to offer my future children a better future than mine.

Herlie is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College in Naples, FL and is 18 years old. Herlie is studying English and working towards a GED with Ms.Khris, Mr.Quinonez, and Ms.Rodriguez.

My Journey To Literacy

I went to school until my parents decided to move out of my homeland, Guyana, when I was 6 years old. We moved to Venezuela, where I learned to speak Spanish by watching a lot of TV. I only learned how to speak the language, not how to read or write, because I didn't go to school. After 7 years living there, my mother decided to go back to my home country. I did not get to go to school back in Guyana because, by then, I was too old to start in the first grade.

When I turned 15, my parents arranged my marriage. I got married and gave birth to my two oldest daughters. Then, their father died in an accident. When I was 20 years old, I had two kids and no husband. I struggled to survive while I was living with my parents, because there were no jobs, so I chose to come to the United States.

When my journey began, I didn't know how to read. I made mistakes at work. I struggled to get around. I was embarrassed when I had to tell people that I could not read or write. I was bullied by my co-workers. The patients at the nursing home knew about my problem and told me about a literacy program at the local library. I was 26 years old when I started to read. It's never too late to learn.

Later, I got married again and had a daughter, but life was difficult. It wasn't easy to take care of my home, my daughter, work and continue my education, all at the same time. I kept at it and have accomplished a lot with hard work and the help of my tutors. I studied and got a learners' permit. I learned how to use a computer and use it to search for jobs and apartments. I have been able to help my daughter with her homework. I have gotten several jobs, where I learned more skills. I also continue to study to get even better jobs in the future.

Students that are in the adult learning program should never give up and should be consistent. I learned that you need to make yourself better to move on in the future, or else you're going to be left behind. My teachers did not give up on me. The journey for me was very hard. It takes a long time to learn to read, and patience is important.

Tejwattie Ramsamujh is a Project L.E.A.D. student at the Miami-Dade Public Library System. Her teacher is Sue Kilrain.

God Bless America

This is my story, one perhaps similar to that of many. One day I wake up and realize that nothing is the same. I left behind family, friends, dreams, goals, and it is a path of no return. I recall what I have been taught about love. I find myself here in a new nation and this new dream is a sacrifice. It is finding the willpower I didn't know I had. It is loving a nation that allows me to be free. I don't have to be afraid; I need to use my voice.

Children are clueless as to why they had to flee, including mine. She runs at my pace. I cannot explain to her that we run to the beat of the clock. I do it for both of us so that we do not die in the nation that we were born. So that hope, their dreams and illusions continue more alive than ever, so that they can continue to be children. They are only protecting themselves and if that means having to emigrate and start again, without identity, without a profession, without money, morally destroyed but together, we would do it over and over again.

For the future of a new generation, I came to the nation that did not see me born but is watching me grow. A country that gives me the opportunity to continue, that does not undo every part of me. This is a place where nothing is impossible if you set your mind to it. It is the nation of rebirth, where dreams come true and it's never too late to try, where the only one who sets limits is yourself.

Here we are living in the present without looking back, enjoying each day as if it were the last, without regretting what we have lived and longing for what is to come, breathing deeply the air that God allows us to breathe. God bless the nation of North America; God bless this nation where dreams that had already been forgotten are built.

Kenia Reyes attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Yes, You Can! Keep Going!

I have been in the United States of America for one and a

half years. After many changes in my family and myself, I have decided to go back to school to learn English. It was the best decision. It is not enough to try to understand the language and be satisfied with the basic knowledge. To feel at home, you must do it with love. That's why I enrolled at Palm Beach Central Adult Education at night.

First, I had been out of the labor market for 20 years. It was a challenge to work in another country, especially with the language barrier, but I did it! Today, I work at Home Goods with great willingness to help customers without fear of speaking.

Second, here I am writing my third essay, can you believe it?!

The first essay I wrote was in the Summer of 2022 and I couldn't believe I was selected for the book. The second was for the county. I am very grateful to be able to participate and possibly get published again in the Florida Literacy Coalition 2023 Adult Learner Essay book.

Third, every day as I improve my English, I feel more involved in everything that surrounds me in this great country. I want to thank the school for giving us amazing tools to practice.

Last but not least, thanks to my dear teacher, who is very enthusiastic, creative, and committed to her students. She instills the confidence that a foreigner needs in himself or herself to face all the changes.

It is not easy to move forward every day when there are events that can change your life. Our teacher teaches us to remain calm, to speak, to think in simple words, and to feel confident in ourselves. My teacher not only teaches us English, but also how to face the day-to-day challenges.

It is incredible how my classmates and I have learned from each other, even though we are from different countries. All my colleagues are incredible. We are from different cultures, but we are united by the same purpose in this country. We have become a family that supports each other and encourages each other to move forward.

Since starting English class, I have already reached one of my

goals. I have achieved my goal of helping others, which makes me very happy and very proud of myself.

In conclusion, you have to encourage yourself, believe in yourself and try to find energy with nice people to help you grow more. Always have an open and positive mind, trusting in the hand of God.

Yes, you can! Keep going!

Deily Riera is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Love

Is love a feeling or a decision? For many years I have been trying to learn about love. The path/road hasn't been easy, but every difficult moment in my life has been an opportunity to understand the importance of loving if we want to be happy and offer our love to others.

Sometimes we can think that love is butterflies around our stomach, and I agree. It is a beautiful feeling. I believe it is a little part of love, but in my experience, love is not a feeling. It is a decision when we accept a person or situation with everything, completely. And we can set aside our desires. We don't try to change the person because when we love, we can guide and advise but not impose.

When we find someone who thinks differently, it is a great opportunity to make the decision to love because it is easy to love someone with similarities. But when we accept the differences and are still loving, that is love. When we can look at this moment like a gift to love and be grateful with this opportunity, I believe we'll be happier. Maybe the challenge is to be attentive to these gifts, to grow up, and be the best version of ourselves.

Usually, when we have differences with people or situations, it is because they are not like we want them to be. These moments are related to suffering, and we don't like suffering. However,

I believe that it is in this moment when we can be closer to demonstrate our love. Sometimes, we want to control everything and when something happens and changes our plan, we feel sadness and madness, but we can choose whether to be sad or love. I'm completely sure if our plans changed, it is because God has a better plan for us. However, are we willing to put our trust in Him?

God is my great teacher, who with deepest love and patience, takes my hand, especially in hard moments, to guide me and show me how to love. I often wonder if I love as Jesus loves me. No doubt, I have a lot to learn, but I trust Him. I know He is teaching me with love and kindness. The only requirement for me is to open my heart and follow Him. I have failed many times, but He is always by my side to lift me up.

Finally, I want to share these words from Santiago Molano, a Colombian motivational speaker, "The love is the medicine, and its absence is the illness". I believe our world needs this medicine. We need to love more, and every day is a gift to love more.

Mariana Rincon is a student in Adult College and Career Readiness at OTC – East Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

What I Would Never Do Again

This story is about the experience of living together with my parents and my cousin in the crossing to get to the United States from Cuba. It is very important for me because it changed our lives completely and is an experience I don't want to repeat.

That trip was very hard for us because we went through many difficulties like hunger, cold, fear, and many other things that I will count on. The most difficult thing of all that we went through was separating and leaving behind the people we loved the most, such as my grandparents, my uncles, my cousins and my best friends.

Verena Riveron is a student at Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Khris.

My Life In Guatemala and the United States

My life in Guatemala wasn't good. I had nothing to eat, I

didn't go to school, instead all day I supported myself by working as a construction worker which is a very hard job. I would get paid 50 Quetzales a day, which in the United States is equivalent to 5 dollars a day. I barely was able to earn enough for a pound of meat. Luckily thanks to God my family gave me the opportunity to come to the United States and my life here is already colored. I go to school and I am fighting for my goals and dreams. I have food to eat, I have an education and I am learning to speak English. With the help of the people who supported me, more than anyone thanks to my parents and my siblings. My siblings and I tell people that in this world there is nothing impossible, everything is possible with effort and all will be fine.

Baltazar Rodriguez is a student at Collier Adult Education. His teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Life is Too Short

One year ago, after giving birth to my fourth child, I had a seizure and God saved me. It was on September 13th, fifteen days after giving birth. I was cooking and suddenly I couldn't see anything. Everything was black. I was able to hear what happened around me but couldn't see. I lost consciousness and when I woke up at the hospital, it was 8:40pm. I arrived at 12:10pm!

I wasn't in a coma because I spoke to the personnel at the hospital, but I wasn't the real me. I didn't know anything about me during those 7.5 hours. They did a lot of tests, but they didn't reveal anything. They sent me home on September 14th. I was lucky because I wasn't alone when the seizure happened. I'm scared to think if it had happened when I was alone with my baby, but my God was with me. I prayed and I thanked God because I knew that it was him who gave me a second chance.

It's been sixteen months since this happened, I still go to see my doctor and some specialists too. Not one of them can explain what happened to me. I realize how life is too short. The best moment is today. If you love someone, show this person you love, if you can help, help because you don't know what will happen tomorrow. In every situation God is in control. I'll always say thank you to Him because He offered me a second chance, a second chance to change my life in a positive way, to love my kids more than ever,

It's Never Too Late

and tell anyone how God is good.

Marie Carline Romain is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education. She is a loving mother of 4 special boys. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Opportunity is Knocking

On February 28, 2018, I decided to make the big decision of coming to this country with my daughter. I had many goals in mind, but most importantly, I was thinking about my daughter's future. I would think a lot about my family, and I would worry. It hurt me that I was leaving them. I had a very clear vision that this new beginning wasn't going to be easy, but that it wasn't going to be impossible.

When I got here, I saw the reality of life. I'm not going to deny it; my life changed completely. The lifestyle, the language, the different culture, and other stuff, were new to me, but it didn't matter because now I had a chance to a better life, better opportunities, opportunities I couldn't have had in my country. I sometimes get a lot of nostalgia on important dates or holidays because I miss my family and special people that I know, but I know those are obstacles that I must overcome day to day. It isn't easy but everyday I try to see the good side of life, specially in bad situations.

This country is a country where if you have your goals very clear, its willing to make them become true. I am very grateful to this country for it has given me new opportunities and it has given me lots of blessings. In my home country, I had my family but not the opportunities I have now. Here I have opportunities and not my family, but I understand that in life you can never have everything you want. We can dream big and try to be successful in our dream's day after day.

Coming to this country changed my life completely. I miss my family and my loved ones, but I'm sure everything happens for a reason. I love my country and this country because they have both given me great things. Even though it is a very poor country, my country gave me the opportunities to grow up surrounded by

love and nature. Since it couldn't give me the opportunities I have right now and I will take advantage of every single opportunity this country and God have given me.

Ingrid Salazar is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

The Brandenburger Cat Story

This story is about a special cat that we adopted from a little town in Eastern Germany near Berlin. My husband was stationed in Wiesbaden, Germany at that time when we decided to adopt a cat. We were informed by my mother, who lived near the little town of Brandenburg, that there was a little kitten available if we're interested. We agreed to adopt that kitten and asked my dad if he would drive her to our home in Wiesbaden. Since my dad worked in the Frankfurt area and commuted on weekends to Eastern Germany, he offered to transport the kitten to our home in Wiesbaden.

It was a 5-hour ride for the cat and a 5-hour audio constraint for the driver. Nevertheless, the cat arrived, and she gotten used to the house until one day she decided to jump from the second story balcony and landed on her muzzle. We found her at the local animal shelter and had to bring her to a veterinarian to remove several teeth that intruded her nose. Once she recovered from the surgery, she decided to leave the house again. We were notified by somebody that they found our cat and brought her to an animal hospital.

During this time, we had a son who lived with us, and the kitten became attached to him. She met him every day at the bus stop when he came back from work. A couple years later, he returned to the U.S. at which time the kitten became sad and lonely. We decided to look for him.

One day we were notified by the animal shelter that somebody found our kitten and had taken her to the animal hospital in Frankfurt. The person that brought our cat to the hospital thought that our cat had a breathing problem and was suffocat-

ing. When we picked our cat up from the hospital, we ended up having to pay a substantial amount of medical bills for all the diagnostics they performed on the animal. Since then, the cat was restricted until we returned to the U.S. It was a 9-hour flight since there was no space available in the animal section.

We arrived in Fort Belvoir, VA. A couple of days later, we traveled with our cat to the Tampa Bay area, our new home in Clearwater. After our cat decided to explore the area, she again disappeared for several weeks. We reported her missing again and one of our neighbors informed us that she found our cat and named her Matilda or Betty. After all her adventures, we've decided to keep our cat in the house and hope that she will become an inside cat for the rest of her life. This concludes my story of our special cat by the name of Meisje.

Marie Schweda is a student in the ESOL evening program of the Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Becoming Myself

I have experienced many situations in my life that could be considered turning points. Each of these situations literally turned my life upside down. These were personal relationships, friendships, work relationships and events that happened around me. The frustrating part is that I could not influence nor prepare for them in any way. The only thing I could possibly do was to somehow survive and live to fight another day. Well, at least that's what I told myself. In difficult moments, I began to ask myself why the same tragic things keep repeating themselves over and over again.

Questioning myself and my circumstances was the point that my life dramatically turned around. These burning critical questions set me out on a serious path of self-discovery. The process that guides my transformation is beyond fascinating. In the best sense of the word, I went through a lot of pain in the beginning. As I continued the journey of self-discovery, I knew that I had to face my emotions about the deaths of my loved ones, face the guilt heaped on me for leaving my home country, and many other painful realities that I had buried deep inside myself. If one wants to see the light, one must go through the darkness. I began

to notice that my internal setting was not the way that I wanted to live. Instead, I was people pleasing those who shaped me from birth, especially my parents, kindergarten and school. I began to realize how many fears I had inside me. I had to open up all my fears and start dealing with them and finally start answering my questions truthfully.

Many people whom I considered close suddenly left my life, everything started to change and it was not pleasant. I felt so alone. On the other hand, new people came into my life and with them also energy and vibrations. The communication between us was different, the topics were different and I understood that I was also thinking, acting and reacting differently. I started to feel “new”. I began to notice how my thinking was changing, bit by bit. My thoughts were no longer rooted in fear. I was reacting differently to situations, and to people in my life who questioned my thought patterns. It brought me relief, peace, and above all, self-acceptance. Although there are some who do not like this liberated new me.

Honestly, the feeling of inner peace and self-discovery is the most beautiful feeling I have ever experienced. It’s a lifelong process and once embarked on this journey, there’s no going back. It requires patience, persistence, & communication with one’s open heart. After years of living the life everyone else wanted me to live, I’m finally becoming MYSELF.

Lucy Silverio is a student of Tonya Richardson in level 7 ESOL, at Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota, FL.

Is It Time For Me?

Is it time for me, this little sentence is in my head. Every day I wake-up and look in the mirror; I look at myself and I say, “Is it time for me?”

“Is it time for me?” can be just a sentence with only five (5) words and thirteen (13) letters, but for me it is so much more.

What can I learn about it, that was my first reaction as the words rolled off my tongue. I know it’s in my head how come I don’t understand it?

Then these two words; “do it,” came into my head. To tell the truth, I didn't give it any importance until I realized what would happen if I put all the words together. So, that is exactly what I did.

Is it time for me to do it? I said to myself, do what? This was the most difficult part because I had to choose and think about the message coming through me, but I am not good at doing that type of thinking. Before, I was this teenager, now I am a woman. I can say that, but still I didn't know what I wanted to do or what I was supposed to do.

WOW! Now I understand, now I got it. It is time for me to grow, not on my weight or my height, but on my mind, on what I wanted for myself. I was so happy when I realized it was time for me to do it and I will do it.

This type of thinking started when I first came to the USA. Before, in my mind, I always thought that coming to the USA would make everything fine, but I was wrong. I started going to school and started dreaming and that makes a realistic goal.

Ooh, yes! It is my time, and I will do it!

I did it.

Amanda St Louis, who was born in Haiti, has been attending the ESOL Advanced class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus in Florida. She comes to school every day because she has a dream, and each day is precious to her.

I Still can't Believe This Is True

That night, I woke up at almost 5 am, and didn't feel sleepy at all. I heard my middle daughter spinning in bed, she woke up too. It was quiet on the street. Then I heard the sound. A strong, piercing whistle of an object that will tell the air with incredible speed.

My first thought was that this high-speed car drove under our windows. But I understood that cars cannot accelerate to such

speeds. The sound traveled through the air. A moment later, I heard two explosions.

My heart froze. Time stopped. I was in complete silence and weightlessness. My brain refused to believe that this was... an explosion.

“Mom, what is this?”

My daughter broke the silence with her frightened voice. I could not find the words; all consciousness resisted the true:

This is a war...

I woke up the other two children and my mother. Keeping calm, we quickly put the necessary things into our suitcases. I calmly sorted the essential medicines and warm clothes. The children packed their favorite toys.

My ex-husband arrived. “I will take you to Poland, they opened the borders,” he said.

Maybe we should move into the basement, I quietly asked, maybe Russia just scare us? But he confidently refused. The news has already talked about the possibility of a nuclear attack on Ukraine.

My mother refused to go.

We loaded our things, the dog and left.

After driving 20 minutes, we saw a tank near the road, in the forest. Our young guys, our brave soldiers have already taken up their positions to defend Kyiv.

Cars were driving along the right lane to leave Kyiv, columns of Ukrainian tanks were moving along the left lane into to Kiev.

Panic makes people out of control. We’ve seen a lot of fatal crashes, cars going off slippery roads just because the drivers panicked.

We were on the road for 4 days. 4 days we lived with the whole family in the car. The line at the border with Poland moved very

It's Never Too Late

slowly.

When we got to our destination, my ex-husband said goodbye to the children, perhaps he sees them for the last time and leaves to defend our homeland.

From Poland, me, children and the dog went to America. This strong country opened the doors of help to save us. We were accommodated in a hotel, and provided with everything we needed; food, clothing, and medical insurance. A few weeks later I was able to go to college to improve my English. I had absolutely no money. The American government took care of us and does this to this day.

Friends are known to be in trouble. The American people have become our friends. They helped me find a job, took me to the doctor when necessary, and provided me with mobile communications.

Now my family is safe. And only now, thanks to America and its citizens, we can feel safe and pray for our native Ukraine. We believe in victory.

Olena Sukachova is a student at ACE Adult Community Education. Her teacher is Joanne Clark.

My Testimony

I would like to share the story of how I met myself. Before I figured out who I really was, I felt uncertain about my life and had no sense of identity. I remember feeling angry with life and feeling like I had no purpose.

The most important day of my life was realizing everything I'd been doing was driving me nowhere. So I decided to surrender my life, my heart, and my dreams to my best friend, Jesus, the same Jesus you have probably heard of before, maybe from your grandmother. I'm telling you this because it also happened to me. The first time I heard about Him was from my grandma. She always talked about His love and how He cares for us. As I listened, I felt a sense of peace, but you know we always want to take our paths in life. I realized that I had been searching for something to

give my life meaning and purpose and that something was Him.

Five years ago, I was finishing my college degree. I was living at the lowest point of my life. I even had a stable business and the things people define as successful, but never in my life had I experienced so much fear, instability, anxiety, and low self-esteem. It was at that moment that I realized I needed help. My husband (my friend back in that day) helped me to connect with a local church so I could share my story with a leader who could guide me to find and recognize the root of all troubles in my life.

After that day, my life began to change. I no longer felt angry and lost; instead, I felt filled with hope, learning how Jesus helped and encouraged others, which filled me in ways I cannot describe. I understand that life is about the purpose of helping others, and I knew that God had a plan for my life and to help others with everything I've been through.

One of the most significant changes in my life after accepting Jesus was my relationship with my family and friends. I had always struggled with communication and understanding with them, but after that, I felt more connected and loving toward them. I started to see the good in them, and I was able to forgive past hurts and conflicts.

I also found that my relationship with God grew stronger every day. I started to pray more and be present in every moment, which helped me to give thanks at all times. I feel so honored to live this life, and I am grateful for the opportunity to share my journey with everyone I know and who loves me. I began to see the world differently and knew God was always with me, guiding and protecting me.

Gesarela Talavera is a student at the Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Gesarela's teacher is Lisa Cox.

Fight For Your Dreams!

I came to the United States like many people; in a new place and not knowing how to speak English. I felt deaf and dumb even though I could speak and hear clearly.

After being here, I had my first daughter. It was already difficult for me to work, since I had to decide if I should work and pay the little that I earned to someone else to take care of my daughter. I had the “need” to work because those were difficult times.

In those years, I thought about how to help my family. I considered starting a business or simply looking for a job from home that would allow me to generate an income and take care of my family at the same time.

Then, my second daughter was born, and it became even more difficult to go to work. Paying for childcare is sometimes more expensive than staying home. When my oldest daughter started going to school, I also started working part-time.

In a few months, that part-time became many hours of work. I went from working 4 hours a day to working 13 hours a day (I really don't know how that happened). Thinking about it, yes, expenses increased and it got out of hand, so we had many debts.

When my 2 daughters began to go to school, without thinking about it I became addicted to work. I said no to nothing. One day, I began to think how much time of each day I saw my daughters. It was sad to know that out of a 24-hour day I only saw my daughters for 4 hours (between school time, after care and their sleeping time). My heart broke and I told myself this is not fair to them or to me or to my husband. All this had to change.

Why did you work so much? I asked myself. We had many expenses and debt. I thank God, who is always watching over me and my family, for giving us light and a lot of wisdom and the will to make a change in our lives, especially in our finances. All I knew was that to achieve this, I had to learn to speak the language of this nation, English. It would be difficult for me without time to study, and tired from work, but I made the decision and enrolled in adult school.

Time has passed and I'm still looking for something better. I don't want to spend more time in jobs that I don't like just because I don't speak English. My biggest dream is to prepare and be able to go to college and study Accounting to start my own bookkeeper business. I studied business administration in my country, and I can continue that career here through a bookkeep-

er business.

I know it's not late. I'm still fighting for my dream to give my family better quality time and quality of life.

Lizzette Torres is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Find a Way, Not an Excuse

I am a native of the city of Tampico, Tammaulipas, Mexico. I currently have 4 children. Like many others, we arrived in this country with nothing but with a lot of responsibility and many fears.

I remember perfectly that the first thing I did was to look for a job. I had a lot of difficulty learning to work because I didn't understand the English language. Once I learned the rhythm of work well, I saw I could earn and meet my needs and those of my children. I could clearly see that I did not have to depend on anyone. This filled me with pride because it was easier for me, economically. But in terms of my mentality, I am still blurry about my future because I thought by having a job, I already had everything.

My aunt told me to study English, but I told her no. All I wanted was to work and be able to provide my children what was necessary. In reality, even if I wanted to go to class at that time I couldn't since I had 2 jobs. Every time I got home, I was so tired that I just wanted to sit on the sofa, put my feet up and rest.

Then, I met a wonderful man, and I married him. He is an ideal partner, and we get along well. One day I woke up, I took the courage, and I told him I was going to study English. Thanks to him I have the time that I can attend the class. He has a landscape company. When I am fluent in English, I can help him receive calls and do the contracts.

I am so happy with my decision. I enjoy my class very much. It excites me to see a phrase on the classroom wall and it affects

me so much that I took a photo of it. Whenever I want to give up, I look at the picture and read it. It says, "If You Really Want To Do Something, You'll Find A Way. If You Don't, You'll Find An Excuse". It is beautiful and true.

Pricila attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Lisa's Story

I came to the United States from Liberia, West Africa when I was 13 years old. Many things were different in the U.S., such as the way people dress, the food (which I did not like at first), transportation, and lifestyle. In Liberia, people share their rooms, their TVs and their cell phones, but in the U.S. Everyone has their own. In Liberia, kids play outside their houses, but in the U.S., there are playgrounds.

When I went to school here, everything was different, and I struggled. My parents didn't know how to help me, so I shut down. I felt very scared and uncomfortable in school, and they put me in a special education class. Special Ed was bad because they were teaching things I already knew, and it was embarrassing, and they treated us like little kids. I was in the Special Ed class for three years of high school and each year they taught us the same thing, so I never learned anything new.

After graduation, I got a job at Wuesthoff Hospital doing housekeeping, but I did not like that job, so I quit and went to work at Wendy's in 2013. I saved money and I bought my first car. I also got a second job working at Walmart in the evenings and on my days off from Wendy's. I also started going to Brevard County Adult Education to get my GED. Then I got pregnant with my first child. When I found out I was pregnant, I quit school and continued to work at Walmart so I could save money.

After I had my baby, life became super hard. I didn't get any sleep, so I quit everything and stayed home to be a full-time Mom. When my baby daughter was 8 months old, I found out I was pregnant with my second child and then I really felt a lot of stress about raising two children and how that would impact what I wanted to do in life. Even though I quit everything, my

mother motivated me to keep going and be strong for my children. It was my mother's motivation that pushed me to keep going and keep myself together.

When my kids started Head Start, the staff asked me about my goals, and I said I needed help reading. They referred me to Literacy for Adults in Brevard (LAB) and I started working with a tutor. I also started going to church to help me with my mental state and my stress. My mother and people at church gave me advice and helped me with life. I want to get my GED, but even if I don't, I want to be able to read and understand what I am reading. Since I started with LAB, I feel more comfortable with reading. I still struggle, but I keep learning. I told myself I am going to keep trying to reach my goals.

Lisa Tubman is a student at Literacy for Adults in Brevard (LAB). Her teacher is Mark Tomassone.

My Best Day Ever

My name is Marco Alexander Valdes Bello, but everybody calls me Chito. I lived with my parents on the Central Road in front of the police station and near the hospital. My mother is a doctor and my father is a war pilot.

Since I was child, I always dreamed of being an athlete. But I was thin, so I did not do well in training at camp. Then, I started eating a strict diet so that I could become the athlete that I wanted.

Later, I opened my mind to other sports, such as baseball. I turned out to be one of the best players in my country. My team and I went out of my country for a baseball competition in Mexico in the sub-15 category and we won 3rd place. Then, our coach took us to a hotel where we spent a week celebrating our win.

When we arrived back home in Cuba, our parents and friends were waiting for us to give us a warm welcome. That was the best day of my life. We continued our training not to lose our fitness and we will be ready to face other opponents in the future.

Marcos Alexander Valdes Bello attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Roots

Doctrines do not shape my mind. I believe in the power of self-confidence, not weakness, probability, or pain. I am confident that I will give all of myself to achieve my goals. I do not need to empower myself because the power is within me. It is said that the most substantial ideas and feelings come from the mind, but, in fact, it is the entire body being one with the universe. Perfection does not exist, regardless of how perfect or confident one might be. Instead of giving up in frustration, let your inner, ever-growing strength emerge.

Although my family was never wealthy, I never felt poor. I learned to seek the best in simplicity. Being poor or rich is just a standard; I was rich being poor. I grew up with two women taking care of me. I saw my beliefs used against me and kept all that pain inside. However, my soul was never alone; no matter the challenges faced, one always rises over any dire circumstances. I kept a smile on my face, even in the most challenging times, and that is because of the two women I call family.

I have always loved to learn: a knowledgeable man is free. It is truly astounding what we can learn from reading. It feeds our minds, so we can accomplish all we dream of. I participated in numerous academic contests. I loved how it challenged me to improve. One of the most difficult goals I have ever had was to get onto the National Team of Chemistry in Cuba to participate in international Olympic contests. Even when people told me that I could not get there by reading books, I was disciplined, focused, and—more importantly—I had faith. In 2021, I was invited to be a member—the youngest in the program—of the Cuba National Team of Chemistry.

For a while, I used to worry about not being good enough; this is known as impostor syndrome in psychology. So many others have failed, so the thought of weakness comes to our minds and makes us doubt ourselves. However, that is also the key to success: “If they can make it, why can’t I?” I realized that it does not matter how good we are; there will always be people thinking we are not good enough. Therefore, I realized then that the only thoughts I had to worry about were my own. Where I come

from, people always expect good things from you, even if they hope you fail. Nevertheless, I still seek the good in each person I meet, knowing that my faith in humanity remains solid and trustworthy.

Jose David Valles, a former student in the Adult ESOL Program at Miami Dade College, is now majoring in Chemistry and works as a Chemistry tutor at MDC. His instructor was Robert Kelso.

The English I Learned In My Country

In my country, most people go to schools that promise to teach English instantly. Since I attended one of these schools and worked using English for years, it made me think that living in the United States would not be a problem. Also, I had already visited the United States and Canada without any glitches. So, English was something I mastered, I thought!

But OMG! When I settled in this country, little by little, I realized that technical English for work in aviation differs a lot from daily English. Likewise, the level of English required for tourism is much less than the level required to live in the country. I understood this quickly when my wife was hospitalized, and I had to communicate with the doctor. I had to face the problem of not understanding what people were saying to me and although facial and hand gestures helped, it was still difficult to comprehend everything. Somehow, my wife and I managed to coordinate medical appointments, request a taxi service, then later, schedule immigration appointments, and even buy plane tickets.

Even when you think you finally mastered the language, you realize there is a risk of mispronouncing words, and you might end up saying something that offends someone without meaning to. I learned this in the elevator of a hotel on the beach when a couple started a conversation with me and when we said good-bye, I said to the man “enjoy the beach.” However, because of my mispronunciation, they understood “enjoy the bit*!#.” They looked at me surprised. I understood my mistake which I corrected by saying, “because Clearwater’s sand and sea are the best!” The couple then burst out laughing.

Since our arrival in Clearwater, my wife has been interested in learning English and found the ESOL program at Pinellas Tech-

nical College. When I realized I had limited English skills, I also entered the ESOL program where Mrs. Zanardini-Rojas, who uses an excellent methodology, has taught us a different kind of English. An English that helps in daily situations. She skillfully uses methods of teaching English within the history of the United States, customs, and many other interesting topics. Classes often have guest speakers who talk about Basics of Car Buying or Credit Reports and Credit Scores, which is very helpful when living in this country, which now, we call home.

In conclusion, ESOL classes with teachers like Mrs. Zanardini-Rojas has helped me improve my level of proficiency in English, and I will always carry her and the ESOL program at Pinellas Technical College in my heart.

Eduard Vargas is a student at Pinellas Technical College. His teacher is Mrs. Zanardini-Rojas.

My Life Experiences, So Far

On a Saturday, in May 2011, I took my luggage and left behind my house, my friends and my family. I drove the long, narrow streets of my city to the airport and boarded a flight to the United States of America. Will I ever come back to my small and peaceful home? The shadow of the houses and buildings on my way to the airport made my departure sadder.

The airplane took off, shook my thoughts, and distracted me from the pain of leaving home. Through the plane window, I watched yellow rooftops, the light of the sun setting over the cathedral, and the beautiful landscape of my favorite city. I watched until the plane went higher and the dark clouds appeared in the sky. With that my trip began and I flew closer to my dreams of a better life with my wife and daughters in the United States.

When I arrived in this country, I didn't know what would happen to my family and me, but we were prepared for anything. I searched for jobs for a while, and then things began to improve and my wife and I got a job. Thanks to God and my family!

After 3 years in the United States, my former company offered me a job in another country for a while. I accepted the offer and

my wife and I moved there. The experience, including the challenges, were awesome. I felt very proud us for having the courage to take this opportunity. After a while, we came back here to the United States to continue everything again. Better mentally and physically, things were great for everyone in the family.

It's good to be able to stand on my own two feet. Sitting out on the balcony, I feel serene and at home with my family. Yet, I always feel there is more to discover. Nobody knows what the future holds for us. The bounds of my garden may be small, but there is a whole world outside there, and it is one I will never get tired of experiencing and learning.

Pablo Velez is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. His teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

The Strong Girl

A story of a girl who passed through the Darien River. There are some things in life that happen and you don't know where you got the strength and courage to survive it.

There was a girl who had to cross the Darien river to be able to achieve the American dream. She had to take the road from Darien to Panama and walk on foot in the Darien jungle, witnessing dead and injured people.

After the girl entered the United States with her family, she found many opportunities such as school and work. She chose not to do anything bad and to do everything well. After that, the girl became stronger, and she is pursuing her dreams to be a great doctor and model.

Nothing is impossible if you put yourself to achieve your dreams, just trust in God. That's the story of the girl.

Dioskalie Vertilus is a student with Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Pending Subject

It all started when my father died, my story is not one of mistreatment, abuse, etc. Personally, this has left an incurable mark on me. Knowing that my father died and not being close to him is something that marks me for life. I feel like I have a pending issue with my father. I had everything that a true man knew how to honestly give his family: housing, food, education, love, and endless things that only a good father knows how to give.

When I decided to come to this country, to live and stay permanently, I knew that this type of event could happen, but I never imagined that it would be so soon upon arrival, because my father was in good health. For me it is painful to be in this room with almost 20 unknown people around me and write this without my eyes not shedding a tear, but it is comforting because I believe that there is a life after death and life must go on.

I include all this as part of my personal story because that's how I feel at 42 years old. Having a good job in this country because cleaning is a great job for me and not sharing my achievements with my loved one frustrates me. Today I can say that the only goal I need in this story is to learn the English language. This is why today I am in this room so that you, Mrs. Josephson, can help me add it to part of my story.

Nelmary attends Monroe County Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Rodziah Josephson.

Free At Last

I'm going to tell you how I became free. When I was 8 years old, back in my hometown of Quito, Ecuador, I would always go to the backyard of the house and daydream of one day being free. When I was around 3 years old, I was adopted by a family back in Ecuador. As I got older, I realized that I was not with my biological parents. I don't know why, but this bothered me so much. It was like the inside of me was lost and couldn't find peace. As I learned from my adopted grandmother about God, I started to pray and write letters to God in hopes that He would bring me home. I felt like He didn't answer me.

As I got older, I continued to pray as I looked up to the sky, asking God to help me. One day my adopted mother told me that

I was going to be moving to the USA. I knew then that God had answered my prayers. When I was able to move out on my own and was able to take care of myself even though I was only 16 years old, I felt free and thanked God for answering my prayers.

My advice to you is never to give up. God answers prayers in different ways. He didn't bring me back to my biological family, but he did bring me to the USA, where I was able to start my own life and start my own family and felt free.

Alecsandra Wright is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

My Life's Transition From Colombia to the U.S.

Since I came to America in 2006, my life has changed in many ways. I was a little bit sad when I left Colombia because I left my family, friends, and the city, Barranquilla, where I was born. I came to the United States because I married a nice Colombian American citizen who gave me my residency.

I arrived with many dreams, the desire to continue a productive life and achieve new goals in my new country. I had an excellent experience in the United States since it was my first time leaving home. I learned so many essential things like culture, language, and currency. Also, I met many people from different countries with different cultures, and I began to appreciate the value of their food.

I began my English classes in 2007 at Winter Park Tech, today Orange Technical College (OTC), East Campus. After about a year in the United States, I left school and went to work. I returned to school in 2010 and continued learning English for one more year. Then, unfortunately, I left again to continue working but always with the idea of continuously learning the language to function more freely.

The fact is that without good language skills, jobs are limited. Although I am a bit shy, I am a friendly person, and I like to talk about current issues, politics, music, the news, or everyday topics.

Thanks to the English I learned at school, I became an

American citizen in 2012. Becoming a citizen requires knowledge of the English language, like speaking, writing, and answering questions with some degree of understanding.

I was pleased with the results since the interview at the immigration office went so well, and it helped me by lifting my confidence in my language skills. I don't deny that it was hard work, time, and money, but it was worth it.

After I became a U.S. citizen, my husband invited me to work with him in the field of Website Development. Since then, we have worked together in our small business and have been designing websites for small businesses in the area.

In August of 2022, I returned to Orange Technical College to continue and finish my ESOL English classes. I need to finish what I started years ago because it is helping me communicate better with Americans at work, church, and my friends. It is also helping me with my self-development.

I thank God every day. I feel happy living in this great country. The U.S. opened the doors for me to live my life the best way I know how. I am living peacefully with my husband working on something we love to do.

Maria Zarur is a student at Orange Technical College – East Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

Special Moments

I give thanks to God for what happened in my life. Even when I lost two loved ones, I learned a lesson in forgiveness. I learned that one should not live with resentment, because once people are gone there is no way to talk things out. Life is uncertain and there is no time to waste on resentment.

My brother who was estranged from me died two years ago. We had some good times, but mostly we were not in touch. I am glad that we had time to tell each other that we care regardless of our bad times. When my mother told me that he died, I was at peace. At that time, I realized the importance of talking things out and solving any problems with others before it is too late.

I started to go back to my hometown on vacation every year. I developed a good relationship with my mother. Every time that I went, I made a point to tell her that I loved her. A year ago, she died, and I was very sad, but happy that I learned my lesson. I will never hold grudges or resentment against anyone anymore. That is wasting precious time that will never come back.

I visit them at the cemetery every year. If life allows me, I will do it for many years. If anyone asks me if those losses changed my life, I will say yes. I learned a lot. I will be close to my family, enjoy my children, and make the most out of our time together.

Baudelia Zepeda is a student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Larid Lopez.

My Favorite Day

Holiday On The Beach

Going to the beach on a holiday has become my favorite day. I had never been to the beach until I was 13 years old. I'd only seen it on TV. When I got there, I went straight into the water to swim with my brothers and sisters. We also ate a lot of seafood and drank coconut juice. At night I played cards, watched TV together with them and went out for a walk on the shore. The wind that blew at night on the beach was so good to feel and the sounds of the waves from the sea made me feel relaxed.

The next day, we rode bicycles. We also rode on the horse. My parents and my relatives took photos of us together. I saw a few speed boats and fishing boats. One thing that surprised me while walking on the beach was so many small holes in the ground. What could they be? Finally, I discovered that they were homes of the tiny crabs. They came out from the sea and entered the holes.

The weather on the beach was pleasant during the day but it was a little cool at night. On the last day of our vacation, my parents, my siblings and my relatives watched the sunset. The color of the sky, the weather at that time and that moment itself showed us the beauty of nature. My parents bought some shirts and bracelets with decorated shells as souvenirs.

Everyone in the world has their memorable moments on their favorite days, and they don't forget them easily. My holiday on the beach became my favorite day with unforgettable memories.

Wai Yan Lin Aung is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. He attends the virtual English class. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My First Day of School

The story involves my family and me too. My first day begins January 30 in my house, waking up at 5:50 AM, getting dressed, grabbing a backpack after having breakfast. My uncle drove me

to Lorenzo Walker Technical College located in Naples, Florida.

My journey began when I arrived from Mexico, with the dream. After continuing studying, I was very nervous because I didn't know English, I knew it would be difficult.

When I went to school, I had an intro class in which they explained the rules and then they gave me my schedule. When I got to the first class, I liked how the teacher gave her classes because it transmitted a lot of joy.

The second class was math, which was very quiet. I understood from the images and the teacher explained very well. The third class was Language which I didn't understand much. It was difficult for me to understand but my colleagues supported me a lot.

My first day was stressful but I felt happy and hoped to learn a lot.

Alexander a student Education in Naples, FL Her teacher Is Ms. Khris.

One of My Favorite Days

I'm thrilled to write about one of my favorite days, the day I went on a field trip with my school friends. It was a school trip to a farm, and it was terrific. It was a day in high school, and I remember it like it was yesterday when our principal announced the trip. I was so happy that I couldn't sleep the day before. I was delighted because I couldn't wait to see the animals. Finally, the day arrived, and I was one of the first ones after the principal to be on site for the departure, and he was a little bit shocked because, usually, I'm not one of the early birds.

When I was there, I saw so many animals, and I even saw animals that I didn't even think existed in Haiti, like pheasant, partridge, and one species of bird called quail. They even gave a couple of birds, which I set free after one week at home. The place was enormous, and the animals seemed well-fed and happy. This day and this place were very memorable in my life, and since then, I have wanted to go back again, , but I can't find

It's Never Too Late

an occasion. I still haven't lost hope, though! And this time, my camera will be ready to capture every moment since the last time I couldn't do so.

Christian Jonathan is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. His/her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Sunday, A Day of Rest

My favorite day is Sunday. I always get up late and have a small breakfast because I am very happy! After that I always tidy my room. I sometimes play computer games, too!

In the afternoon, I often help my grandma cook lunch. Then we all eat together. After lunch, I usually meet my friends in the country. We always ride our bikes and sometimes play basketball. I get to have some time with my friends, and I often have lacrosse practice.

In the evening, I never stay at home! I usually go to a friend's home and watch TV. Sometimes we go to the park or invite some more friends and play video games. I don't usually stay at my friend's house for a long time because I have school the next day. I go to bed by 10:00 o'clock.

The day I like most is Sunday is because it is the day to do a lot of enjoyment and rest all day. I do not have school, so I do not have to wake up early in the morning. Sunday enables people to rest and relax. This is why I love this day.

Actually, nothing very exciting happens on my favorite day. We do very ordinary things, eating, and sharing some advice. This is the time that I feel most secure and loved. I treasure the time we have together.

Makenlove attends the English class at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Relax, Rejoice, Refresh

There are seven days in a week but the day I like best is Sunday. It is my favorite day because I can relax after working hard

for six days.

On Sunday, I like to wake up a bit late and have my breakfast. Then I read some books and do my homework. After taking a shower I go to the supermarket, and I buy something I need. In the evening, I hang out with friends and go to a coffee shop. Then I go home.

I enjoy dinner time on this day. At around 8:00 p.m. my whole family gathers in our dining room to eat dinner together. We all talk about how our days have been. After dinner I go to my room and take care of my cats and play with them. Then I go to bed early so that I can go to work the next day on time. Also, I get more refreshed and energetic when I get back to work after each Sunday.

Sunday is always an important family day. This day makes it possible for me to spend some time with my special people. Right now, Sunday will always be my favorite day.

Aung Khant Oo is a student at the Monroe County Adult Education Center. He attends the virtual English class. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Birthday

My name is Sonia Leon Compere. I would like to talk about my favorite day. My favorite day is January 14 because I was born on January 14. I really love this day.

My mother carried me for 9 months in her stomach. After she brought me into the world, she took care of me every day. She used all her patience to give me the best of life. Every day I say thanks to the Lord for my life, and I also say thanks to my mom and dad for taking care of me.

On this day each year as an infant, teenager, and adult I am celebrated by my family. They like to organize a party for my birthday. They invited all of my friends and family to celebrate my birthday. We organize large cooking parties with music, dancing and then there are many activities. I enjoy dancing with my

It's Never Too Late

husband and my best friends. On the same day, I usually receive lots of gifts, money and a cake.

On January 14, I praise God and I say thanks to the Lord for my life. I ask God to allow me to see several more years.

Sonia Leon Compere is an ESOL student at the West Technical Educational Center. Her teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

It's a Beautiful Day

In a person's life, there are countless beautiful moments and many unforgettable memories that are worth recalling. Of course, I have a lot of unforgettable happy memories too. Especially my wedding day, - that day was truly blissful and wonderful to me.

Even though I have been married for 10 years, I still remember my wedding day so vividly. On July 3, 2012, it was a sunny day in the summer; the sky was clear and filled with beautiful white clouds. Even the air smelled so sweet to me, and everything was well prepared and ready to go. I was excited staying at home, waiting for my Mr. Right to come and pick me up while my makeup artist was helping me to look my best on the wedding day.

All my family and friends were gathered together for my wedding. There were two parts to the ceremony- a solemn church wedding as well as a more relaxed and romantic hotel ceremony. During the church ceremony, we swore to be husband and wife under the witness of God, along with our relatives and friends. During the hotel banquet, my husband brought me many surprises, which made me cry and laugh. I was very touched by what he said and did and felt that I was the luckiest girl in the world at that moment. He sang my favorite love song to me on the spot to express his love. He collected my favorite Hello Kitty 12 constellation plush dolls from Japan for me, along with a huge Hello Kitty theme cake ... All of them are my favorite.

He has always been so caring for me ever since we met each other a few years before. During the wedding ceremony, we danced, sang, and played some interesting games together. The

most surprising thing was that one of my best friends proposed to my husband's cousin on the spot, and we were all very happy for them two.

Marriage is when two single people build a home for love, and love comes first in this home. I am very lucky. Even though I have been married for so many years and have two children, my husband always says that 'wife first', 'mommy first' that I am 'the most important person in his life'. My husband deeply understands the saying that a happy wife brings a happy life. I also want to say to him: Thank you, every day is a beautiful day with you.

MengMeng Lin is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Family Days Are Blessings

My favorite day is without a doubt Sunday. This is the day my parents are at home. I'm very happy when this day of the week comes. Mom always cooks with her amazing talent, and we usually go to the beach to enjoy the paradise. My father always shares his delightful stories with such detail and expression.

We all eat together and share the weeks experiences and anything we need input about. We discuss what happened at work and explain everything, the good and the bad. We get to share and have others listen, so we feel togetherness.

My parents let us know the education is the route to success in life and to always show kindness and respect. They tell us how to treat others and also how others should treat us.

During my familiar Sundays, I feel so blessed to know I have the security of my close and loving family and I look forward to every Sunday to come together as I know we always have each other.

Ruthe Marius is an ESOL student at the Suncoast technical College. Ruthe's teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

How do Ukrainians Celebrate Christmas?

First, let me share that Christmas is an amazing event! The Eve of Christmas is on January 6th. Usually, it is freezing and snowing in my country. We all wait for the first star, we light the candles, and then we sit down for supper. There are only meatless dishes on our tables. Jesus Christ had 12 Apostles, and this is the number of dishes on the table. The meal stays on the table all night.

After dinner, children and teenagers go to neighbors and godparents where they sing special songs for them and wet wheat seeds on their floor. The songs speak about Jesus' birth and our wishes for the next year. The owners treat them with sweets and small change (coins).

On January 7th at midnight, the Orthodox Church worship begins, which lasts until morning. On this day, we prepare a festive lunch or dinner with meat dishes, we go to visit each other, and godparents give gifts to their godchildren. These are the most miraculous days of the year for all Ukrainians.

Yelyzaveta Tsvitaieva is a student at the Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

Original Poetry

Forgetfulness

I miss the eyes
you used to look at me with tenderness!
I missed the hand
that you stroked me with love!
I miss the voice
you sang to me with joy!
I miss...
I miss...
I miss...
Pain breaks my heart.
Oh good Lethe* give me a picture of your water.
Oh good Lethe give me freedom
Oh good Lethe
soothes my pain!
I know you're fine there
I know you care about me
I know you still love me
I know we'll meet very soon

*In Greek mythology Lethe was the underworld river of oblivion and goodness the shades of the dead drink of its waters to forget their mortal lives accounting to sum it framed the border between Hades and Paradise

Bozena Borowiecka is a student of Tonya Richardson in level 7 ESOL at Suncoast Technical College in Sarasota, FL.

What Do You See?

W What do you see? I see the beauty of the peace you find in the mind. What do you see?

H Happiness. Knowing the beauty of something. What do you see?

A Another. A way to say I love you. What do you see?

T Thoughtfulness. The look. Deep into someone's eyes. What do you see?

It's Never Too Late

D Diamonds. The eyes sparkling brighter than diamonds.
What do you see?

O Open. Open the door to...What do you see?

Y You. You will be amazed. What do you see?

O Opportunity. To say what I see.

U Until. Until the end of time in my mind. What do you see?

S Special. That diamond. That beauty. That love. That look.
That peace of mind. What do you see?

E Everything. What do you see? The love.

E Every day. That diamond, Miss V. came. That's what I see.

I love you.

David Burney is a student at DePorres Place. His teacher is Clare Wilso.

They Say, I Say

They say I'm crazy.

I say I'm an intelligent young lady.

They say I'm mentally ill.

I say I tend to live on the edge because I enjoy the thrill.

They say they're afraid of me.

I say they're safe because my mind is my only enemy.

They say I'm antisocial.

I say they just don't know how to handle me when I get emotional.

They say I need to be medicated.

I say what's wrong with just being jaded?

They say I'm a failure.

I say I've made mistakes, but my life isn't over.

They say I'm always mad.

I say you don't know me because the truth is I'm just sad.

They say I'll never learn.

I say one day I won't be as stubborn.

They say I'm bitter.

I say it's your heart that's cold and dead like Winter.

They say I can't be fixed, no, not ever.

I say I won't be like this forever.

Dana Coleman is a student at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Anne Meisenzahl.

The Land of Natural Mirrors

Splendid morning with your new twilight between quiet lakes.
They duplicate with reflection the beautiful landscape from a placid place.

The work of God dresses up. Caladiums smile saying hello, giving us their message saying that this is a land of liberty.

Most of the time is warm but sometimes it is cool. It is a place of freedom where everything say hello, with splendors and simplicity.

Flowers, trees and animals known to express themselves, showing kindness.

Their walk and whistle, bring happiness to the people.
This moment fills of happiness and good vibes all the place.
The dusk comes like a shooting star!

It seems like a movie trailer to announce that the big movie is dressing up with stars.

And a moon who compete the brightness of the most special place in the firmament.

There are no words that can describe the work made by God in this placid and beautiful place.

It's harmony and beauty awaken the muse who inspire these humble lines dedicated to Lake Placid.

Claudio Dam is a student at South Florida State College. His teacher is Larid Lopez.

“How To Describe The Black Woman”

How to describe the Black Woman ... I don't know if I can, but I'll try.

At the beginning of time, a calm voice did reply, emanating from my Cosmic Minds' Eye.

It's Never Too Late

You see, she has been so many things, to so many people; and these facts, we cannot deny. So, to that extent, I've composed this lament, to clarify my thoughts inside.

In ancient Kush & Kemet, she was worshiped as Goddess and Queen. True history speaks in volumes to this very dream.

“Each Black Nation world round, held her Magnificence profound, as a symbol of God's perfection, a Love Supreme.

A creation so keenly in touch with the Divine forces of Nature and such, no sweeter miracle has this world ever seen.

She fills you with such Pride, pure Beauty and Grace personified, as timeless as the history of Man itself ...

And with her by your side, walking with you stride for stride, no man has ever known greater wealth.

She is Mother to a Nation, and with such a strong reputation, she sits at Mother Nature's right hand.

And if you've ever been blessed to know her intelligence and prowess, then you too have shared in the wonder of God's Plan.

She's the 1st teacher to our children, for this new Nation we're building, cannot live without her Tender Loving Care. And it's the lessons we've learned from respect and wisdom. She's earned the foundation that's needed to take us there.

How to describe the Black Woman ... I don't know if I did, but I tried. For, if there were ever a more perfect creature, who was Lover, Friend, Mother & Teacher ... I don't know them, and someone has lied.

Idris Amin-Ali Bey is a student at the Family Support Services Network Inc. His teacher is LaShan Chruch-Crumpler

Poetry of Ourselves

Original poetry. We might think that original poetry is something limited to us, and made only for writers, poets and artists, but little do we know that poetry is part of who we are and who

we are becoming.

Poetry is part of our daily lives, our speech, our songs and religions. Expressing our kind words to anyone we like, expressing our hate and kindness with courtesy. Moreover, poetry is part of the nature of things on this Earth, it is part of creation, just as it is part of God.

Poetry can be expressed so much by words of love, friendship and peace. It can be words of power and security. Just as it could just be a charade. As bad as the context of the poem (original) seems, it is just an expression used in formal and direct language. Because we know that poetry will never cease to be original because it expresses some fixed content or some feeling for a person.

Poetry shows that the original is everything that originates from us, just like that verse I wrote in high school, which I entitled "Sketch of Me:"

"I'm the one who is fascinated by life. Even with smiles that shine so bright, a lot of things irritate me. To dream is to risk more, simply to live. Sometimes I feel like river water, nothing is clear. but everything runs its course That's why I'm scribbling and living."

Frandlely Fertil is an ESOL student at the West Technical Education Center. His teacher is Carolyn Vickers.

My Family Are My Stars

As the stars are above,

shining so bright

My family are my stars

My stars of love

My stars of kindness

My stars of hope

It's Never Too Late

As the stars are above,
the twinkled in the night
My family are my stars
Who give me joy and peace,
As my stars shine in the darkness of the night.
My family-Are my stars

Juliaetta Green is a student with Family Support Services Network Inc. Her teacher is Lashan Crumpler.

It's Not About How You Feel

Fear is apprehension to whatever you pay too much attention to
Fear is the belief you could never accomplish what you set out to do
But if you briefly examine fear
You'd check what's going into your ear
Because sometimes what you speak to yourself
Is what can stop you
False evidence appearing real
It's not about how you feel
It's just an emotion
So set right thinking into motion
Courage is doing it afraid
Overcoming is striking fear in the chin
Bravery is clasping hands with purpose
Success is proclaiming, "Today I win!"

Kenya Hill is a proud mother of six, a devoted daughter, sister, aunt, niece, and friend who loves deeply and cares for humanity, and even more so, loves God. She is a student at Gadsden Correctional Facility, and her teacher is Anne Meisenzahl.

F.E.A.R.

Fear of death.

Fear of not dying.

Fear of not entering the gates as I'm dying.

Fear I won't see your face as I'm dying.

Fear I won't hear your voice as I'm flying.

Fear I was a little too late to acknowledge I was dying.

Fear I can't live life up to the fullest as I'm dying.

Fear to die, I just don't know why.

I swear I don't want to die.

Just wanna meet God's face when I die.

Meghan Holton is currently studying poetry and is in the medical field. She is currently housed at MTC Gadsden Correctional Facility. She is the mother of two beautiful children.

You

When I'm with you,
It brings joy to my heart.
It never once knew.
Who would have ever thought
that this would be true?
In a crowd full of people,
but all I see is you.
Your smile, your eyes,
brighten up the dim light.
I'm surrounded by joy,

joy, and delight.

Amanda Johnson is a young woman who keeps people laughing.

It's Never Too Late

She is currently studying poetry at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Anne Meisenzahl.

She Is A Woman

She is a woman who walks with grace
Though battered but not easily broken
She still knows how to carry her weight
She is a woman...

Who smiles even when she wants to cry
She no longer lets her tears stain her cheeks
She lets her inner battle rage inside
She is a woman...

Who has healed
Though her scars are still visible
She takes great measure to conceal
She is a woman...

When cut she bleeds
But her blood is no different from ours
She is the same woman you always see
She is a woman...

She could be your mother, your aunt, sister, or cousin
Despite her relation to you
She is a survivor, a conqueror, a beautifully made over comer
The trials, the pain
She is strong she remains unfazed, nothing can pull her back-
wards
She is a woman of many gains.

Shannon Kinlow is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility. She is enrolled in the ABE 3 class taught by DelaQuese Jernigan.

Labyring

Yea, getting to me is a maze.
I'm not the same.
Trying to understand me

might just drive you insane.
I'm beyond what the eye meets;
my appearance definitely doesn't
define me.

Maria Liranza loves life, living, enduring and embracing. She is a poetry student at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

Who I Am

I was here, before here had a name.
I am the ending limit, to everything.
I am the only thing that makes sense.
Because I can only be experienced.
When the story is told. You will know.
I'll never, ever grow old.
I can never, ever be touched, tasted, smelled or seen.
Or even placed front, back or in between.
I have touched every piece of matter in the universe.
I have experienced your good, bad and worst.
For I have no beginning, and I have no end.
All I have got, is who I am.
I'm married to Ms. Eternity.
So, some call me, Mr. Infinity.
But I am known to one and all, as Father Time.

Larry J Mckissick is a student at Family Support Services Network, Inc. His teacher is Lashan Crumpler.

A Fractured Paternity

A sea of grudges with a dedication for disaster.
In the distance, one can see the grudge
plotting strategies.
The minimum to change a life, the minimum to ruin a life.
Constant indifference creates emotional barriers.
Love is looking for a space in that limbo
Where one can see a truncated paternity.
I close my eyes and the universe is a reflection
In that darkness.
The unknown can change the course of destiny
In just the blink of an eye.

It's Never Too Late

I look around and you are not there.
I look for you everywhere.
I call you and the memories answer me...
I need you...your presence your breath...
Your love!

*Ricardo Monroy is an ESOL student at South Florida State College.
His teacher is Larid Lopez.*

What Is This

Love is like a sigh
Strong and deep
That invades your body and soul

Love is like a rose
Beautiful and delicate
And should be cared and protected

Love is our super power
It is infinite and endless
Many times, is magic

We do not believe in it
until we feel it
That is why I believe that
the deep meaning of life is love

Life is too short,
forgive and love passionately,
being the best version of yourself.

*David Montanez is an ESOL student at the South Florida State
College. His teacher is Larid Lopez.*

Not My Last Breath

From the first breath to the last,
There is still hope for the past.
As the bird sings
For her last time,
Shallow breaths begin to fade,

as if for the final fight.
So, who's really keeping time?
This heart still beats for life.
Life's trials will arise
amid the darkest night.
Joy will always come
in the morning light,
For this heart will always
breathe for life.

Melinda Ode is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School – ABE. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

How Lucky We Are

There is a place in the distant heights,
Where beautiful mountains touch the sky every day.

The whisper of wind makes my mind fly,
With a beautiful frequency that I had never heard.

Those perfect mountains made me understand,
How lucky we are for all those details.

Wherever you look, wherever you are,
There is always a reason to appreciate life.

I love the mountains
where nature speaks,
I love every sound
from a bird to the wind.

There is a place where birds fly around,
with captivating melodies that can touch the soul.

Exquisite flowers captivate my senses,
With vibrant colors and delicate scents.

Enchanted forest with magical creatures,
That comes to perch in a beautiful way.

Fervent rivers carrying in their waters

It's Never Too Late

Powerful elements of the air and of the earth.

There is a place in the distant heights,
Where the stars are closer than anywhere.

The starry night
makes me understand,
How lucky we are
to be present today!

Carlo Pinto Palma is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Fear

Fear – – an unpleasant, often strong emotion

caused by expectation.
It's a lot of things in this world to fear,

but fear for me is you.
Fear of losing you.
Fear of losing me in the process, too.
Fear of not giving you my all.
Fear of you never giving me a call.
Fear that I'll wake up and you'll be gone.
Fear to hear that same break up song.
Fear of drowning in a puddle of your tears,

tears that I can't promise won't pour.
Fear that I can't give you much more.
Fear of running out of time
and never getting the chance

to forever make you mine.
Fear of begging you to stay
but
In all actuality, this fear is pulling you away.

Alexis Perry a phenomenal woman with a heart for poetry. She loves to brighten up someone's day. Alexis is currently studying poetry at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

The Dreams of Florida and I

When I sleep, I am a man who dreams that he is in Florida.

When I am awake, Florida dreams of being a man.

As I lay in bed, my mind takes me on a journey where I am the state of Florida, experiencing all it has to offer.

But when I am awake, it is Florida that imagines itself as a man, with all the thoughts and feelings that come along with it.

In my dreams, I am the sun-soaked beaches, the endless stretch of highways, the vibrant cities, and the quiet small towns.

I am the history and the culture, the people, and the landscapes.

But when I wake up, it is Florida that envisions itself as a human being, with all the complexities and contradictions that come with being a person.

It is a strange and fascinating relationship as one that blurs the lines between reality and imagination, self and other.

Julian Serna is a 16-year-old adult education student at Atlantic Technical College. He is an aspiring computer engineer based in Florida.

Toss the Carolina Coin

Heads, it's to Carolina.

Tail's, it's to Florida.

Is it somewhere greener,
somewhere warmer?

Up into the mountains, or Down by the sea, where?

It does not matter to me! As long as my dad and I,
Ride side by side and we're Going somewhere, together.

Now, I've got the quarter, and Daddy's in the truck.

We might be driving from Florida to Carolina with A quarter
size of luck!

This thought, a poem, you think it's minor?

It's Never Too Late

No! Heads up Ya'll, we're off to Carolina!

Katelan Summers is a student at Pensacola State College. Her teacher is Ms. Lewandowski

No Kid of Mine

In St. Johnsberry, Amanda Lee was watching MTV.
Ushered upstairs to knock boots with Kelley Sue.
Amanda Lee's eyes, so big and blue, watched my every move.

Above Ball-Four Lounge,
Kelley Sue showed up with Amanda Lee in her arms,
wet and shivering cold.
Resembled two bedraggled souls salvaged from the Frying Pan
Shoals.
My heart was wretched clean from my chest.

A kid in a crib and a woman trying to make me dinner,
one, full of joyful gibberish, while the other full of ginger.
I did not hold her; I did not change her; I did not feed her; I
did not burp her;
I showed her no attention at all.

Unsure and aloof without a clue of what to do.
A live-in girlfriend, and her child, that was not even mine.
One poked hole in my condoms the other beat my pots and
pans like tom-toms.

With eyes so bright, she said,
"Daddy!" Her mother threw a fit.
and with a snit reminded me
that Amanda Lee
wasn't even my kid.

Amanda Lee was my sigh, yet still, she was no kind of mine.
She kicked her mom and went out of the bathroom so she
could potty, all on her own.
I felt such pride and joy, it must have shown.
Her mother sharply reminded me, "That ain't no kid of yours!"

'91 was coming to a thaw.

I got a frantic call.
Someone was trying to take her away!
I hurried on my way.

The authorities told me,
the safety of Amanda Lee
was the priority.
I put this kid that was not even mine,
in the back seat of the social worker's ride.

I felt this was folly but made sure she had her little dolly.
As the car pulled off and away
up stood Amanda Lee
and mouthed to me,
"I'm sorry, Daddy!"

That day
That moment I died.
I wanted Kelley Sue out of my life.

It seemed a matter of fact,
Amanda Lee was not ever coming back.
In my heart, there was no home without this kid that I could
not call my own.

I felt broken, and damned to the ninth.
I'd lost the kid, that wasn't even mine.

COVID paid a visit.

Born March 22nd.
Her last name was new,
her first name was even changed,
but her middle name remained, and her birthdate matched
too.

I saw her eyes and just knew.
I cried; I melted alone in my cell.

A piece of mine broke this time it was the bad cameo.
Those eyes, so big and blue, found and renewed.
This kid, who was not even mine,
was now a grown woman and mother of two.

It's Never Too Late

Once there stood, no kid of mine, now was a woman I surely admire.

I'd be satisfied if I was the recipient of that twinkle in her eye.

I was no daddy of hers, as much as she needed and sorely deserved.

Yet, she'll always be my Amanda Lee.

Travis A. Welsh is a student at South Bay Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility. His teacher is Cheralee Morgan.

My life In My Twenties

Sometimes it's hard to be twenty.

When I was younger, it looked so easy.

But now I just want to be happy.

But how if everything depends on your pocket? Money!

Is life really that hard?

Or is it just how we were taught?

What are humans' motivations to keep moving on?

What makes us stand up when we're down?

What makes us... what makes me special?

What makes us...what makes me original?

What makes me think that there is something good for me?

What am I supposed to do; who am I supposed to be?

I'm only twenty, and I don't want to keep living no more.

I'm afraid to see my life passing by and see myself old.

The dark side always felt so good, but slowly it's been getting cold.

It's been hugging me tight, screaming at me, "Don't let me go."

I feel that I am drowning,

While this world of mine is colliding,

All the time I feel unnoticed, worthless.

I feel stressed, anxious, and with life...disappointed!

Sometimes I just want to die.

But wishing my death would be wrong, right?

Nobody even cares, that's why everyone is fake,

That's when you see life's real face.

I try not to break down,
Why am I here? That's my doubt.
I'm tired of fighting alone.
I'm tired of feeling always on my own!

I'm losing my soul and my spirit.
I'm tired of always carrying my broken pieces.
How do I fix them? How can I fix me?
How do I fix this? How can I fix it?
How can someone keep living if it's supposed to be extended?

Why am I the one who needs fixes?
I'm twenty and I refuse to trust new faces.
You don't have problems people say!
They don't know how it's like to be me for a day.

I'm broken, but my loved ones believe in me.
But they don't know how I feel, but they are there for me.
They know that I am here.
They don't know I'm full of fear.

I'm just twenty and I'm giving up.
I'm twenty and I'm messing up.
I need some light to go through the darkness of life.
Have I lost my reason to shine? Did I ever have it by my side?

I'm worthless. I'm less than less.
I hate feeling like a mess.
What makes me special?
What separates me from the devil?

What makes me wanna stay?
What pulls me away from the edge?
Love? Money? Family? Fame?
Why are the twenties the hardest age?

Someone tell me if I must be afraid!
I want to grow up and be fearless.

Carla Valdez is an ESOL student at Orange Technical College – East Campus. Her teacher is Rosalind Shell.

What the American Dream Means to Me

The Climate of Economic Change

I have been in the United States for many years, and I have seen how the economy has changed.

Do you remember when rent, food, clothes, etc. were affordable?

Everything has changed and prices have become too high for many to afford. For some people it is almost impossible to pay for their utilities. Many people have become homeless or returned to living with family.

It would help if salary increased as prices increase. An increase in salary will be great for everybody, especially for poor people and single families. If salaries increase, people will be able to pay their rent and buy food, clothes, etc.

It is also expensive to send children to school. As a single mother of three girls, I had to stop them from university, because they needed to work to help with the bills. I am very sad that I can no longer afford to pay for their university education.

For this reason, I am writing about the economy and economics. I want things to get better soon. I want to be able to send my daughters back to college. I want to continue to be independent and pay my bills.

Maria Aldana is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Point of View

Let's talk about motivations. Here, I will tell you some of mine.

"Yes, we can!" That is one of my teacher's favorite phrases in the ESOL program. This phrase encourages and motivates me every

day to fight for my goals and aspirations in life. Then, we have “live the American dream,” an apparently motivating phrase that often makes you wonder, living the American dream...? What is it? How do I know if I’m living it? I think these are good questions and of course they need a good answer.

Point of view. That’s my answer.

When I arrived in the United States, I understood that improving myself and learning English would be the best tool to make my way and achieve my “dream.” I realized immediately that the adult education ESOL program was my best option to get started. Here I am, 6 months later, with the same enthusiasm I had on the first day of class, but like almost everything good in life, it takes sacrifice, perseverance, dedication and in my case, it also takes pedals.

Yes, I am a bicycle in a world of cars. Every day I chase the American dream on two wheels. My bicycle takes me almost everywhere, including school. My classmates tell me all the time that it is complicated and difficult to ride a bike everywhere, but for me, as I said before, everything depends on the point of view and the attitude with which you face life. I get up, take my bike and go to work while appreciating the landscape. I am determined to improve myself every day as a person, dealing with good people and bad people, socializing and learning a new culture and, little by little, incorporating it as my own. For me, that is living the American dream.

Every day is a good day to achieve our objectives and goals. For some people that may be buying their own house, having their own company. For others, it may be being able to make ends meet without debt. Again, points of view, that’s all we are.

As for me and my point of view, I will continue to chase my American dream on two wheels, loving this great country every day, enjoying it, and giving thanks for being in it. I promise myself to never to give up. I will continue living my dream, and when I go from two wheels to four, I will remember my teacher and say:

Yes, we can. So, we did!

Ilena Campos is from Cuba. She is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Dreams

Since I was little boy, I never imagined the future of my life. I didn't have any idea of how much effort it required to accomplish my dreams. In my country, we don't have the opportunity to prosper, but in the United States we can accomplish anything we dreams of.

What does the American dream mean to me? It's an opportunity, but it's not easy. This is the only way. I will be able to validate myself and accomplish my dreams and know how far I can go. If you are in the same situation in which I am, you have to be strong and work hard for your objectives. Nothing falls from the sky, so you must take charge and focus. Just remember that by pursuing the American dream, you might have to leave behind the people who you love.

“Follow your dreams, believe in yourself and don't give up”
-Rachel Corrie.

Leonardo Castro is a student at Collier Adult Education. His teacher is Dayana Exposito.

Th American Dream

What does the American dream mean to me?

First let's define what the ideal “American dream” is...

Some say the “American dream is what you consider the ‘perfect life’ composed of happiness, being wealthy, having the love of your life, cars, basically anything you desire all at a whim. Every culture and socioeconomic background have a different view of what the “American dream” is in their medium because all dreams are interdependent of each other's. My “American dream” is a fruitful job that will bring me enough money to sustain myself, not too much, not too little. The ability to have time

for my family and lover, but most importantly, achieving and maintaining good health throughout my life.

In some instances, the subject of economic standing and wealth are mentioned with the phrase “The American Dream”, as if money is the only way to achieve happiness. As if society has willingly accepted being divided into a caste system. However, there are some who fall into this lifestyle unexpectedly and will never achieve “The American dream” because of their lack of exposure to the world and inexperience from never having to go without. The American dream isn’t about the money or how highly you’re respected at work, it’s to be able to walk into a room and know that the people in it will welcome you because they want you there. This dream is to notice that in America we are able to make an honest difference with the resources we are given.

The absolute “American dream” is success, and overcoming challenges is how you define the individual. Having the ability to choose your own path, your own freedom, and having control of what you want to do.

My name is Kayla DeJesus and I'm 17 years old. I attend South Florida State College, my teacher is Ian Lilly. I plan to continue my education in culinary arts while obtaining my credentials for emergency medical services as a 911 dispatcher and Emergency Medical Technician.

What the American Dream Means to Me

The difference betweenbetweenhome country and the United States is that in the United States, we have the opportunities to accomplish our dreams. You only have to have a purpose and a goal. You are free to do what you want. On the contrary in Cuba, everything is under a regime. You have no freedom. The United States has many opportunities. You just have to have a goal. I am very grateful and happy to be in this country.

Figueredo is a student at Collier Adult Education. Her teacher is Dayana Exposito.

We The People

Three big words written years ago, made our past, our present and future grow.

So sad the man that don't understand, they sprang forth from tyranny's hand.

They turned oppression into progress, into progress, and unity into opportunity.

For we the people, are the guardians of tomorrow.

For we must lead today, so our children can follow.

We the people made this land, the greatest country on earth.

So, treat it as you would, your very own birth.

We the people.

Larry J Mckissick is a student at Family Support Services Network Inc. His teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

Are You Ready to Transform Your Life?... I Am, and How About You?

When you come to this country, you come carrying dreams, fears, great expectations, and a multitude of sensations. But when we are here, we either run or we freeze. In this race to achieve what we set out to do, we forget to do it strategically and without a defined goal, we just get the task done day by day.

It turns out that when you reach your fifties and you have to start over, you have to do so thinking about what is my "why?" Because you have 10 to 15 years to achieve it (I don't want to work all my life out of necessity, if I do it's because I love it and because I love what I do).

I stop, take a break, breathe and think... How am I going to do it? First, I research, based on what I have (knowledge, money, responsibilities, among others), I think about what business or job fits my goals and values.

I make sure to know what my duties and rights are as a new resident in the United States, and don't forget, we must never forget our Personal Credit construction, this is key to a healthy financial security as it is very different from our countries.

I make a list of how I see myself and what I want if I had the perfect job: flexibility of hours, work location, I want a business that gives me long-term residual income, in general, I want to have my own business, be the owner of my own enterprise.

For this, I must train myself, this is key for me, If I'm going to do something, I do it well and responsibly... it's time to learn new skills and knowledge, it's never too late.

Passion, determination, consistency, resilience, and discipline is my new motto for the moment I find myself in.

I must say that this doesn't stop me from having fear, frustration, and many times seeing me crying, but as my teacher Pamela Wilson said...

“Yes, you can.”

Maria Mercedes Metz is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. Her teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Finding Our Way

I was born in Cuba. I lived there for 37 years and raised my three children there. The island is the biggest in the Caribbean, about the size of Tennessee. It is divided into three zones: western, central and eastern. Each zone is different. In the eastern zone, for example, people when speaking do not pronounce the letter “s” at the end of sentences. In the central zone, people change the letter “r” for the letter “l.” In the western zone where Havana is located, people have a more urban lifestyle. They have nightly activities such as clubs, parties, or walking with friends. In the rural areas of the country, people usually go to bed early. The weather is almost the same on the whole island, but the eastern zone often has somewhat higher temperatures.

Although Cuba is a beautiful island, the people who live there face great economic and socio-political problems. The government is dictatorial and military. Only the army and the police are authorized to carry firearms. There is only one party and people

can not say anything against that party or against communism, under threat of going to prison if they do so. The government controls food distribution. Only children up to seven years of age have access to one liter of milk per day. The limited foods each person receives can not satisfy their basic needs. When we went to the store, prices were in American dollar equivalents, but our salaries were in Cuban pesos. As a result, everything was so expensive that we had only enough money to buy food for one or two weeks a month.

In Cuba, salaries are extremely low, even for professional workers. One day, we decided that our children would not have to live the harsh Cuban reality anymore. We wanted them to have a better future, because even when my husband and I would finish our university studies, we still could not have a free and worthy life. For these reasons, we decided to find a way to live in the United States.

At that time, the United States gave visas for Cuban physicians who were working in foreign countries and wanted to escape from the regime. It was called the Cuban Medical Professional Parole Program. As my husband qualified for that program, our family was able to obtain the visa.

We came by airplane. We will never forget our arrival through Miami airport. It was amazing. Everything looked so beautiful. The buildings, houses, commercial centers, and everything else were so clean and peaceful. We felt free. This country welcomed us with open arms. Getting here was not easy, but we are grateful to this great nation that opened its door to us.

Mayuri Perez is a student at Read Lakeland. Her teacher is Neal Steiger.

What Do You Mean? Heh!

When you have the chance to write something related to your own life, sometimes is very tough to start. But now, after my little introduction and a sip of coffee, I'm ready to go ahead and start by letting you know what the American Dream means to me for the most part.

I've been living in this country for over a year, and I realized that every day I learn a new word, in my new world. And I wonder, why do Americans talk mostly in idioms? But I had to step back and think that we do the same in Colombia. I was a rookie talking with my husband, who is a native American speaker. I have several examples about misunderstandings... ish. Why in the world do Americans use "ish" so much? What the heck is ish? So, I decided to trust my gut and take a shot at starting ESOL classes to learn all of this slang universe around American culture.

"Let me know what's the scoop!"

I feel so proud to myself, 'cuz now I'm able to make a call, order food in a drive thru with no prob. I can even have a personal point of view in a discussion. Tremendous! I have to give myself a pat on the back.

I'm gonna throw something at you so you don't miss the bullet. Also, make sure you have your ducks in a row before you start because it can be a breeze! Take ESOL classes, BTW (by the way) this is not publicity, but here's the gist of it all. I'm flabbergasted bc I'm doing free publicity. I mean, Call Now! Or text ASAP. What? Yes, as soon as possible. Let's get this rollin' and I mean now! Also, I can give to you some coupons because you don't want to miss out on the wheel of a deal.

This lingo is a must-have to understand this kind of thing. Don't be "shy" and just go for it, you have nothing to lose. I'm living proof because I was in it to win, and I'm ready for my new life here in America.

Juli Preciado is an ESOL student at the Suncoast Technical College. Juli's teacher is Kimberly Alibro.

What It Means to Be an American

During the Civics Education Enrichment course, conducted at the prison, I was required to read: "The 5000 Year Leap, by W. Cleon Skousen (2006)." The assignment was to submit an essay on "What it means to be an American?"

Skousen's emphasis is upon the United States Constitution, our unalienable human rights endowed to us by the creator and the principles and duties that those rights entail. According to Skousen, in 1607, the first permanent colony of England called Jamestown (known as Virginia) is not only the setting for the book, but also the beginning foundation for the structured framework of a new civilization known collectively as the United States of America.

The original settlers existed on a show and reaped living, not much differently, one might say, then all humanity for the prior 50 centuries. Very crudely, no indoor plumbing, hand tools, such as ax, hoe, and animal driven carts and plow. However, with the sense of independence from the Crown of England, the Jamestown Society began to thrive and advance, creating the "first popular assembly of the legislative representatives in the western hemisphere."

In fact, Jamestown, Virginia, produced many of the founding fathers and four of the first five presidents. According to Skousen, this American independence and free enterprise produced many phenomenal results. Yes, the massive melting pot of immigrants, collectively known today as the United States of America, produced an unfathomable leap (5000 years in 200 years) in technical, political and economic achievement.

Freedom to think and act for oneself produced unimaginable resources and discoveries such as the combustion engine, jet propulsion, nuclear energy and space travel. To me, the basis or foundation of being an American is having a belief, idea and faith (ecological, theological and physiological) that this present society will progressively get better. I personally feel that as an American, I should believe in the creator and in the principles laid out in the Constitution of the United States of America. The founding fathers knew, practiced and firmly stood by the self-evident and unalienable rights bestowed to all humanity by our creator.

The way I see it, from the inside out, society is seriously lacking in morality, self-respect, parental respect and especially lacking in respect for authority (law enforcement; and this from a prisoner). However, most appalling of all is the lack of respect for the creator.

To be an American is having the freedom, ability and desire to search for the answers to turn the dreaded tide of today's un-American way of life. I was wrong and the voice of criminality and immorality that I lived to please as an un-American for so many years proved to be tragically dispositive to me, my loved ones and society.

Inside this un-American prison system "the belly of the beast" where human dignity and unalienable rights are despoiled, my #1 priority is to recognize and respect (and protect when necessary) the equal and unalienable rights of all.

As an American (whether released or not), I have an obligation (duty) to educate myself as best I can so that I can educate others and break these chains of recidivism. As an American, with life in prison, I now strive to believe in and understand to the fullest the self-evident truths as outlined in the Constitution of the United States of America. W. Cleon Skousen stresses so well that all humanity has been endowed by the creator with unalienable human rights, foremost, life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (property).

As an American, I now practice these principles and duties with zeal to do-right and be-good to my fellow prisoners, officers and civilian staff! As an American who worthily receives, accepts and now guards my self-evident unalienable human rights, I have learned to accept and embody the rights, liberties and dignity of others.

As an un-American, I would have allowed the Florida Atlantic University (FAU) prisoner education and enrichment course to pass me by. However, as an American I responsibly, with principles, duties and dignity signed up for, attended, and strongly embrace and support through my hard work, dedication, and encouragement to other prisoners to join FAU in this novel opportunity.

I especially wish to thank Professor M. DeRosa and all the FAU students who are consciously bringing educational programming to the un-American prisoners and turning us into Americans.

Richard Egbert is a student at South Bay Correctional and Rehabilitation Facility. His teacher is Cheralee Morgan.

What the American Dream Means to Me

Since I was a teenager, I knew my future life wouldn't be in my country of my birth. I'm Cuban, and like many other Cubans, I decided to leave my country behind to achieve my goals and live my life without fear.

Even though my whole life was in Cuba: with family, friends, work, and culture, I was determined to reach my freedom, and I came to the United States to make my American dream come true. The American dream means freedom, peace, the possibility of having a decent life, and being part of a respectful society.

In my country, people are not free. You can't express yourself peacefully without the fear of punishment and are not allowed to disagree with the established concepts. That is why there is no place for all Cubans in Cuba.

When I arrived in the U.S.A., I realized that this is the place in the world where you could feel safe and protected. It is a place that allows you to achieve as much as possible through your efforts; and where human rights are respected. I am amazed not only by the U.S. as a country but also by the American people. In my personal experience, they have always been very friendly, polite, and helpful. Cultural and language barriers almost disappear when interacting with them.

Everyone has a preconceived idea of the American dream. The most important thing is to achieve it with gratitude and respect for this great country. I can say that I'm very grateful to be here today. It was not always easy, but it was worth it. It's the beginning of a beautiful life living my American dream.

Susana Sanchez Torres is a student at Chuck Shaw Technical Education Center. Her teacher is Lisa Cox.

Is It a Dream or a Truth?

At the age of seven, after hearing from my father about his official visit to the United Nations in New York in the 60s, a statement that he said stuck in my head: "Down there, coins lay on the streets". Since that time, I had a great dream of being able

to visit one day to this country called 'America'.

In 1983, I was very excited to take my first three-week holiday trip to Seattle, Washington. As soon as I set foot on American soil, I recognized that this country is huge compared to Europe. Seattle had such wide streets, high buildings, big houses, the giant BOEING plant, and the Space Needle. This became my desired destination to live one day in the United States. During my stay, I tried to look for a job in tourism despite my poor English. Luckily, I came across a travel agency that offered me a place, but I got stuck by immigration papers that took several years to process.

Finally in 2008, I made the difficult decision to leave the beautiful county of Europe where I had lived for nearly 40 years to settle in Clearwater, Florida. Named "The Sunshine State", Florida offers many beauties such as green nature, good weather with sunshine almost all year round, beautiful beaches, and friendly and welcoming people. As I was new to this region, I needed to practice English. Thanks to the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas (LCUP), I was able to take free English courses and I was finally able to receive my license as a travel agent. I worked so hard and ended with a dream come true. To want is to be able!

Bopha Suy is a student at Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas County. Her teacher is David Muething.

What Does The American Dream Means to Me?

The American Dream has always been a source of inspiration, motivation and hope for many people.

America offers unique opportunities for people or companies looking to expand their businesses and realizes their innovative and profitable ideas. The lifestyle, the local mentality, and the overall economic system encourage creation and entrepreneurship. It seems that everything is done to stimulate good ideas, to push people to be better with access to all sorts of resources such as forms, free advice offices and various trainings.

Thanks to the American dream that I cultivated in myself, I managed to stimulate my energy and focus on the goal to be reached, to give the best of myself to be able to achieve it. Today, taking advantage of this pleasant and very inspiring environment, I was able to acquire a house, set up a company, Chibaldino LLC, create my own brand of leather bags made in Italy, and set up marketing with a dedicated website. These encouraging results motivate me even more.

Finally, age is not a limitation. I am living the American dream as I build my own business while enjoying my retirement, in a great climate, with a lot of tools and people for training and development.

Arangelo Ubaldi is an ESOL student at Palm Beach Central Community High School Adult Education Program in Palm Beach County, Florida where Mrs. Nereyda Garcia is the adult education program director. His teacher is Ms. Pamela Jo Wilson.

Graduation Day!

Today is my graduation! I am so excited and proud to be here. To be honest, I still do not believe it. My name is Patrizia Villamizar. I am from Venezuela, and I am 28 years old. I used to practice dentistry in my country, but I felt that something was wrong. It was not my vocation. My true vocation is baking.

Like many immigrants, I left my country looking for better opportunities. In March of 2019, I arrived in this country. Immigrating to another country is never easy. Feeling that you do not fit into a country completely different from yours is very sad. Culture and the lack of communication through language makes it even more difficult. For a long time, I was depressed.

Sometime later, someone told me about the English program at Pinellas Technical College. She sounded emotional when she said, "It is an excellent school. You are going to learn English. The teachers are the best, and the schedule is great. You are not going to regret it." With such a description, I was very interested. I wanted to learn English. I wanted to be able to communicate with everyone. I wanted to study and achieve better opportunities for myself.

By December of that same year, I was enrolled in the ESOL program at PTC. I had three wonderful teachers: Teacher Vicki, Teacher Regi, and Dr. H. These three wonderful teachers taught me English in a wonderful and fun way. They reminded me that we still have a child inside us. I feel lucky and honored to have learned from all three of them. They even helped me get into the Baking and Pastry Arts program.

At first, I did not understand it, but now I know why Pinellas Technical College became my home. This school was all I needed to feel happy and recover from all the stress I experienced due to immigrating here from Venezuela and from the depression that for a long time was difficult for me to overcome. I had the opportunity to heal, meet wonderful people, and most importantly, learn. Today, I graduated with my Baking and Pastry Arts certificate, and I could not be happier and prouder.

It is a pleasure for me to talk to others and share with them my experience with this school. The kindness and treatment PTC gives you, regardless of your country, language, culture and age, will make you at home and will make you not give up.

After today, I will always look back and remember to not feel sadness because it is ending, but to feel pride because it happened and remember that the impossible is possible.

Patrizia Villamizar is a student at Pinellas Technical College. Her teacher is Regiane Zanardini-Rojas.

Miracles Happen

Do you believe in miracles? Do you notice how beautiful our world is? The amazingsness of our world is always around us! My name is Lucy, and I was born and raised in the city of Moscow; it is very gorgeous, and I love it. Since childhood, I enjoyed being creative, and it inspired me. I love to draw and make crafts, which is why I decided to work as a hairstylist and be creative by helping people to look beautiful and feel happy. I also have different hobbies like making crafts, painting, floral design, and interior design. Sometimes I write poetry; all this inspires and excites me.

In 2016, I came to America and when I saw Florida, I realized that it was paradise. I saw the ocean for the first time. It was amazing! What a powerful energy emanated from it. Florida is the most beautiful place on earth; there is beauty and inspiration in everything! It is impossible for me not to create here and that is why I am enjoying two new hobbies, landscaping and nail design.

Florida inspires me. God bless this paradise! Our planet is unique and wonderful, so let's take care of it and make it only more beautiful! And then all the miracles will happen, and the world will only surprise and delight you! Believe in miracles!

Lucy Volkevich is a student at Flagler technical College. Her teacher is Ameli Gauss.

Embracing the Change

As far back as I can remember, I never thought that one day I would immigrate to the United States or fall in love with someone who lives here and join him. Once I was granted a green card, I didn't know what to do, or how to prepare for this new journey. Certainly, I didn't give this change much thought. I mean how different living in the United States could be from living in Morocco. A question that I would quickly find an answer to.

I can't describe my feelings when I landed at JFK Airport. It was a mix of multiple emotions. I was impressed by how immense and crowded JFK Airport was. Unlike Casablanca Airport, everything was organized, and the signs were made easy for any foreigner to find their way inside the Airport. Also, I was blown away to discover the strong interstate highway system that helps the United States become a leading economic power and wished Morocco focused on similar infrastructure to help it acquire a more stable economy.

But the major experience that made me see and feel the huge economic and social gap between the United States and Morocco was the time I gave birth to my dear daughter Khadija. I was well taken care of from the day of my first visit to my Obstetrician-gynecologist, to the moment I held my daughter in my arms. I

can't express my gratitude enough to the whole medical staff. Every single member of the team was so nice and kind to me. Everyone was attentive to my concerns and needs for a safe and successful pregnancy. Regrettably, that type of high medical service with this kind of professionalism is not accessible to everyone in Morocco, especially in some rural regions where we need more hospitals and more emergency care clinics.

At the end, and with the help of my husband too, it wasn't hard for me to embrace the change from a country that needs everything when it comes to infrastructures and economic and social services to a country like the Unites States that went far in giving its citizens and residents the tools to prosper, evolve and be productive inside the society.

Fatima Ezzahrae Zine is an ESOL student at CAEC. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Original Fiction

Jill's Journey

All her life, Jill was told that she had a lot of disabilities. She never understood what kind of disabilities, and she never got the help she needed to get better. She couldn't read nor write. When she looked at words, they were different from the way they were supposed to be. Kids would laugh and make fun of her. She would feel so bad that she would run into a closet to hide, and she would cry. She cried so much, and she felt so much pain, because no one would help her. Even when she got to be an adult, she always felt she couldn't trust anyone with her secret, because she knew they would use or abuse her.

Jill was scared to go out on her own, but she decided to move to California. When she landed in California, she realized she had to find her own apartment, pay her own rent, and pay for her lights to stay on. She had to do this for herself. She had to do everything on her own, and she was scared. But she was lucky. She went to one beautiful apartment where the landlady, Miss Susan, was very nice and understanding. Miss Susan told her, "Oh, I have a daughter with a learning disability, just like you."

Miss Susan told Jill what she needed to do. She helped her fill out her application for the apartment, and she helped her get her lights turned on. She also said she knew someone at a restaurant who was looking for a busser. She introduced Jill to the manager at the restaurant, and she helped Jill get a job there.

Miss Susan also introduced Jill to the reading school that her daughter attended. Jill started going to school where she learned the alphabet and the sounds that vowels make. Sometimes she got frustrated, but the teacher was patient and understanding. She understood why Jill got frustrated, and she told her, "That's okay. You will learn these things. When you get angry, just take a deep breath and count to 10 to calm down your nerves. Then try again." Jill was very happy with the teacher.

After school, Jill would sometimes go out to dinner with Miss Susan and her daughter. They would eat, laugh, have a good time, and they would talk about school. One night, Miss Susan's

daughter said, “Wow, we’re doing it! You’re doing it, and I’m doing it, too! We should be so proud of ourselves!” And Jill realized that she was proud of herself, and she thanked Miss Susan for helping her.

Jill never had any confidence in herself. She had always stayed inside of herself and never took any chances. This was her first time trying something on her own, and when she took a chance, she found that there were people willing to help. She did many more things that she thought she would never do.

Liz George is a student at Project L.E.A.D. (Literacy for Every Adult in Dade) in Miami, FL. Her teacher is Christine Lyall.

Finding Nemo (Alternative Version)

Once upon a time, there was a little fish named Nemo, one of the many fishes in the fish world. Nemo had a mother, an older sister, and a brother. She (yes, in my story Nemo is a girl), has never met her father. However, this is not an important detail. It is, however, a sad fact. Nemo’s Clownfish father lost much more than his kids.

This was an ordinary fish family: they lived in an anemone apartment, kids went to the fish school, and their mom worked at several fish jobs to make her kid’s life comfy. Nemo would say now that she had an “as good as it could be” childhood in the 90’s, especially in that big fish world.

Nemo grew up to be a creative child who loved to dream. Nemo always did many different things and never was considered a couch potato.

Years passed, but Nemo never understood who she was. It was not a serious problem for her. It was just a weird feeling. Then, Nemo graduated from university, changed many jobs, and met many fish friends, too. She married her fish husband and had two lovely little fish. However, she always felt something was wrong. It seemed like she never got what she really needed.

One day, Nemo and her family took a long trip through the Atlantic Ocean, seeking a better life. This could have been a

It's Never Too Late

happy conclusion to this story. However, Nemo, many months later, still felt blue, as if she was living someone else's life. Nemo needed a change.

Today, Nemo feels much better, and she is sure that her biggest voyage has yet to begin and that the future holds a sea full of opportunities and smiles. The real "finding Nemo trip" is about finding herself and discovering who she is.

So let the adventure begin!

Maria Kolstova is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. The inspiration to write this story came from her kid's favorite animated movie "Finding Nemo." Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

Life as a Housecat

Me:

Life as a housecat must be great! Every day fresh food on the plate.

No work so they are never late.

Belly rubs all the time.

Curtains to climb.

Morning sunbaths.

Midday sunbaths.

Late afternoon sunbaths.

Has a best friend in the dog who lets him drink water from his bowl.

Gets to play a lot; running around the house having fun.

Cat:

Life as a housecat is NOT great!

The food is horrible. I want to get my own food like a real cat!

I like the belly rubs but only when I want belly rubs!

Lying in the hot sun all day looking out the window; how I wish that I could go outside.

And this dog!! How I hate this dog! He is always drinking my water; he never wants to share his food; he is always chasing me around the house when I am trying to stretch my legs for exer-

cise.

Climbing curtains instead of climbing trees.

Where is my person going all day long, leaving me alone with this dog that I can't stand? That stupid dog barks at everything and I don't know why.

I thought about running away many times, but when my person comes home at night and rubs my belly, and puts food on my plate, the woes of the day melt away. It's so warm curling up with him in bed while he rubs my head and we fall asleep. (The dog is not invited.)

I actually love my life as a Housecat!

Michael McLaren is a student at Adult Literacy League Orlando. His teacher is Fran Eberts.

While I Wait for You

When the little girl stepped inside that tasteless train, accompanied only by a battered teddy bear and a one-way ticket to Paris, she was immediately reminded of her father's desperate warning: "Take off the armband and never place it again!" Even without understanding why, that's exactly what she did, putting it in her coat's inner pocket. Even though she was small, her instinct set that rule in stone.

Another passenger asked about her parents, and she shrugged. "Your mother's portrait fell, I'll get it," her dad said after putting her in the wagon. While she waited, an uproar erupted outside. Passengers ran, suitcases were thrown, and the sound of gunpowder pierced the sky. A chill ran down her spine and her heart choked. The train left. And it never came back.

After 30 years, the little Jewish girl was now teaching history at the university.

"War does not favor anyone. Although I survived thanks to my father's cunning and God's mercy, I never remembered the faces of my parents, despite all my efforts. My father didn't have enough time to give the life he wanted for his family. And I didn't get a chance to spend more than 7 years with them." She paused,

It's Never Too Late

looking intently at each student present. "History does not just come to be studied; it is burned into our collective memory to never be repeated."

Samantha Ogowa is a student of Ms. Richardson at Suncoast Technical College, Sarasota, FL.

Why Voting Is Important to Me?

Why Voting Is Important to Me

A long time ago, voting was a thing that we used when we had to make a choice about community interests and other important issues.

Voting for me is especially important because it helps someone to decide what is best for himself and his community with plenty of liberty. When we vote, it gives us a chance to say what we want, a chance to be involved in the decision for the future. Voting gives someone a voice but does not always end with their preference. Therefore, one also learns to accept that the majority opinion wins, and this must be accepted by all involved.

Voting gives us the potential to understand and cooperate with everyone even if they have different ideologies.

For me voting is part of life; It's a definition of democracy.

Edouige Renaud was born in Haiti (Cap-Haitian) and worked in The Public Hospital Justinien as a Doctor for 5 years. His little baby girl is living in the Dominican Republic with her mother. He has lived in the US since November 2022. He is a student in the ESOL Program with Ms. F. Johnson. He is working hard to get his certification as Nurse Practitioner.

It's Never Too Late

Index

A

Abad, M.	103
Aguilar, J.	143
Aguirre, O.	22
Aldana, M.	230
Aleman, T.	126
Aloma, Y. R.	98
Angel, A. M.	145
Angeles, O.	128
Anonymous	93, 115, 165, 167
Aparicio, P.	2
Aranda, Y.	80
Arevalo, M.	147
Arnaout, R.	148
Arumendi, S.	104
Aung, N. N.	64
Aung, W. Y. L.	206

B

Baptiste, J.	66
Barbosa, D.	67
Barrio, J. D. H.	32
Barrios, P.	148
Bello, M. A. V.	197
Beltran, M.	3
Bey, I. A.	216
Bishop, J.	150
Bolanos, D.	151
Borowiecka, B.	213
Bryant, S.	105
Buitrago, C.	152
Burney, D.	214

C

Cabello, D.	122
-------------	-----

Cadet, M.	25
Campos, I.	232
Capacyachi, J. A.	82
Carrera, I.	4
Carrillo, Y.	5
Castro, L.	232
Castro, R.	91
Cerowska, A.	107
Cesar, Y.	20
Coleman, D.	215
Collado, O.	68
Corporan, A.	82
Crumpler, H.	68

D

Dalzon, M.	6
Damasceno, V.	6
Dam, C.	215
De Brandt, M. A.	130
DeJesus, K.	233
Delgado, R.	155
Diaz, S.	7
Diaz, Y.	156
Dinh, H.	83

E

Echemendia, I.	28
Espanol, T.	131
Esquivel, E.	157
Estrada, L.	29
Estrella, L.	158

F

Fenelon, K.	84
Fernandez, D.	124
Fernandez, M.	30
Fertil, F.	217
Flores, E.	159

Flowers, S.	9
Fontanez, A. O.	176
Fort, M. S.	55
Francois, E.	9
Frere, R. P.	178
Frere, V. P.	97

G

Gallardo, A.	11
Gallego, G.	69
Garcia-Gonzalez, E.	70
Garcia, U.	160
Garcon, J. L.	14
Georges, L. J.	161
Giménez, M. A.	108
Goel, M.	71
Gowman, C. S.	109
Green, J.	218
Guerire, C.	110
Guillen, A.	72
Gutierrez, S.	30
Guzman-Leon, H.	12

H

Haseeb, Y.	12
Henri, J. M.	162
Hernandez, H.	86
Hill, K.	218
Holton, M.	219

J

Jeudy, G.	93
Johnson, A.	219
Jonathan, C.	208
Joseph, L.	39
Joseph, W.	163
Josep, Y. J.	73

K

Kerdy, F.	14
Kinlow, S.	220
Kolstova, M.	248
Kononova, T.	36
Krasilchuk, C.	164
Kraszewska, N.	111
Kutsayev, N.	111

L

Lago, G.	37
Lanza, E.	165
Lara, I.	129
Lee, D.	133
Leon, M. L.	112
Liranza, M.	221
Lisperguer, K.	38
Lopez, D. V.	133
Lopez, M. G.	86
Lozano, T.	94
Lynova, A.	114

M

Marcelin, F.	134
Marius, R.	211
Martin, A.	135
Maslova, S.	40
Mata, Y.	168
Matto, L.	88
McDonald, M.	170
McLaren, M.	249
Metz, M. M.	235
Miranda, G.	41
Miranda, L.	42
Mitchell, E.	89
Monroy, R.	222
Montanez, D.	222
Mun, N.	43

Munoz, C. S. 44

N

Nepelska, D. 173

Nevins, S. 174

Nguyen, T. 96

O

Obregon, J. 96

Ode, M. 223

Olano, B. 136

Olvera, S. 176

Oo, A. K. 209

Oo, S. 45

Orellana, C. 9

Orellana, C. A. 137

Ortiz, P. 46

Ovsyannikova, E. 116

P

Palma, C. P. 224

Palmieri, L. 177

Paul, F. J. 74

Perdomo, L. 153

Perdomo-Reyes, G. 52

Perederko, P. 48

Pereira, M. C. 26

Perez, M. 177,

236

Perry, A. 224

Philibert, M. B. 128

Phyu, E. 117

Piedra, D. A. 63

Pierre, K. E. 15

Pierre, V. 16

Ponce, S. M. 115

Popilaire, K. 48

Popkova, Y. 118

Preciado, J. 237

Q

Quiles, K. 50

R

Ramirez, A. 51

Ramirez, M. 89

Ramsamujh, T. 180

Renaud, E. 251

Revelo, A. 23

Rice, B. 17

Riera, D. 183

Rincon, M. 184

Riveron, V. 184

Rodriguez, B. 185

Rodriguez, J. D. 90

Romain, M. C. 186

Roman, N. 18

S

Sac, M. 138

Saintilaire, L. 139

Salazar, I. 187

Sanchez, F. 100

Schell-Sze'chenyi, E. 119

Schweda, M. 188

Seide, L. 77

Serna, J. 225

Seymour, M. 124

Silva, G. 19

Solares, A. 55

Soto, A. 78

St Louis, A. 190

Suarez, Y. 19

Sukachova, O. 192

Summers, K. 226

Suy, B. 241

T

Talavera, G. 193

Tamayo, G. 119

Thomas, M.	56
Torres, L.	195
Torres, S. S.	240
Tsvitaieva, Y.	212
Tubman, L.	197

Zine, F. E.	245
-------------	-----

U

Ubaldi, A.	242
Urueta-Hurtado, O.	120

V

Valdez, C.	229
Valles, J. D.	199
Vargas, E.	200
Vegas, L.	140
Velasquez, A.	140
Velez, P.	201
Vertilus, D.	201
Villar, Y.	58
Volkevich, L.	244

W

Wells, D.	102
White, J.	59
Wright, A.	203

X

Xa Rin Xo Na	60
--------------	----

Y

Yakovenko, I.	61
Yépez, A.	121

Z

Zambrano, J.	142
Zarur, M.	204
Zepeda, B.	205

