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In My Words

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition promotes, supports and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As the statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's Adult and Family Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 300 adult education, literacy and family literacy providers throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based organizations with their training and development needs.



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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.

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We would also like to thank 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, literacy, ESOL 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. The editorial committee chose to minimize editing of submissions and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they as they were received. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or other affiliated organizations.

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

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My Experience in Adult Education

1909

I had never known a teacher who wanted to learn my name the first day of my class and the next day she just got it (!) including those of my classmates and you know: the first day is the most crowded. For me, in that special moment, this attitude restored my sense of wondering about the daily things that are around us and that we just missed because we are very focused on us and do not care about things that load our hearts with good feelings. And I was right, since that day I have filled my life with a wonderful experiences and this journey began in my 1909 ESOL classroom.

I am pretty sure that every student enjoys meeting people from different countries. This experience is amazing. First of all, trying to understand the accent in our “English” is hard and funny, but how interesting it is to know about the places where we belong and love!

I learned the courage and the bravery from people who were forced to leave their family and lives because of an earthquake, most of them young people. In the other side, the perseverance shown by older people who want to be understood by their grandchildren, for give you some examples.

I came to this country following my personal dreams. But in the short time I have been here, I have learned a lot from people: not only the sincere and lovely concern from my teacher, also the attitude in every student; because every story is particular, and now for me it is a privilege to share a classroom with these people. I want to thank them. Maybe in some years they won't remember me but, it is a fact: I will never forget my 1909 ESOL Classroom! Who I am? This is not the matter; the important thing is the gift that everyone has brought to me.

Liz Vera Chung is a student of ESOL at Sheridan Technical Center. Her teacher is Suell Scott.

How Does Adult Education Help Me

Coming to adult education was the best thing that I had ever done for myself. I never thought I would ever go back to school, because of fear that I was too old or that the stroke I had caused comprehension problems, I ran from education.

Being in the classroom getting educated, I set a value on myself. I know today by learning I will be going places like college or landing a job of my passion all because I went back to school.

Because of adult education, I feel positive about myself and my abilities. Knowing that I am a person of infinite worth gives me the freedom to know that you can teach an old dog.

I have a long way to go, but with the help of my instructor and peers that are 100% on my side, I should have no problem to finish this part of my education and earn my GED.

So no matter how old or challenged, you can still get a good education. It may take longer, but nevertheless, you will get there. This is only the beginning for me. By coming here, my future looks very bright.

Victoria Freckelton is in the GED Program at Lee County School District. Her ultimate goal is work with animals.

My Experiences In Adult Literacy

Hello my name is Lucy Gutierrez Lugo, I am from Mexico City. My husband and I have 2 daughters, Melany and Alexa Chavarria. I am living here for 8 years. When I started to learn English because I am understand to learn English is important for using all the time in the school with daughters in the doctor wherever I am going I need it.

In the beginning it is not easy it is so hard to take the decision to take my class. When I started to learn I did not understand nothing. I try but it is so hard. The time pass and I continue and continue, my mind is more accustomed to learning.

I have one teacher so really intelligent. She stimulates me every time she says going and keep going, one word in one day is better than nothing. She gives me to courage and my daughters is may

inspire to come to the class. My experience makes me grateful. I can see my progress I looked in the back, is so different I can't pronounce or explain nothing. After my class now I can talk with my daughter's teachers and I can talk in class and English for parenting class.

I try day by day learning more I never stop to learn, all the day all the time I can learning something different.

Lucy Gutierrez Lugo is a student at Immokalee Technical Center in Immokalee, Florida. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee. Lucy also studied in 2006 and 2007 with School on Wheels and Healthy Families, her tutor was Barbara Goldman.

Adult Education

As an adult student being back in school is a challenging, a lot of hard work. Specially, when you have been out of school 30 yrs. It does get easier if this truly is a goal. So me today been educate is a sense of accomplishment. I find myself very happy with my grades. Making honor roll was what made Me more determine. I found something that I am good at that is learning. I admire my Teacher Ms. McCall who takes, the time to see her student achieve in each subject. Her patient with her students, has me want more for myself when it comes to education.

If you truly want to learn you can. Start by having faith in yourself. Tell yourself you can do it. Love yourself. Tell yourself you are smart. Then work a little harder each day. To make your dream come true.

Education is very important to me. Just remember it is never too late. Today I strive for my education as adult. I feel good about myself. It gives me confidence, a since of being complete. It is truly a wonderful experience. Don't be afraid to ask question, or ask for help if I need. I also learn don't be hard on myself. Learning is the key to life. It is never too late. Learning open up a whole new horizon in my life. I am grateful for a second chance to get an education. Two things I know for sure (1) If I don't use you lose it (2) Nothing beats try but a failure. If I don't try them I have failed. So keep your head up and you will succeed.

D. Range is an adult education student at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

My Language Experience

I am writing this essay because I wanted to explain why I am learning English. I want to explain what experiences I gained while learning English. We follow a path during learning. I would like to describe the path I used to learn English.

Since I live in America, I need to learn English. I would never go anywhere with my husband or my friends. I restricted my freedom. I need to learn different religions, cultures, important people, important days and food culture in this country.

Why do I learn? What are the experiences I gained? I can narrate a few things about these questions. I described above that I am learning to expand my freedom areas. Because of the fact that I couldn't speak English, I was not able to get out alone in my first year here. I needed to sit at home most of the time or I have to go out with only my Turkish friends. Day by day, I started feeling nervous. When somebody knocked on my door or my phone rang, or even someone asked for something, etc. I was feeling that I was unable to give answer them and was feeling also hopelessness and unhappiness. I figured out that I had to learn English. I joined ACE's English programs and started to learn English. So, over time I saw some improvements in my English. Now, I can go out by myself and I can do some things where I need to use English. My confidence came back.

During learning, I followed some usual methods which many English students apply. I went to an English course about 5-6 months last year. The name of the course was Adult Community Education. But it was not enough for me to go to the course only. It was absolutely necessary to study at home. I memorized a lot of words. How could I learn more easily and quickly? I asked this question to my husband and some of my friends. I have been reading stories for English learners. Also, I have been listening to some English listening CDs. I solved some English tests in my computer. Now, I have a tutor. We are meeting once a week. My tutor is excellent to me. I want to thank my tutor, Brenda Owens. Also, I want to thank Karen Gotti, she provided the opportunity to us.

Finally, the second language was not easy for me to learn. In short, I tried to explain my experiences, my feelings and my thoughts. I am advising to learn a second language to everybody. Absolutely, everybody will need to the language, they will use it somewhere.

Fadime Akdemir is a student in the LVLC ESOL program. Brenda Owens is her tutor.

Why I Came to Adult Education

There are quite a few reasons why I came to adult education, but I will list the ones most important to me. One reason is to further my own education and knowledge, another reason is to further my children's knowledge and a final reason is to go to college and succeed in life.

I want to further my education and knowledge for my benefit. I believe having more knowledge means more confidence in doing what you want to do. Being knowledgeable will help me not only in life, but in adult education as well.

One of the most important reasons to come to adult education is to be able to help my children with their education. My reasoning behind this is simple, my parents were uneducated so they were unable to help me with my homework or teach me. This caused me to drop out of high school, which was not a wise decision. My children will have the help they need with all their school endeavors because I will have the knowledge to guide and help them, so hopefully they won't make the same mistake I did.

The last and most important reason for coming to adult education is to go to college and succeed. I want to be able to buy my family nice things and go to work without feeling like I'm working. As I always say, "If you do not want to work a day in your life, do what you love." The reasons for coming to adult education are the backbone and motivation guiding me through school and life.

Joshua Palov is pursuing his GED and plans to enroll in Florida Gateway College.

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

My experience in Adult Education and Literacy has been exciting. I'm finally getting the chance to go back to school and obtain my GED, something I've wanted to do for a long time. Right now I'm focusing on math. I'm not used to doing algebra, fractions, geometry, statistics and probability, but I'm getting better at it.

Mrs. Josephson who teaches GED and ESOL is very kind and patient with all of her students. When a student has a question or a problem she is always willing to help us out with encouraging words "You Can Do It" or a phone call.

The Adult Education and Literacy program is a great way for adults of any age to build confidence within themselves while also improving their reading, writing, and thinking skills. I'm grateful for the opportunity to be a part of this program for the experience has been a great blessing to me and those around me. It is making a few of my friends thinking of going back to school, too.

Kimberly Thomas is a GED student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Experience in Adult Education

My name is Jean Fenold Metellus. I'm Haitian. I came to America on August 30, 2005. My first day in Adult Education was one of the worst days in my life because I was unable to understand anything that Ms. Josephson asked me to do. I know learning is not easy, but I must be educated. For me, education is the first and the best part in the world. I tried to be in this class for many years to complete my G.E. D. but I wasn't serious about it. I know that it is the best thing for me but I am just lazy. This program is a good one, especially my teacher, Ms. Josephson, she is always good to me. When I don't come to class she will always call me to come to class. Finally, I came back to class again trying harder this time to reach my goal. It is never too late because this program is for everyone who does not know English and do not have a high school diploma. Moreover, Ms. Josephson is always here to help me and others as well. You never know what you can do until you try. I will not give up.

Jean Fenold Metellus is an ABE student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

English Has Become My Primary Language

When I was in Haiti, English was always a good language for me to learn. I have always liked it, but I haven't considered English as my primary language. Then I came to United States in September, 2009. I really could not understand when someone talked to me in English. So, I started going to school to learn English. I learn something new every day, so that I can improve my English. I realize that English is the only way for me to reach my goal. I have to make an adjustment in this new country. I have to try to forget who I was and try to focus on who I am now, and then go after what I want to be. It is a proven fact that if one was a lawyer, doctor, a judge or whoever one was in one's country of origin, when one comes to United States without knowing English, in spite of all one knows, one is nothing here. One needs to start from ground zero like everybody else when they come to United States.

On the good note, I am learning English at the Adult and Career Education Center. Now I understand, I can read, and speak English very well. English has become my primary language and I am enjoying it very much.

Jackson Joseph is an ABE student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Opportunity of My Life

I am Stephany. I am from Colombia. I just arrived about four months ago from Colombia. Now, I live with my daddy, his wife, and my sisters in Key West. My father is stationed here for about one year. This is my opportunity to learn English in U.S. I am grateful to Adult Education and Career Center that offers English classes for adults.

I enjoy the program and the teaching. Though it is not easy, I am building up my English skills slowly. Besides that I am very excited to be in Key West. I like the city and its people. I love the beach and enjoy watching the sunset. I will be going back to Colombia in October of this year. When I get to Colombia I will continue my study at the University majoring in communication.

Stephany Pinto is an ESOL student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Experience In Adult Education And Literacy

I came to United States in 2007. I'm from Guatemala. I want to tell you about my life here and how the Adult Education has changed a part of me to be in America. When I first came to U.S., I found a job immediately. I was a very shy person and I didn't feel good about myself at all. The reason was when somebody spoke to me, I didn't understand what they were trying to say. Sometimes they had to use their body language to help me understand. I felt very feel bad. It couldn't continue this way. I needed help. Help directed me to take an English class at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West.

At the beginning I was scared to speak because I wasn't sure of the right pronunciation. Even though I always think before I speak, it does not make any difference if I don't know the correct pronunciation. After a while my teacher, Ms. Josephson, gave me the courage to speak with confidence. She said to all of us not to be shy and not to allow anything to be an obstacle towards learning. According to her, the class is a training camp for the 'broken'. She will help put back the pieces together for us. It took me a little good while to make the necessary adjustment, and now I'm not afraid to speak anymore. I have a job as a maintenance man. I have to interact with a lot of people every day. At this moment I feel very comfortable with my speech. So, every time when I'm in class I try to do my best to learn a little more. To be a fluent speaker in English is very important in my life and I'm sure I will master it one day.

Jhonder Vasquez is a student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Why I Enrolled in Adult Education

My name is Shelby Peloni and I am seventeen years old and currently enrolled in adult education where I am trying to earn my GED. The reason I left regular high school is because of three main reasons.

The first reason that I left regular high school is because of the drama. People were constantly getting into fights and all the drama and fighting was getting in the way of my education. Drama was the main issue in high school no matter what you did or where you went

you were always getting caught up in it. People were constantly fighting and it seemed that there were fights every day at high school. It just distracted me from my education.

The second reason I left high school is because of my age. I was 16 in the ninth grade. I added it up and if I would have stayed in regular high school, I would have been 20 years old when I graduated. I was just behind in everything and it seemed like I never had the time to catch up. When I was in regular high school my friends became more important to me than my education and I just kept falling more and more behind.

The last reason I left regular high school is because I had a goal I was trying to reach and it wasn't going to be met if I remained in high school. My goal was to go to college and eventually start working in the medical field and start setting up my life.

With this said, I am so thankful for adult education, because now that I am enrolled in the program I have time to get caught up on things. I am currently enrolled in adult education and in college and pursuing my dream in the medical field. I am currently attending Florida Gateway to earn my PCT. Without adult Education I would never be where I am today.

Shelby Peloni recently earned her GED and is completing the PCT Program at Florida Gateway College.

My New Start

As I look at the differences of my past and future, I have made a big step toward success.

I have had a devastating past. As a child, my mom was not worrying about parenting my sister and me. My grandma always cared for us. When I was eight, my stepdad passed away of leukemia. I only knew him for three years. When I was twelve, I asked my mother who graduated? She replied with only one person.

After that day, I went to foster care. I kept running away, and I dropped out of school while I was in foster care. Also, I had gotten pregnant one month before I turned seventeen.

When my daughter, Malina, was born on March 8, 2009, I started thinking about her future. I ended up turning myself into foster care and I went back to school. I am now attending the Even

Start Program. I have my own place. I have daily challenges, but I get through them and have my eye on school for my daughter's future.

The devil is going to try to bring you down, but stop walking around with your head dropped low. Lift your head up high and keep trying.

Previously, I always felt there was something missing. As I still continue to attend the Even Start Program, I have found that empty spot in my stomach. I have the love, family and education that I was looking for. Thank you Even Start.

Kimberly Richards is attending the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Crystal River, FL. Also, she is currently being independent, paying her own bills.

How My Life Has Changed

In the past year I have met a lot of people who have changed my life and helped me adjust to my new life. I would like to thank them from the bottom of my heart, and let them know they have made a difference in my life.

Who are these people? These people are my teachers who work at Piper Community School. They have been teaching me how to speak English and also how to write it. Since I have been in the U.S. they have been helping me to improve, and much more.

When I came to the U.S., I was like an Alien who came to earth. I was scared to speak to anybody. I didn't know how to make sentences. I could only say two words. The two words were "yes" and "no", and even though I knew those two words, I had never used them.

I think now is the time that I can thank them, and everybody should know the names of the teachers who have made a difference in my life. I have Mr. Robert who always encouraged me to work hard to learn English. Adriana, Michelle, and Catalina and Debbie who is the one I think has done the most work with me. She is whom I have spent the most time with. She has been teaching me lots of grammar and American culture.

They don't know how much they have done for me, but I know. Teaching me English and making me able to communicate is the

best thing ever. The entire world is now open to me. Once again my dear teachers, thanks from the bottom of my heart.

Yvensky Lebrun is a student at Piper Community School. He is from Haiti, and hopes to begin GED classes soon.

Yes I Can!

When I decided to become a citizen it was to improve my future. I wanted to get better work and better opportunities for me in my life. To be a citizen of the United States is good, so that was my goal.

First I needed to understand about the government and the history of the United States. I studied hard, so I could answer the questions well for the interview and test. It took time because I needed to know how to read and write. My husband and I went to the library to ask for a teacher. I met my tutor, Connie, and she was patient with me and gave me confidence that I could do it. My neighbor also helped me learn to read and write. Sometimes it was hard for me to understand all of the information and I thought I could never learn it all. My teacher and my friend helped me not to give up. They said, "YOU CAN DO IT!" I learned that if I kept trying I could succeed.

Now I know what the Constitution means and I understand the laws and what it means to be a citizen. Finally the day came for my interview and test to become a citizen of the United States! I was nervous and afraid that I might not pass. But I did it! I thank God for helping me to succeed. I felt like the door had been closed, but now it is open a little for me. Now I can go on and open the door some more to a better future in America.

On February 15, 2011 at 2:00 p.m. I was sworn in with 480 other new citizens from 82 different countries. It was a very exciting and emotional ceremony and I felt welcomed as a new citizen of the United States. Now I can say to the other people like me, with little education, if I can do this and make a difference in my future YOU CAN TOO!

Martha Rosales Davis meets with her tutor Connie Howell at the Homosassa Public Library. Martha has resided in the U.S. for over 20 years and has recently become a U.S. citizen!

Reading Changed My Life

When I started reading class, I could not read or write. Once I began to work with my tutor, I started to improve.

My job supports me going to school. I attend class three times a week. I am learning many things like history and about famous people.

I am determined not to give up! I am the only one working to support my family. I want to make a difference for my daughter.

Dale Eggleston is an ambitious student at Northeast Community School, one of the tutoring sites of the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. His tutor is Sandra Hickey.

My Educational Experiences

I grew up in a family of blue collar workers; consequently education was not a priority. No one went to college; everyone worked entry level jobs. The importance of education was never instilled upon me as I grew up. I attended an inner city high school for 2 years, but due to the lack of guidance at home, I skipped a lot of school in 12th grade. As a result, my parents withdrew me; their attitude was that if I was not going to attend school, I had to go to work. This was the beginning of my life long career of minimum wage jobs and low level entry positions mostly in the food service industry. Without encouragement and positive educational influence from my family, I became accustomed to these jobs and endured them for years. As I became older and examined the results of my career choices, which were forcing me to live from pay check to pay check, I realized how much I have missed out on by not finishing high school and continuing on to college.

After going through some life changing events, I was brought back full circle to Miami where I grew up. Work is extremely hard to find here, so I was encouraged by my counselor at South Florida Workforce to enroll in an educational program. However, I needed a GED to qualify. I always wanted to get my diploma, but I never had the self-confidence nor reason to pursue it. The thought of being educated in something that I like to do, helping others and being emotionally successful in a career excited me! Yet, it also scared me, because I thought it would be difficult to return to school at my age. I knew at this point in my life it was time to make the proper

moves to ensure a future that would be emotionally and financially stable.

I chose to go forth with determination and commitment and get my GED, then continue into professional schooling. I enrolled in the Miami Dade College GED program; and as a result, my life has changed in the most wonderful way. Going back to school and being in an educational environment has boosted my self-esteem. Meeting other people my age who are pursuing the same goals has opened my eyes. I have developed a new, profound respect for instructors who demonstrate an unending commitment to teaching and helping students. Teachers are angels without wings.

In closing, I want to say that it is never too late to pursue an education and further your outlook on life to reach the higher standards we all deserve. I am forever grateful and blessed to have had the chance to realize that THIS is an opportunity that will benefit me in the most positive way; and therefore, I would also like to thank all the kind people that guided me along my journey.

Suzanne Ayers is enrolled in the GED Prep program at MDC Wolfson Campus. At age 52, she plans to graduate and enter the medical field. Her instructor is Sherry Joseph-Dutton.

Reaching for the Stars

I want to learn to read for myself and not to depend on others. My goal is to get my GED. Once I get my GED, I want to go to school to become a mechanic.

I have come a long way with reading, writing, and spelling. I am learning how to comprehend what I read, which makes me feel good.

I am also learning how to solve math problems which will help me manage my money.

Sammie Campbell has spent 30 years working as a Heavy Equipment Operator for Leon County. He and his tutor Lisa Foran are very proud of his reading progress.

Learning English

I came to Jacksonville in 2003 with husband and daughters. My husband and my daughters speak English very well, but I speak very little.

I work 4 days a week. In my work place everybody speaks English; I am the only one who speaks Spanish. I talk to them with the basic English that I have learned. I have tried not to speak too much because I am afraid to make mistakes doing my sentences. I always forget the words that I need to say to express myself. I watch TV in English, but I don't understand a lot of it. I would like to learn English faster, but it is hard for me. I do feel that I am learning slowly every day. I feel happy and thankful with all the people who are helping me to improve my English.

Dora Peña is from Peru. She's married with two daughters, and one granddaughter. She is a student at the Center for Adult Learning, Jacksonville Public Library.

A Wonderful Experience

When my granddaughter was born, I had one of the biggest experiences in my life because I became grandmother, an "Abuelita" as we say in my country. I'm very happy because she is a wonderful girl and because I get to see her growing up every day into a young woman.

I am also very happy because I love to be a grandmother, her grandmother. We both live in the same house and we both go to the same school. She goes to Southwest Senior High and I go to Southwest Adult Center, which is in the same building. Isn't it funny? We get to see each other during break or at noon when my class is over.

She is the only grandchild that I have and I love her very much. She is always making me feel proud because of her intelligence and abilities. She helped me write this essay. I am the proudest "Abuelita" ever!

My name is Maria Ferrao, and I am years old. I live in Miami, Florida and I am taking classes at Southwest Adult Community Center. I am registered in an ESOL multilevel class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez. My ESOL level is foundations.

Why I Came to Adult Education

My journey to adult education began in Mexico. My friend and I walked across the desert from Mexico DF to Tijuana. It was a very hard journey. We had only tuna and water to keep us going. It took us a week to get to America.

I came to America so that I could get my education and do better for myself. My brothers and my mother still live in Mexico. When I got to America, I stayed with my uncle and aunt and they enrolled me at Richardson Middle School. When I turned 16, they told me I had to leave and enroll in adult education.

I came to adult education and I am currently working towards my GED. When I get my GED, I want to go to college and be a policeman so that I can make money and help support my family here, as well as the family I have still living in Mexico.

Luis Perez is currently attending Columbia's Adult Education Program and plans to earn his GED and then attend college.

My Experience in Adult Education

As a student in the Adult Education class at Cape Coral High School, here is my experience. First, three hours a night, two days a week is not enough time. Second, my adult education staff members are aware of my goals. Third I would recommend this program to my friends and family members.

The first reason why I think three hours of night school, two days a week is not enough. It is hard to learn something, and then you are off five days till you come back. All together you would be coming to school six hours a week. That is not enough time to learn and remember to succeed the adult education program.

The second reason, all of my adult education staff members are aware of my goals. They are showing and teaching me the way to pass, and to succeed. I have set goals in this program to pass in the amount of time that we have. I know the staff is here to help you to succeed this program. So I know my goals will be reached.

The third reason is that I would recommend this to my friends and family members. I believe this is a great class to take if you don't have a diploma. The program is a great and good experience

Experience in Adult Education

to take. I will always recommend this program to my friends and family. Everyone needs a diploma these days to succeed in are economy.

In conclusion, as a student in the adult education class this was my experience. First I felt that three hours a night, two days a week is not enough learning time. Secondly all my staff members are of my goals to succeed this program. Then third I would recommend attending this program to my family and friends. These are just some of my experiences as a student in the adult education program.

Jennifer Ebbert is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

Goals and Ambitions

My Goals and Ambitions

Ever since I was twelve years old I wanted to be a music producer, song writer, and a recording artist. A lot of people think I won't make it, but I have it set in mind that nothing is going to hold me back. Nothing makes me as happy as when I make, write, and record my own music. That is why my goals are to become a music producer, song writer, and recording artist.

Music has always played a major part in my life. I remember when I was little my father used to play songs like "Enter Sandman" and "Sweet Child of Mine" on his guitar. I always showed interest in making music. I learned to play guitar and I used to be in five different bands. I set out to learn as much as I could about music. I have used various beat making programs, such as FL Studious, DJ Mixer, and Music maker Project Six. I start off with finding a good kick, and then I add the snare and high hat. Finally, I add an instrumental and then mess around with it until it sounds great. I am really inspired by Mike E. Clark, the man who produces my favorite band's music.

Hour after hour I spend in my studio writing my own lyrics. I am currently writing lyrics for my song called "Straight Outta Cleveland". To me the words are the most important part of a song. If the words don't fit together, then the whole song falls apart. When I write my lyrics I sit there in my leather computer chair, and put the pen to paper until I have a good song. Song writing is a lot like telling a story; it has a beginning, middle, and an end. I add rhymes to make the song more interesting. I enjoy sitting and writing my lyrics. With writing my own lyrics, it makes it easier for me to memorize them and to get ready to finally record.

I am sitting there in my chair, head phones on and microphone in

my hand. As I hit ‘play’ the beat begins to play. Now it’s time to record. This is my favorite part. I enjoy putting my lyrics and beat together. Recording takes a while. You need to make sure everything fits together. As much as I love this part, it can be stressful; it is easy to have mess ups. As soon as I finish recording I play the whole thing. If it sounds good I keep it. If it doesn’t, I edit it and make it sound great. I am hoping to one day be a part of Psychopathic Records.

I know with hard work and drive I will fulfill my goals. All I think about is my music. It helps knowing that each day I do a little to fulfill my dreams. My music means a lot to me. It brings me a lot of happiness and joy. I can’t even think what I would do without my music. Being a music producer, song writer, and recording artist is what I am going to be. One day when I am older I will teach my grandchildren so that can share my goals and continue the music business.

James Holland is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

Just One Phone Call

I’ve always wanted to get into childcare. In high school grades 9-12, I had taken child development classes and completed all levels. I got my hours and certificates as well as receiving an “Outstanding Performance” out of all level fours. I never finished high school. I dropped out at the age of 18. I was pregnant with my first child. When I dropped out, I felt like I failed my father. Out of all three kids, I was the only one who didn’t finish school. I lost my father back in 2001. He committed suicide. I never lived with him, but I did keep in contact with him. It was and still is hard to live with the pain of losing my father at an early age.

After getting married and having three kids, I still wanted to do childcare. It took me 6 years to get where I am now. I thought with all the kids in school now, it would be worth a shot. When I went to my daughter’s school, the director at Crystal River Head Start, Cozzette White handed me a paper that had the Even Start Program’s number. Then in September of 2010, I made the call! I talked to Mrs. Seijas, who had that sweet, innocent voice and set up a day to start Even Start. That’s all it took was one phone call and I felt a big relief knowing I am finally going back to earn my GED and to finally walk.

Right now, I'm still in the process of earning my GED, trying to work hard and do my best! After I complete my GED, I'm going to attend WTI. I talked to Jennifer Blake from WTI and she said it will take me six months to take the child care classes.

I feel very proud of myself for calling and getting my foot in the door so I can chase my dreams, and most of all making my dad proud of me. I believe he's smiling down on me right now.

Remember, just one call is all it too for me to get my foot into that door and that's why I am where I am today.

Crystal Grooms lives in Homosassa, Florida with her husband, Robert, and their children-Christopher, Kurtis and Tehya.

My Goals

I am turning my life around because I want to be a teacher's aide. I have been working on my GED at Northeast Community School in St. Petersburg, Florida for almost two years.

I have advanced three grade levels. I received four certificates of accomplishment from the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. This made me very proud of myself.

I have improved at work. I was happy to receive raises. My boss compliments me for helping out with other managers and crew members. I have a lot of confidence in myself.

My knowledge has helped a lot with a computer. I know where a lot of buttons are on it. I have taken a class at Work Net in St. Petersburg, Florida. I am teaching myself how to use a computer.

I improved on my bowling games over this past summer. Reading has helped me with my favorite sport as I can now help with the score sheets.

I will eventually get married and adopt a baby boy and a girl and be able to help them with their homework.

Mandy Mattingly is a young woman with great expectations, whose positive attitude has advanced her basic reading skills and stirred her interest in writing. Her tutor is Jacquelyn Smith.

My Goals and Ambitions

When I was in high school, I always dreamed of becoming a scientist and I knew it was possible because I was a good student in Mathematics and Physic Mechanics. So, I decided on a plan for my future. I set my goals. I worked hard so that I would be able to follow the dreams that I had always hope for in the future.

However during this period there was a lot of trouble in my country of Haiti. The situations went from bad to worst and there were a multitude of problems. The upheavals of political events caused a drastic halt to me of accomplishing any of the goals that I so carefully planned for my future.

In spite of everything, I was still able to attend the *Institute Superior Technical of Haiti* where I earned a Bachelor Degree in Civil Engineering. Shortly after graduating I was hired by Kay Consulting Company and was employed with the company for eight years. I was now at the top of my career and reaching my goal. Everything was going great, until...

On January 12, 2010 a devastating earthquake hit Haiti and life as I knew was no longer the same. I left my country to find my wife and son who were residing in the United States (Miami, Florida).

The moment I arrived in the United States, I begin to set my goals one more time. I knew the first thing I would have to do is learn to speak English. I begin by enrolling into William H. Turner Technical Adult Educational Center and taking a class to assist me in learning that most difficult and different language called English. I'm working hard and it seems to be getting better each day. I know that I will accomplish my goal to attend a local College and achieve a Civil Engineering degree, with a specialty in Reinforcement Concrete. I did it once through many hardships and obstacles and I know that I will do it again.

Ronald Desroches is an Adult ESOL student at William H. Turner Technical Adult Educational Center, Miami, Florida. He has a wife and a son.

My Life Goal

Ever since I was little, I always admired Christian music. I loved to hear the message given by the band in their songs. Two years ago, I fulfilled my dream, and started my own band called Forgiving the Sinners. But, we ran in to financial trouble, and were struggling. So we disbanded, going our separate ways, but still keep in contact hoping one day we could raise the money to come back together and give our message to people.

When my band and I played at our friend's birthday party, we all got adrenalin rushes from the crowd after we finished a song. People encouraged me to love what I do from their joyful shouts and screams. I cannot remember the last time I grinned from cheek to cheek. It was the single greatest day in my life, so far at least.

I also loved what I did, because I was teaching about Christianity while I was singing. Every song I wrote came from the heart, and the Bible. I hope to help inspire people that are lost and have nothing else to turn to. I hope for them to turn to the Lord for help and forgiveness. Teaching about my faith is what also inspired me to play music.

One day I hope for my band to reform and try to get sponsors for us to become a professional band one day. But money is not what would drive me to do that. It would be because of my love of music, my love of people, and for Jesus Christ. Doing something that makes money is good, but doing something you love, is indescribable.

Fulfilling my childhood dream is only months away, that is why I decided to get my GED. After I, and my band members, obtain the GED, we will be able to create enough of an income for band materials, and for sponsors to recognize my band. They will recognize our passion for music, the joyful crowds, and our incredible faith in God.

Johnathon McElfrish is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Mackendy Libera. I'm from Haiti. I came to America on April 22, 2010. That means I have been in Key West for eight months. I have three sisters. My family lives in Haiti. I miss them a lot, and I love them very much. My ambition is to be a police officer. After five years I'm going to work for the FBI. That's why I am in Adult Education class now. I need to study English, get my GED diploma, and then go to college. After that I will go into the police academy.

I believe that education is the key for a better life and a better future. The only way that I know how to get my education is by going to school. My goal is to help my country and my family. After the earthquake one year ago my people are obviously living in the street, under the tents because they lost their houses and everything they had. Many people cannot go to school because they don't have money. We need more hospitals, schools, universities, and houses. We also need more doctors and teachers. I want to participate in the reconstruction of Haiti.

MacKendy Libera is a student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Dream Job: Teaching

Since I was a child I have dreamed of becoming a teacher. A teacher is a person who encourages others to learn new things and helps to improve their lives.

There is an old saying in Chinese- "A teacher is equivalent to half of a biological parent." And my biological parents are teachers too. So originally I was inspired by my parents to become a teacher. Whenever I got a chance, I used to go with my parents to their school. They were teaching and encouraging students to make science projects. And I saw the students also respect them from their hearts.

I have the same respect for all of my teachers in my life. They have always served as a well-wisher, a good friend, and a guide. They taught me good communication, an important skill of learning. They made us think, ask and create new ideas.

As I have grown up I realized that I am passionate about teaching. And it will lead me to a brighter future. I wanted to

choose a career of satisfaction and happiness. Finally, I decided to become a teacher. After graduation I earned my master's degree in chemistry. Then I did a teacher's training program in my country. I got a job in school and was teaching math and science in the 8th and 9th grades.

As I have been in the United States, and not a native speaker of the English language, I have had to learn the language in order to be able to communicate with others, and to make myself available for teaching.

I would like to teach again because it is in my blood.

Jigisha Chirag is from India and wants to improve her English. She is a student at the Center for Adult Learning - Jacksonville Public Library - Southeast Branch.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Jean Brissol. I'm from Haiti. I came to America in September 2009. I remember when I was a little boy; my ambition was to become an administrator in my country. My mother wanted that for me. Therefore, she made me focus on it continuously. For your information, my mom is illiterate. Although she doesn't know how to read and write, she tries to instill in me that it is important to have goals and ambitions in my life. Also, this helps shape me and gives me direction for my future. While going through life, there might be some changes along the way.

I know, I can, and I want to be an administrator someday. As I keep this in my mind, my first step is to equip myself with proper communication skills, a strong academic background, and some training in administrative work. The only person that can hold me back from my goals and ambitions is myself. I have made up my mind to not let anything stop me from reaching my goal. As Edmund Burke quotes "Ambition I can creep as well as soar."

Jean Brissol Brice is an ESOL student at Adult and Career Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

One Day

I would love to travel one day. I work a lot and I get so stressed out. I know that I need to be patient. Good things happen for those who wait. My goal is to get my GED. Once I get it, I want to go to college and study radiology. Hopefully things work out and I hope I get a car when I get my taxes. I'll be so happy and I always think how I started on the bottom, but I'm working my way up.

Armando Sanchez works hard in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program.

Leslie White

In 1987, there was a young lady that was in her last year in high school. She started dating and assumed that being in a relationship was more important than an education. At that time she dropped out of high school and developed a family. In 1994, she left her husband and then began to realize that a relationship or being married is not as important as getting an education. She returned back to school along with her 5 children in school.

In 2000, one of her goals was accomplished and she received her GED. She then attended Lake City Community College for a year. At that time, her plan was to become a teacher, so she decided to become a substitute teacher to see if that was really what she wanted to do. After becoming a substitute, she realized that she did not want to do that every day. She chose to substitute while searching for her true career.

In 2009 she decided to become a CNA (certified nursing assists) after passing the State Board and while performing those duties, she realized that she wanted to pursue an additional career. Now she is studying to increase her TABE scores and become a LPN (License Practice Nurse) and within the next 10 years she would like become an ARNP (Nurse Practitioner). This is my story, the story of Leslie White!

Leslie White is attending classes at Columbia's Career and Adult Center to assist her in raising her TABE scores so that she may pursue her LPN certification. She plans to complete her studies at Florida Gateway College.

Purpose Of Life

My name is Connie Rojas; I was born in Bogotá, Colombia. I have been living in the United States since February 2008. In September 2009, I moved to Florida, and I love it here. When I was living in Colombia I studied cosmetology. I had to interrupt my studies to move here. My plan now is to continue learning and enroll in a cosmetology and aesthetics program to obtain my license. I try to pursue my goals every day.

I am a hard worker and I like to help others. So many people have helped me in so many ways. I want to give that back in any way I can. Many women in my community don't have enough confidence, because they may not speak English, or feel they don't have enough education. I help them with English but also, through cosmetology, I can help them feel better about themselves physically and emotionally.

Now I work as a sales person for a sunglasses company at the Sawgrass Mall. I'm also enrolled at Piper Community School adult program where I study English. The company has offered me a new position, but I need to have computer skills and write English much better. I like my new job now, but I really want to get a new job in the future with a better schedule because I love spending my time at church helping others and taking classes every weekend to learn and grow spiritually.

I love my country of Colombia. I miss my family and friends. I plan to go soon to visit everyone, but I love this country because I think it was God's plan for my new life. I have new friends and better opportunities.

I have heard about "The American Dream" and I have one. My dream is to be the best wife, mom, daughter, sister, friend, and professional. I dream of getting married and having two babies. I'm living for myself right now, but I want to travel to different countries to visit my family and friends and experience new cultures. I'm really happy. I know the purpose of God in my life. I'm living and enjoying my time, with faith, hope and love; I'll see my dreams come true.

Connie Rojas is a student in the advance class at Piper Community School. She's working hard to create a perfect life for herself. She will most certainly succeed.

My Goals And Ambitions

Before coming to United States I worked at Bank Bac-Bamer, Honduras. I was a cashier. I really liked my work there, but now I'm here in United States and I don't have a job because I don't speak English. To speak English well is my main goal. Once I accomplish it, I know it will be easier for me to get a good job and also I will be able to go to college.

My ambition is to be the best psychologist. I think this profession fits me because I like to listen, observe, and help people. My dream is to sleep in a beautiful house and do a lot of travelling. The first step in order to meet my goals and ambitions in this country is to learn English. Believe it or not, nothing is easy. No goals and ambitions come without hard work.

Sandra Sansone is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Goals and Ambitions

I have a lot of goals and ambitions. These three goals are the main goals in my life. The first thing I want to accomplish is getting my GED. Then I would like to go to college and get my license for Cosmetology. I want to do hair and nails, because that is something that I would enjoy doing.

Being a better mom is another goal. I want to put my kids first because that is something that I've never done. I want to give my children everything that they need. I want to be someone they look up to. I want to give them things that I've never had. Don't get me wrong, I've always had a good mom. She taught me things in life aren't easy and they are not free. I want my children to know the same things, but I want to be there for them 100%.

My last goal is to own my own home one day in order to be able to give my children and myself a place of security. A home we never have to worry about being thrown out of. A place we can call home. I know this isn't a lot to most people, but it's a lot to me. I know it's not going to be an easy; life is a challenge, but it's a challenge and a goal that I will achieve. This is because these are the most important things in my life.

Chasity Petit is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are ever changing things in my life. Up until just recently, my goals and ambitions were not very realistic, nor were they meaningful. However, I want to tell you how they have changed and why. Goals and ambitions change because people do, but places can change them too.

I am currently incarcerated at Broward Correctional Institution in Ft. Lauderdale, FL. I can honestly say that I never thought too much about my goals and ambitions until I got here. Being here has taught me a lot about myself and where I want to go in my life.

Do you think a solitary life is exciting, fulfilling, or something to look forward to? Me neither! I think it is sad and depressing. Although I'm fortunate enough to receive mail, money and visits from family and friends, my experience in prison has shown me how lonely one's life can be if someone does not have these things. It has made me also think seriously about people in nursing homes and pediatric wards.

I am currently enrolled in a Business course and it gave me the idea to open a non-profit organization to gather volunteers to visit people who have isolated living conditions. I would love to spend time with those who are secluded from their loved ones in nursing homes and pediatric wards. Whether it is doing their nails, styling their hair, telling jokes, or planning fun activities, I want to bring a smile to lonesome hearts. It would be fulfilling for myself and uplifting to others.

My goals and ambitions are clear. Think of those you love who you are not spending time with. If you cannot be where they are, give them a call. Before it's too late, let them know they are not alone. Tomorrow is not promised and no one wants to be forgotten and lonely.

Angela Wicklow is an MLP Teacher's Aide at Broward Correctional Institution.

Making My Life Better

By the time I dropped out of high school, it was too late to try and reach out to me, because there were things much more attractive to me than an education. The streets and everything that came with it excited me as a teenager. The most exciting attraction to me was the business of pedaling drugs. I loved how quick money would come from the sale of drugs. By the time I was nineteen I was trafficking drugs from Miami to Lake City, From Tampa to Georgia; oh the fast life never felt so good.

Like the saying goes, crime doesn't pay. Luckily, I never got caught with any felonies, but most of the friends I hung with everyday weren't so lucky. By twenty-one I had a son. I had to ask myself, "Is this the lifestyle I want my son to live?" . I couldn't imagine my son growing up to be a drug dealer, so I did what any other man would, and should do; get a job. I got a job working in Jacksonville Florida, and was a concrete finisher. The money wasn't as profitable, but it was better than looking over your shoulder every time the police passed through your neighborhood.

Unfortunately after ten years of being a concrete finisher, I got laid off due to the economic recession. I found myself considering living the same life I lived as a teen-ager. The job I had for ten years was a dead end job anyway, so I had an attitude like why not? This time I was older, more mature, and probably could be more successful with the trade. Deep inside I knew that was a dead end direction for me too. There's no work and the drug trade was a dead end too. I decided to go to Adult Ed in Columbia County to get my GED. Once I earn my GED, I intend on going to Florida Gateway College. I guess I was tired of having the wrong set of goals. I finally wanted to set goals for my life which would make my life better.

Jacoby Moore is pursuing his GED in Columbia County's Career and Adult Education Program and plans to continue his education at Florida Gateway College.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Ramiro Saenz. I am from Nicaragua. When I came to the U.S. I could hardly speak English. My number one goal is to learn how to read, write, and speak English very well. Without failure, I always make myself available to attend the English class. My ambition is to find a better job so that I can help my family, my special daughters, and myself.

Ramiro Saenz is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Elements of Achievement

One evening, as I got home from school, my mother called me with an angry voice, “Johnny!” As I approached her room, I noticed a white slip in her hand. “Here is your progress report”. Startled, I took the report from my mother and I saw all Fs. I broke down in tears,” Mom, I tried my best” I whimpered. The next day my mother tutored me in my math and reading. I started understanding these subjects. A month later I received my report card and I had 3 A’s and 2 B’s. I then realized that sometimes in life you must fail to succeed. That taught me a critical lesson of life to live by forever. In the process of achievement, there is failure, change, and then success.

Many times in life there are things you can’t learn from word of mouth. You must experience things to learn, which may lead to failure. Contrary to this statement, I learned that failure is simply a state of mind. Failure, in my eyes, is just a process before an achievement. Every successful person has failed at numerous things in life, but failing is what made them realize what needs to be corrected in their future attempts. The problem in society today is that we accept failure as a permanent status, as if it cannot be improved or changed. Understandably, we give up because we assume that success is not for us, or we are not smart enough to achieve that certain task.

In addition, the first step to success after failure is change. It is impossible to succeed at something at which you fail, if you use the same strategy. It’s almost like a football team using the same play over and over after not gaining any yards. That’s exactly why president Barrack Obama’s slogan is change. That change is for everyone, due to the fact that if we all want to live in a perfect

Goals and Ambitions

economy, we must all change our ways, not only the government. In my eyes, there is no such word as perfect. That word should be removed from the dictionary, but perfection is still what we should strive to achieve. Perfection is constant change, or working on something consistently for the better.

Success is simply looking back on your long journey of where you came from. My Uncle Peter failed the bar test four times before he became a lawyer. To achieve you must apply all the lessons that you learned from failing.

To conclude, success is crossing the finish line and thinking of all the steps it took you to win the race. A successful person never lives with regret, but a person that accepts failure always lives with shame, and regret. Change is conquering failure and all the obstacles it brings.

John Sheriff is a young student who want to study political science as soon as he earns his GED.

Pressing on Toward My Goal

I have not yet obtained perfect skills in computer, math, reading and language, but I am working on getting my GED and high school diploma. I know I am doing better because Christ Jesus is with me. Remembering what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal of doing my best in learning. Because I am mature, I think an education is important. God has made this clear to me.

Join with me in following my example of learning. If you want to do better, try what I am doing today. Find a program near you and do what I have done. I've learned a lot from my teacher and I thank her very much for helping me along the way. I'm so proud of myself for what I'm doing in my life. I'm starting a new life for myself because it is so important to make something out of my life today.

Shirley Freeney, who thanks her mother and father for taking care of her all her life, is a student with Learn to Read of NW Florida.

Becoming a Cosmetologist

What is one goal I have? My goal is to be a cosmetologist. Because I want to be a cosmetologist I must get my GED, go to North Florida Cosmetology Institute and then get my own salon.

Right now I'm going to ACE. I am starting one of my steps. In order for me to get my GED I must keep going to school, doing my work, being on time, participating, and focusing and getting rest at night and communicating with my teachers and others.

After I get my GED, I'm going on to my next step, which is going to North Florida Cosmetology Institute and starting my classes. I must go to class every day, no matter if I want to do things with others. I will need to participate in things I don't know how to do. I need to keep the same routine going. I will need to make sure I have all the books and supplies I need for class, communicate with others asking questions, and also let some things go.

Now that I have got everything I need, I'm going to my third step. I must save up some money, pick a couple of people I know who do hair and who are nice to people, who want to be around people and don't mind helping people whether they are having a good day or bad, and helping people with or without an attitude. They also should be willing and wanting to work. Not only that, I must stay out of trouble. And I need to keep my focus and let nothing stop me. And the name of my shop is going to be Latorya Hair Salon.

Finally, but not least, being a cosmetologist is one of my biggest goals. But in order for me to be a cosmetologist, I must keep going to school while I have this chance to get my GED, and then go to North Florida Cosmetology Institute and start working on getting my own salon. I know I can do it because I have a pusher, someone who's telling me that I can do it and that's God. I thank God for giving me my talent for doing hair. So why stop? Hair is something I do every day. Hair is what I love to do. Doing hair is really fun to do because you can be creative and think of different hair styles. My goal is to become a cosmetologist.

Latorya Wiggins is 21 years old and goes to Adult and Community Education in Tallahassee Florida and has a dream about becoming a cosmetologist.

Crystal Bellamy's Future Goal

My goal is to get a job .This is how I am going to do this. I will go out and look for a job or I will go to many websites and I will go to different stores. Also, I will go to a lot of places to fill out applications. When they call me, I will go on interviews to see if I have a job or not.

The first thing I need to do is go on the internet and fill out applications. I could also get on the bus and look for a job at the supermarket and different fast food restaurants. I could also ask my caseworker where I can find more jobs at or I can look in the newspaper.

After I apply, I hope they will call me for an interview. To get ready, I will learn how to answer questions in a pleasant manner. I should dress neatly and I will have a polite attitude with the interviewer and I will come on time.

One of my goals is to get a job. I will have to look for a job and I will go on interviews. I want a job so I can make extra money that I can put toward my bills. Also I can feel good about myself if I get a job.

Crystal Bellamy is a 23 year old student at ACE in Tallahassee. She hopes to get a good job in the future.

My Journey

First and foremost I would like to thank Miami-Dade Public Library, Project L.E.A.D. and Mrs. Gail for giving me this opportunity of a lifetime and helping me to become a better reader. Let me tell you the story of my life. I am 31 years old. I was ashamed about my reading skills growing up. People used to pick on me at school, make fun of the kids who were in special ed. classes. I used to run into the classroom so fast so no one could see me going in. It was hurtful having people telling you that your dumb and stupid and that you will never do something with your life at the age 15 or 16. I would sit up in my bedroom, crying, feeling bad about myself, having no confidence. I am tired about feeling low about myself, tired of working low paying jobs, doing low labor work. I want something better for myself and my future.

My mom and my aunt told me about Project L.E.A.D. I have big dreams and goals. I want to try to get into school like a technical

school so I can work in horticulture with plants or maybe into college. One of my loves in life is sports. I would love to go to school for sports broadcasting, doing TV or radio. One more goal I have is to help someone like me so that they don't have to feel ashamed about reading. Someone is out there to help you have a better life, a better future. It is not going to be easy. It will be hard, but it will be worth it. You will be so proud of yourself. Don't ever give up on yourself.

Statan Burney is in the Project L.E.A.D., Literacy for Every Adult in Dade, in Miami, Florida. His tutor is Gail Lewis. He would like to be able to one day go to school for sports broadcasting.

My Goals and Ambitions

I plan to learn how to read so that I can get a job. I want a job like sitting with old people because I used to take care of my grandmother, and I enjoyed helping her. I think I would be very good at a job like that.

Cynthia Sanders lives in Pensacola, Florida and is a student of Learn to Read of Northwest Florida.

My Goals

Hi, my name is Mirna Francisco. I was born in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. I came to the United States when I was 20 years old and expecting my first child. I lived in Texas for only six months with my family before we decided to move back to Mexico. We stayed in Mexico for three years and returned again to the United States.

My home at this time was in Fort Myers, Florida. My first job was packaging flowers from a warehouse. I worked doing this for two years. In the meantime, I had my second child. I now became a stay-at-home mom. Taking care of my son and daughter was more than a full-time job.

When my daughter was about seven years old I decided to go back to work. I started working for the Food Service Department of the Lee County School Board. I have been working in this capacity at Tice Elementary for about seven years now.

My goals and life's dream is to become proficient in English and attend college. I want my children to be proud of me. I also want to be able to help my mother and be there for her as she was for me.

Goals and Ambitions

Most importantly I want to be able to help my children to be successful and have a happy life.

My name is Mirna Francisco. I was born in Monterrey, Nuevo Leon, Mexico. I came to the United States when I was 20 years old and expecting my first child.

My Goals for 2011

1. Get a raise at work
2. Get my driver's license
3. Study for the U.S. Citizenship test.

If I had more money I would give money to my sister in Haiti and to my church and my family.

If I could drive I would go to work and to church to pray for everybody. I am not a big driver.

I want to be a U.S. citizen, because I live in America. I like America very much. I learned to read and write English in America.

Antonine Joseph is a student in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program.

My Past, My Present, My Future

I arrived in United States without anything but with many problems and different customs. Though I have big problems and feel alone, this is just the beginning of a new chapter in my life. My past situation is critical! It forced me to detour my learning and my goals for three years. My ambitions in United States are English and my business. I work all day to investigate for the development of my project. My project is to have my own company that restores building, houses, and commercial establishments. In order to accomplish this goal, I need to consult about my construction project with the small business and development associates. Also, I need financial assistance from the bank. I am confident that I will be able to achieve success because of the availability of assistance and support in America.

Tulio Torrado is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Journey

I have many reasons for deciding to come to Adult Education. First, the economy is horrible and without some type of education or trade there aren't many jobs that are willing to hire you. You also need to have a work history or educational back ground. So having been out their looking I decided to broaden my resume and extend my education. With that being said, I'd like to point out "That I have truly gained so much information and knowledge by coming faithfully and actually paying attention."

Allow me to tell you this, "a mind is a terrible thing to waste", literally. This may sound cliché, but that is the honest to god truth. Now with that as an understanding I had come to my conclusion that I had to embark back on my education to better increase and secure my financial future. So with my drive and determination I have started school and have no intention of quitting and not completing my educational goals to set my future career.

Another one of my many reasons is that I have no type of a job history. Either I was going to have to have a major connection or have an extensive educational background, which I am now obtaining through the Adult Education program at the Columbia County School Board. Because a mind is a terrible thing to waste, I plan to enroll in Florida Gateway College where I will obtain my G.E.D. I will then pursue a higher level education.

Finally I would like to say that my last and main reason for actually coming to Adult Education was because I really want to broaden my resume. I want to have that personal enjoyment knowing that I took the time to accomplish my education. That's really and truly something I thought that I'd never complete and to actually even consider college just blows my mind completely out of the water. Without my education, I could never obtain my career goal of becoming a pharmacist. I would like to secure my financial future and finish my education. God blesses and encourages me.

Sierra Caldwell is pursuing her GED and plans to attend college.

Goal and Ambition

The cool feeling of the six ounce gloves triggers my adrenaline, shooting it throughout my body. A quick sip of water to extinguish my thirst and I'm ready to fight! Becoming a Professional MMA fighter has always been my biggest goal and ambition. Not only will it bring me a surreal salary and help me become a better fighter, but I get to keep my body healthy and in shape as well.

My dream has always been to be a mixed martial artist. Ever since I started the sport I've trained and worked toward becoming a better fighter. This sport is my one true goal in my life right now, and to become a better fighter of course. I'm sure that if I keep training with the right people I will better my skills as a mixed martial artist. I'm positive that I will become better than what I am today.

Keeping my body healthy and in shape is crucial to becoming a MMA fighter. All year round I have to exercise and diet right just to keep my body up to date. A fighter's body is his weapon in the ring; without it he's nothing, so keeping my body in perfect shape as much as I can is very pertinent! Knowing how to diet the right way with the equal exercise will also benefit me when trying to stay in shape for this sport.

Becoming a mixed martial artist will also bring in a very big salary. Most of professional fighters make up to one hundred and sixty thousand dollars in just one fight; it makes me wonder about how much I could make. If I do make money like that I would never be able to exaggerate the amount of money I make. The money I would be making will also benefit me in getting my life started off in a good way.

Over all my goal and ambition in life is becoming a better MMA fighter with a great salary and a fit and healthy body. So by continuing what I am do to keep my body in shape and keep shooting towards my goal, I'm positive that I will become a better fighter with a salary and body to match!

Victor Ortiz is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

Turning Point in My Life

A Turning Point in my life...

This year Christmas was different in my life and in the life of my family.

Ever since we moved to Jacksonville, FL, in 2006, we would drive or fly to Los Angeles, CA to be with our Philippino families for the holidays. This year we decided to just stay in Jacksonville. The kids, of course, were disappointed. It was going to be a quiet Christmas and a change in our holiday lives.

For months before this time ,we had been talking about getting a dog. (I had always secretly been afraid of dogs.) So, during the holidays we started going to animal shelters. In one of them we saw a dog that we really liked. His name was “Norman”. Unfortunately, another family adopted him.

Then we went to a pet shop and saw a puppy that was perfect for all of us. We fell in love! On Christmas Eve day we brought the puppy home. We named him “Norman” after the dog we had liked in the shelter. Norman is a “schnoodle” (part Schnauser and part Poodle). He’s five months old.

The kids are so happy and so am I. I finally overcame my life-long fear of dogs and I feel like my family is complete in our new home. Norman changed our lives and now we feel like a real American family!

Antonette Cristobal is a mother of four children. She is in an ESL class at the Pablo Creek Regional Library in Jacksonville, FL. Barbara A. Banks is her teacher.

Turning Point in My Life

I worked for a IT company for eighteen years as a programmer. I worked so much overtime that I couldn't care for my children. My Mother-in-law cared for my children and kept house while I was working. I felt guilty for not spending time with my children and not filling my role as a housewife.

My Mother-in-law was becoming old. So, it was hard for her to keep house and care for my children. I was very tired and not happy. My energy was drained by so much work. I retired because I needed rest and I wanted to care for my children. I had mixed feelings: I missed working and seeing coworkers, I was not earning money any more, but felt free and was relaxed.

Six months later, I came to America with my family. Visiting America is a new chance for me and my family. In our country, my husband works away from home during the week. Therefore, our family only sees him on weekends. But in the U.S, our family is together all week. We talk together often, go shopping together, and take trips to new places together. Our family is becoming closer emotionally and knowing each other better.

I am studying English and learning to make bread, cookies and new foods. This time in America with my family lets me recharge my energy. I am really enjoying this time.

When I go back to Korea, I'll live with more energy. I'll care for my children with my true heart and support my husband well.

This time is also most important for my son. He must go to the university in a few years. My daughter is still young. She needs her mother's help. Because my husband will often live alone, he doesn't pay attention to his health. So I will do more to help him stay healthy. I want to be a good helper for my family. I'll live a new life as a helper and homemaker.

Yeonsuk Won is a student in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program. Her tutor is Rachel Baker.

A Turning Point in My Life

One day back in 2005 I chose to go the wrong route. But as I was traveling down that route, doing whatever I could to be happy, I thought my life was perfect. Little did I know I was really at ground zero. The only thing that really matters was that the Lord saw the best in me, when everyone else around could only see the worst in me. Then in 2008 I really found out that I was on ground zero. Got locked up in county jail did a couple of months, got right out after I served my sentence, started back traveling down the same route that made everyone but the Lord above look at me like a nobody. This time I got worse with it. Walking around like my mess don't stink. Then in 2010 my Lord came to me, but before he came to me he had to sit me back in that same county jail where he put me at the in 2008 to really get me attention. Then he said "Listen my child, I have given you chance after chance to get it together." When he spoke to me and told me that I said, "Lord, let your will be done in my life." To be exact that's exactly what was done. On June 11, 2010 I was sentenced to 18 months in the Department of Corrections. Being here in prison has really been a turning point in my life. Back when I was on the streets, I wasn't going to school or trying to better myself. But since I have been here in prison, I'm in school trying to better my educational skills, focusing on getting my GED so that I can further my education once I'm released back into society. This is the best I have felt since childhood. I am very pleased with myself and I thank God everyday for letting his will be done in my life. Again, I don't think bad about the situation, it's just my turning point.

Ladonya Lamb is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

A Turning Point in My Life

A turning point in my life would have to be when I met Zachary. A lot of changes in my life have been made since I met him. There will be even more changes in the future.

My husband and I had just separated when I met Zachary. The relationship between my husband and I was horrible. I did not realize how horrible he was until I met Zachary. Right away Zachary showed me how a great man should treat a woman. He

Turning Point in My Life

spoiled me from the start with all the love he gave me, the letters, poems, and with all of his actions. He has stuck by my side through my whole healing process. It's like he has hit the slow reset button to my heart and soul. The stress and strain I put him through has to be hard on him, but if it wasn't for him, I would not have allowed this turning point in my life.

With the support from Zachary, I quit my former job of six years to better myself. His support has allowed me to re-grasp the relationship with my mother and brother. We are closer now as a family than ever before. Zachary has encouraged me to get my G.E.D. He has supported me through the strain of my divorce, and helped me get off of probation due to a DUI. He has helped pay my probation fees and fines.

He helps me every day to grow into a respectable woman, that my family is not ashamed of. I have even quit drinking with his support. Just quitting that job alone took a lot of support, and he gave as much support as I wanted or needed.

My future has a bunch more changes in store for us. I cannot wait to start a family with him. With all the love and patience he has, I just know he will be great at being a father. We have grown to share the same goals and dreams for each other, especially going on to and graduating from college. I cannot wait for all of these changes to happen. All the changes will lead to many more turning points in my life.

This huge turning point in my life is the best one I have had since I dropped out of school at the age of seventeen. The changes since I have met Zachary have been the best change for me. It blows my mind how one change in the right direction can lead into this huge short and long term turning point. I am sure that there are so many more changes and turning points to come. I will embrace all the changes.

Brittany Hays is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

A Turning Point in My Life

My turning point in my life was the day I was asked to go to Pennsylvania. I decided to go because, I realized if I went that was my chance to get off of crack cocaine, and get my life together. I was really bad on crack cocaine, I lost everything my marriage, children, and myself worth of me. I started doing anything I could to get my drug. That included robbing people, and then walking the streets just to get my next high. I didn't care who I hurt. Was in and out of jails, drug treatment centers. I really didn't care about living anymore, that's how I felt about my life. Wasn't worried about who, it was going to hurt. I always had that devil on my back, every time I try to shake him off, he was always back. All though this tragedy, I had the crap beat out of me, been raped. I didn't care if I had a roof over my head or food in my stomach, all I worried about was getting my next high. I went to see a friend of mine that wanted to be my boyfriend, and asked him for money to have a couple of beers. He told me to bring fifteen dollars back to him. I go to the bar and a friend of mine asks if I can get him anything, that little devil was on my back telling me, take his money. Instead I took him to the dope house, to get him some drugs. Well instead of taking his money, I took the dope and mine. Then I was freaking out, where I was going to get my friends money. The only way I knew how, was to walk the streets. Well I did and this guy asked if I needed a ride and I said yes. That's when he said he needed a companion to go to Pennsylvania with him. He said do you get high and I said yes, he bought my dope and said this will be your last. This is where the turning point in my life begins. That day August 10, 2008 was the last day I smoked crack cocaine. Then on August 19, 2008 we got into a serious automobile accident. Where I ended up in the hospital in a coma. I was in a trauma intensive care, then regular intensive care, regular room and then therapy. I died five times, didn't have no fluid in my heart. Where all my organs were hanging out of my stomach. I woke up wondering where I was. They had put me back together. Found out that the guy I was with killed a lady and her unborn child, in a head on collision. Then he died two hours after they worked on him for a hour and half. So today I am a walking miracle that I am here today. God has me here for a reason. My journey is to help other females that are going through what I went through. This is my turning point in life, I'm a

Turning Point in My Life

miracle. Now I am incarcerated, I am going to school to get my GED, that is my goal while I'm here. Is to have my GED by the time I EOS in 2014. God has plans for me and its starting while I'm here. Also what Gadsden correctional has a lot to me. I am going to take every opportunity that is thrown at me. Then when I am released in 2014, I can further my career. I have three beautiful children and five grand babies to look forward to being with upon my release.

If you believe, you will receive and I believe in our Lord Jesus Christ. I never gave up.

My name is George Ann Watts. I'm 45 years old from St. Petersburg, Florida. I am in Doc Jones' AM GED class and I am learning a lot from him. Doc Jones is a very inspirational man. My release date is August 26, 2014.

A Turning Point

Some people may not know that when you bring a baby in this world it will turn your life around. That was my turning point. When I gave birth to MiTavious Dewayne Hamilton. It changed my life forever.

My son was a premature baby, he was 2 pounds and 15 ounces. I never knew a thing called patience, until I had to handle a premature baby. Handling a premature baby takes extra care and patience. It can be very stressful at times.

My son changed my life completely for the better. He stopped me from running the streets, hanging out, and partying. I did a complete turnaround with my life. I never knew someone so little could fill such a joy that I have in my heart. I love like never before.

My son completely changed me. He turned everything in my life around for the better. He gave me a sense of completion that is love.

Mia Hamilton is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

A Turning Point in My Life

When I was 40, a person that I knew told my wife and I that it would be good to live in Miami. At that time in our lives we wanted a change. He asked us if we were going to go to the U.S. and our answer was, "Yes."

Our son was only three months old and we were younger than today but today, we have the same philosophical principles with which we came to the U.S.A. Now, we are very excited because we are going to become American citizens next year.

We know that as citizens it is very important to speak English. My son, who is now 10 years old, speaks perfect English. My wife speaks good English, but I have been learning slowly. However, I have a very great desire to be able to communicate in English.

At a critical moment in our lives, we thought that we needed a change. I believe we should see our destiny throughout our lives. My grandmother was born in New York and, when she was very young, my great grand-parents went to Argentina. Many years later, I, her grandson have returned to my roots.

When Albert Einstein was offered the presidency of Israel, he declined. He knew that he had another fate. Einstein always wondered, "When is a man biggest?--When he is on his knees."

Another example of the work of destiny was Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The people called him "...the miracle which God let be born in Salzburg." The Cardinal said, "Mozart's music was the voice of God because his music has no mistakes." What Mozart wrote on paper, Mozart played on the piano.

These men broke with the established norms and made a crucial decision at a turning point in their lives. I feel that, in the same way, we must all seek our destiny.

In a nation, in a company, or in a school, the most important thing is the people. After the attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941, President Roosevelt and everyone in the United States, regardless of the color of their skin or their ethnicity, came to an unexpected turning point in their lives.

I am seeking my destiny and the destiny of my family. I know that I need to be able to communicate with people for that. I am studying hard and I am convinced that in a short time I will improve my English and will be able to fully integrate into this society.

Hector Lopez is a dedicated and hard-working online Language and Reading student at TLC Online at The English Center

A Changing Point in My Life

Was when I was 14 years old I lost my father I thought that my world was falling apart. I stop going to school I give my mother a hard time I had a child at the age of 15 yrs old a son. Then at the age of 18 years old I got on drugs really bad I was going down the wrong road. I was slowly killing my pain with drugs to the point of almost overdosing! Then I came to prison that open my eyes a lot so If I hadn't came to prison It's hard to tell where I would have been so this was a changing point in my life. Now I can watch my kids grow up the way a mother should.

The End

Betty Sowers has two wonderful kids, a 13 yrs old boy and a 6 yrs old girl. She lives in Jacksonville, FL.

A Turning Point in My Life

After my husband died, I decided to get my education. When he was alive, he did everything while I was working. He kept the house, he took care of the kids, he paid the bills, and he took care of all the business. Sometimes I worked around the clock. Since my husband died, I have to take care of all the business. So I decided to go back to school and get my education. I can see that I'm learning and I think I'm going to make it. We never get too old to learn.

Martha Fortune lives in Pensacola, FL and attends Learn to Read of Northwest Florida's learning lab at Richards Memorial UMC.

My Turning Point

I am at a turning point in my life that it is time for me to stop wishing and start working for things that I want. I am back in school to learn English. Going back to school is like being born again. It creates a new opportunity in my life. I need to acquire the proper communication skill, so that I can converse with the people in this country. English language is a global language. Everyone should know English. This is the starting point. The rest will fall into place such as considering a future career and ending with lifetime happiness. This is one way to be clean and free from the bondage of lack and illiteracy.

Angel Luisan Garcia is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Turning Point in My Life

Colombia is a very nice place to live with a lot of wonderful people and beautiful weather. At least where I used to live, it was spring for a whole year.

It was January of 2005 when I was getting ready to leave my family, my friends, my city, and also myself. Why “myself?” I don’t know how it happened, but when the airplane arrived in the U.S.A., I was a different person. That little girl wasn’t going to be the same. “Now you are a big girl. You have to work, finish high school, and make your own money.” That was what my big sister told me just when we passed through the airport door. I was so scared that I just wanted to run away. I had never worked in my life. RESPONSIBILITY. Responsibility is what I had now.

When I was living in Colombia, everything was easy. My parents worked. They made everything for me. I just had to study. But let me tell you something: I wasn’t a very good student, but, shh, don’t tell anybody.

My life is getting better since I came to the U.S. I was living with my sister and my mom. My dad unfortunately wasn’t here. My parents divorced before I came to the U.S. I went to high school and was one of the best students and got honors. Believe it!

I graduated in 2007 when I met the person that I have loved all these years, the person that is my husband now. I got married and have a little angel, my son, who is my all.

My life has changed, getting better every day. Now I’m studying more English and want to become a nurse someday. Not all changes are bad. Everything happens for a reason, so if you are seeing black, just be patient and you will soon see a beautiful and quiet white.

Lina Sanchez is a student at the Center for Adult Learning, Jacksonville Public Library.

A Turning Point in My Life

We all have dramatic experiences that change our lives forever. Mine took a major turn. Everything began in the morning of May 19th, 2001. Let me begin with my story.

My husband and I got married when we were only 20 years old. Even though we were both young, I knew he was the love of my life. Together we were maturing; our love grew increasingly more. Ten years passed without losing our essence; we were made for each other and we were successful in our jobs. However, there was still something missing. We wanted to share our happiness with a child which is the gift that God can give us for the ultimate joy in our lives.

Unfortunately, the great news never arrived and we were becoming desperate, but we never quit. After many visits to different specialists and lots of treatments without positive results, we learned that both of us had problems of infertility. As the years passed, I was adapting to the reality of the situation, but my husband did not give up.

One morning we went shopping. All of a sudden, my husband entered to a huge desire to go into the Department of Children and Families offices to fill out a request for adoption. I should admit one thing: in my mind there was not such possibility.

Years later, I was alone in my house when suddenly I received a phone call. It was from the Department of Children and Families. The person said, "We have a girl for you so you can come and pick it up tomorrow morning." Oh, my God! My heart started beating really fast! I thought I was going to faint. I was speechless. On the other side of the phone there was the person waiting for my response. When I finally reacted, I replied that I was going to call her back as soon as I could talk to my husband and reach to a final decision. I called my husband to give him the news. He started crying. I was also crying but I was also afraid. My husband asked me to call them back and tell them: "I will never disappoint them."

The great day arrived and it was beautiful day! Many of our relatives were with us. The employee from the Department of Children and Families asked us to go into an office. While waiting

for the moment, I felt butterflies in my stomach and my legs were shaking. The special moment came and the encounter was given. The social worker came in with a girl in her arms. The baby girl could not stop crying; she was afraid too! She extended her arms to my husband and she stopped crying.

Nine years have passed since then. She has allowed us to be part of her life. When I look at her standing in front of me, I just realize how privileged we are for being given this opportunity.

Carmen Socorro Nieves is a dedicated mother who came from Puerto Rico with her family in order to look for better educational opportunities for her daughter, the inspiration for her writing. She is a student at East Area Adult School in Auburndale, Florida and her teacher is Madeline Lopez-Ortiz.

A Turning Point in My Life

As a young man growing up, life was very difficult. Having a large family and very little money, I did not have a chance to achieve my goal to have an education. There was not enough money for the expenses I needed to leave home and learn a skill.

I worked one year in an auto shop where I painted cars. I also worked as a security guard and a taxi driver. I was able to work every day, so I was able to pay my bills. I also was lucky enough to have benefits such as health and life insurance. The social connection made my life easier as well.

Without a proper education my life would be extremely difficult. I would not have the money to purchase needed medication or put food on the table and clothes on my back. I consider myself lucky to have been able to have some jobs, but I am missing one important thing, and that is a proper education.

Can you imagine if I did not motivate myself to turn my life around? I realized that without an education I could not offer my family much of anything. It is very important to me that I would be able to assist my family with all of their needs. I know how important it is to work hard and receive my GED, so that I will be able to be a role model and a good provider to my family. I am going to do everything possible to make my dream come true.

My name is Walter Christie. I was born in Jamaica and was not able to complete my education, so my goal is to receive my GED. I am the proud father of three daughters.

My Turning Point in Life

My turning point in life is when I got pregnant with my son. At that point, my life changed drastically and my entire outlook on life changed as well. Main goals came into focus; furthermore, I began schooling, put goals into action, and got my life on track.

Finishing school became my main focus. I enrolled myself into G.E.D. night school every Tuesday and Wednesday night. Finishing my education was the first major step in the right path. After passing the G.E.D, I plan on furthering my education and starting my career as a dental assistant. Self-achievement and personal growth in my schooling is very important to me.

Pondering on my goals and what I want from my life came at me fast. Being a teen mother is very hard, so it was imperative that I got a head-strong outlook on my future as a mother. Having an education, successful job, and my own home are all goals for the near future. I know anything is plausible for myself; that's why I dream big and am putting my goals into action early.

Before I had gotten pregnant with my son, my life wasn't anything in comparison to what I now have for myself. I wasn't in school, I was always out with the wrong people, and doing whatever I felt like doing, whenever I wanted to do it. Goals for the future didn't exist and my life at that point was simply in a daze. Getting such life changing news brought such happiness and excitement into my life. My son opened my eyes to what was important to me and the steps I had to make to become successful for myself not only a person, but a mother as well. I'm proud to say he truly turned my life around for the better.

Needless to say, I'm very excited for the road ahead. The news of being pregnant came surreal to me. Although a lot of things had to change I know now I wouldn't change my situation for the world. Being a good mother and successful person is pertinent to me and I'm willing to make the changes to become that person. Having my son was overall the most effective turning point in my life.

Ielle Steeg is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

A Turning Point in My Life

Hello my name is Diamond McCain and this is my story. I'm not saying I've had the hardest life but it has had its struggles. I am 16 years old and I have a sweet baby girl. Her name is Faith and she is 6 months old. I am in foster care. Foster care has been a really good thing that has happened to me because I have had good people around me, including now having a mom and dad. I have never had the support of parents before.

First, having a baby girl has changed my life for the better. My life is no longer about drugs or other negative behaviors. Getting put in foster care and having Faith has made me a stronger person and a mother. When I look at my daughter I see so much of myself in her. From her smile to the way she laughs to the way she cries, I see me. Just the way we play, to see her smile and to laugh lets me know that she loves her mommy. She is so beautiful and I thank God everyday for her to be here with me. At first I was told she wouldn't make it when she was born. I knew deep in my heart she would and I couldn't ask for a better blessing. As she gets older I want her to know that I love her and would move the world for her.

The second thing that changed my life was being put in foster care. I knew I was in a better place than where I was. Since I have been in foster care, I have been in school and focusing on getting my GED. I'm not doing drugs, I am not in gangs, and I have a good man who loves me. I care about myself so much more than before. I'm in a stable home with the support I need to get where I want to be. I have learned there is nothing you can't do if you are in the right place. At first I thought being in foster care would be like the first time I was in; unsafe and not a good place. After getting put in to the home I am in now, I am happy where I am and it is safe.

Last, having the support of a mother and father has meant so much to me. They are there to guide me and to tell me what I am doing is right or wrong. They have brought me back to God and showed me what a loving family is. I realize that what my real mother was doing was not right. She was more of a friend than a mother, not giving me a life like I needed and deserved. I could not be happier than I am now with Mrs. Betsy and Mr. Tom, my mother and father. I would not be the mother that I am now if I was not living with them.

Turning Point in My Life

This is my story. I'm not saying I've had the hardest life but it has had its struggles. With me being 16 years old and having a 6 months old baby girl, things have been hard, but I have the support I need and also the love. Being in foster care is a good outcome for me and no longer a mistake as I once thought.

Diamond McCain is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Catie Griffith is her teacher.

My Turning Point

There is a time in your life when you notice that you need to make a change. That is a "turning point" in one's life. Just like many other people, I had one as well. My turning point came when I was seventeen. That is when I realized I would be a mother in just nine short months. There were three primary steps which I took to transform myself from being a carefree teenager into a dedicated mother. I needed to start taking care of myself, prepare for the baby, and devote myself to another person.

First, I needed to start taking better care of myself. I had to stop my reckless, teenage behavior in order to practice a safe and healthy lifestyle. I also began to eat more nutritious foods such as fruits and grains. Then I scheduled an appointment for my prenatal care.

Next, I needed to prepare for the baby. I put the baby's needs ahead of my own and purchased all of the necessities. Then, I prepared a nursery just for her.

Finally, I needed to get ready to devote myself to another human being. I wanted to love her as much as I possibly could and teach her everything she needed to know to be happy in life.

In closing, the turning point in my life was when I was seventeen and found out I would be a mother. Even though it wasn't planned and wasn't easy, in the end it was a success for Kristalynn and me--- just ask her sister, Alexis.

Elizabeth Salber is a 26 year old student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, FL. She is the mother of Kristalynn (8) and Alexis (6). Her teacher is Anna Franta.

A Turning Point In My Life

A turning point in my life is when I gave birth to my two handsome sons Jamar and Jaquez Henry.

When I was a young girl, I would wonder why my mother was absent from my life for a brief period of time. I was young so I did not understand at the time that life brings challenges that will separate you from your loved ones.

Today, as I have grown into a woman and have my own children, I realized by my mother missing a big part of my life, it was as stressful for her as it was for me. It was just a brief turning point in her life.

When I gave birth to my boys I could not explain the joy they gave me. There isn't anything in the world I would rather do than to make my children proud of me. My children made me more determined to go back to school and further my education. They also motivated me to do things I never thought I was capable of doing.

Having my boys changed my life and made me a better, stronger woman. I've had many struggles and even more challenges throughout my life, but my children have been the greatest turning point in my life. There have been times when I wanted to give up on life, but when I looked into their beautiful eyes all I could do is think to myself, "How could you possibly give up on them?"

The bond that we share will never be broken because I gave my heart to my sons. Without them, I couldn't possibly breathe. We've shared pain and tears, struggles, joy and happy times together. Most of all, I have always shown them regardless of how rough times may get, mommy will NEVER leave them or give up.

I often say my boys were a turning point in my life because when I gave birth to two innocent lives on that day, I decided to give the life I lived up for theirs.

Jacquese Mickens recently finished serving a 2 year sentence at Broward Correctional Institution. Throughout the time of her incarceration she realized that making the wrong choices not only affected her, but her children as well.

When One Door Closes, Another is Opened

A turning point in my life occurred for me at age 18, when my mother past. I am adopted, so the mother I grew to love became everything to me. She was not only a mother, but a teacher, a friend, and an opinionator. She was my world, and all was lost in the year 2004, the year of her death. From that day I was forced into the world of womanhood, venturing out into the world on my own.

My mother taught me many things. She taught me self respect and/or self worth. I learned that loving yourself was the first step to self respect. Although, when she past, that all went out the window. I sought out to find the one thing I thought I had lost, love; and went looking in all the wrong places.

I never knew my biological mother, but my adopted mother and I became very close. She was my best friend. I could talk to her about anything. When she died, I became an exotic dancer. I became desperate in seeking attention from the many men that surrounded me, indulging in sex, drugs, and parties; for it was the one thing I found comfort in.

My mother was very opinionated. She would always say to me, "You always have to have the last word." I guess that came from me, in a sense, trying to view life the way she saw it. I too became very opinionated, thinking at one point that money was everything, wanting to have the best clothes, the best car, and the best home. Soon I came to realize that the money was nothing in comparison to the one thing my heart was searching for, love.

Although, my mother is no longer here, the memories of her friendly, loving, motherly nature will always replace the pain I feel for her loss. I self medicated by experimenting with many drugs and danced; in my opinion dancing can be very therapeutic, if done with proper intentions. I felt powerful and in control while subdued in these things. One day, I no longer desired power or control. I've learned that life may knock us down, but we may choose to get back up.

Kinah Johnson is a 24 year old African American student. She was born in Chicago, moved to Tampa at age eight, and has lived there ever since.

What Education Means to Me

What Education Means to Me

Everybody has his or her opinion about education. I have my own idea about education in my life as well. Education is one of the most important things in this world. A person who is not properly educated cannot fit easily into the society. That's why I say education means a lot in our life. Education can make people polite. When a person has an education, he can help his country. He is valuable. He can find a good job to help his family. So, he has a lot of advantages. In my opinion, all people in the world must receive education to help juvenile youth. There will be less crime in the world. Personally, education does a lot of things in my life. It makes me polite, kind, and intelligent. That's why I always council all my friends to go to school to get themselves educated.

In fact, education is a good way to drive people into a good direction someone takes this path, he will do well. If he does not take it, he makes a bad choice. I encourage all people who are responsible to help other people with education. Out of all the things in my life, education is the main thing. I would like to go the highest level, whenever possible.

Sobner Anilus is an ESOL student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Why I Chose to Become an Adult Education Student

I decided to come to adult education to earn a diploma because when I finished high school, I was not able to pass the HSCT. While I was in school, they said I had a learning disability and I wanted to prove to myself to never let anything hold me back from my dreams.

I have four wonderful children and I would like to set a great example for them. Once I receive my diploma, I would like to go to college to learn how to cut and style hair. When I am finished with that, I would like to continue on with college to earn a degree in Medical or Dental Assisting.

I have goals to better my life for my children, as well as myself. In order to do so, I have to have an education. I would also like to show my children that in order to have a great life; you must have an education, no matter how hard you have to work to succeed.

Amanda Bennefield is the mother of four children and aspires to earn her GED and attend college in the near future.

What Education Means to Me

Education means to have a certain knowledge for my life. When I have education, I have learned something more to help me live a better life. I can get a good job. To acquire education, I need to prioritize my time and make some sacrifice. The knowledge I received prepares me to differentiate between the good and the bad, the right and the wrong. My first education is from my parents. They teach me a lot about how to live a good life. Mom and dad would want me to be a good daughter, wife, and citizen in this country.

Education is like a light bulb that shines only when you turn on the switch. So, let your light shine everywhere you go. Someone is looking at you to be their light and their guide. Lead them to the right path in life. Education is life just like money is power.

Berline Jean Charles is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Education Means to Me

When I was younger, I only completed the 10th grade. At the time, I didn't think quitting school was a big deal. As the years past me by, it was an "out of sight, out of mind" kind of thing for me, but all along it was in the back of my mind how great I would have felt about myself if I was to have ever graduated high school. Then, I became a mother and I made a vow that my children would never experience the harsh truth of being a high school dropout. I swore

that I would instill in them the value and importance of an education.

In 2009, our economy plummeted and my job of four years closed. As a head strong woman, I focused on getting a job as soon as I could. I went to a telecommunication center and aced two tests for the application. As I stood there waiting to be called back for the interview, I found myself feeling so accomplished. I felt like I had pulled through, once again, for my family of five. That was soon dismissed when the lady looked over the education part of the application. She informed me that their facility did not hire anyone without a diploma or equivalent. I found myself sitting alone in my truck crying and wondering what I was going to do. It is hard to be faced with the cold, hard truth and the choices you have made through your life that have brought you to where you are. For me, it had been 15 years since I came home from school and decided to never return.

I went home and my eldest son, who is 9 years old, put his hands on my face and said the words that put me in motion to attend Even Start. He said, “Mom, just do like you tell me. Be yourself, try your best, and go to school. I believe in you.” BELIEVE is a very powerful word. *Believe* and *faith* are empowering words. They give people a push to do things in life. Sometimes it puts people in the right direction and gives them the strength they need to get going. It makes you feel important and knowing that, you realize you are important.

So, you ask me what education means to me. It means; self-respect, dreaming out loud, hard work, and family. Education is seeing a young future in my children’s eyes. Never wanting them to learn by the past example I set of not finishing school, but by the present example of going back and finishing what I started. Education isn’t just learning, but being taught to believe in yourself. To make a life for yourself and the people you love. To touch those barriers you never thought you could break.

Dana Beck is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Catie Griffith is her teacher.

What Education Means to Me

I often dream about receiving my diploma, walking up to the stage when they call out my name. All dressed in white and black cap and gown; the light shining at me, and I can feel the rush of air through the vent filling the auditorium with its noise along with people cheering, and clapping, screaming, and whistling. My Family is taking pictures of me; how proud they are with their mother receiving her diploma at age 57 years old. My husband smiles at me as if telling me “you did it.” I am 57 years old and still don’t have my GED diploma in the United States. Getting your GED is pertinent to me, never the less education is rather imperative to everyone. Without education you cannot receive a good paying job, as well as take a nice vacation with the family.

When I was little girl I remember my father having to go to work every day to earn a living to support six children. Mom stayed at home to take care of the children, keep the house clean, and prepare the meals. My father was a very proud man and he always was sharing with me about moving up to the Manager’s position so he could earn more money for us kids. He was not able to do so due to his education as well. He only has a high school diploma and no college degree.

We lived in a small two room house and the kitchen was outside of the house, more like an additional hut. There was a place to cook and a bath area. It was very small and in the winter time was very cold. The bed room was built with hard board top with straw mat laid on top, so we could sleep on it. It was not very comfortable on your back but after a while you got used to it. There was no heat in our house. In the winter time we needed an extra blanket on top of it so it would keep us warm. There wasn’t much space on the bed for six children. We all were lying head to toe whichever way would fit, zigzag sometimes you may get kicked by someone; well thank God we had home and bed to sleep on.

When I was young I did not remember taking vacation as a family. We could go to somewhere that was nice, like Disney world, have the entire theme park to ride on and the water slide to enjoy as a family. What an awesome trip that would be. I can see it from here; envision the colorful flowers everywhere and all kinds of

rides, with a beautiful sunny day at the park. We could enjoy eating different ethnic gourmet food. The family could get on all kinds of rides and enjoy some ice cream, or milk shake. I think that would be just grand.

Over all I believe education is paramount. Without education we are unable to apply for a good job, to afford to have a good home and furthermore to enjoy a good life taking vacations with the family. I guess I have to keep up with the good work and study hard so I can get my GED diploma someday.

Sumei Congelosi is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

What Education Means to Me

Going back to school is making me feel young. It is just like starting over. Getting my G E D is very important to me because I believe it will help me grow in my knowledge and I can get a college degree like becoming an LPN. I and my family can have a better life.

Feeling young is like going back in 1980, when I was in 9th grade in a catholic school where everything was based on stricter rules. Every Monday we had a mass before we started classes. We had nuns following us everywhere. I use to work in group for projects in science and math, and I use to participate in class, but I don't think I can do that now. Maybe because my first language is Spanish, I'm trying to get my English to be perfect; however, I do read books to my five years old daughter, and she understands the story I read to her.

With a GED my chances of getting a better job opportunity get better, and I will be able to get a better position that requires more education, like college. I do understand more companies want a High School Diploma to hire someone, and will help me to with my children's homework. I have a teenage daughter that has dropped out of school and I would like her to understand how important it is to finish school.

Getting my GED it will help me and my Family gets better life, and I will be able to finish my LPN, and get better job.

Glenda Clotter is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

Why I Came to The United States

I lived in Cuba for my entire childhood and teenage years. It was a time of many economic battles, promises, and an uncertain future. We were hopeful that things would be better one day, but that day never came. Battles were never won, and promises were lost. The only thing I had, was my pride and my family.

For all these reasons and many others, my family and I decided to come to the United States of America. I wanted to give my family a new life full of possibilities, and a chance to grow in a different culture. I was also looking for better-paid employment and opportunities for professional growth.

This new life has given me an opportunity to increase my language skills; to write, read, and learn in English better with every passing day. Furthermore, they have helped me meet new people from many different places, travel to unique locations, and communicate much better than I did before.

Today, I find myself studying English at Southwest Adult Center, with new classmates, and an excellent teacher. Mrs. Lopez teaches us that we can reach our goals and for me, that it is very important because that way I feel I can prosper and have a better future for my family.

My name is Gladys Corral and I am from Cuba. I live in Miami, Florida and I am a student at Southwest Adult Center. I attend Mrs. Lopez's multilevel class.

Gladys Corral is a student at Southwest Adult Educational Center, MDCPS. She attends an ESOL multilevel class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez.

What Learning English Means to Me

My name is Jona. I am from Haiti. I am struggling to learn English. It is not easy for me to learn English because I work too much and too long. I always come late to class. Even though I know that I am late, I still press on to attend class because it is very important for me to learn English. I need a lot of help. The students in my class are very nice.

Marie Jona Desilus is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Education Means to Me

Education means to have hope, or aspiration.
Nobody in my family got that certificate,
or felt that fulfillment.
I will be the first in my household
to embrace the future and let it unfold.

Education is a gift to me,
A gift of knowledge, wisdom, aptitude, and ability.
Education is showing it is the central,
the keys to everything, the fundamental.
Education means to have confidence,
the way to success and assurance.
To do things we think we cannot.

What education means to me, it means to change your life.

Josephine Cruz was a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

What Education Means to Me

My name is James Andre. I am from Haiti. I have been in the United States for two years. I have a lot of goals and ambitions, but without education I don't think I will be able to accomplish them. In my opinion, education is to be equipped with the proper tools for my future. This tool includes knowledge from all levels of education: elementary, middle, high school, college, and university. Not only knowledge is important, training falls in the equation as well. Let us not forget that if we have education, the higher our education, the more people will expect out of us.

James Andre is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Learning English Means to Me

For me to learn to read and write English is very important. Even when I lived in my native country of Cuba, I loved the English language. Besides being the universal language, I think it is very interesting because of its sound and drama. Now that God gave me the opportunity to come to the United States, it is even more important to me.

I am in a place where the language is different from mine. I want to adjust to the environment and try to get ahead. The only way to do that is to study the language. After I reach my goal to learn English, thousands of doors will open at my feet and my way will light up. I will have many choices, a better life and a better job. I will be able to make many friends and to help other people.

Perseverance means to emphasize what is to be achieved. When you desire something, the key to success lies in having the will to do it. So I will continue to study hard and learn English.

Lazara Gonzalez is a student at the Center for Adult Learning, Jacksonville Public Library.

My Education

I always try to educate my mind and improve my skills and abilities. Education helps in so many ways. Education will help you to be an influence for good in the world and it will help you better provide for yourself, loved ones, and those in need.

I always try to work diligently and make sacrifices to obtain knowledge. Education is an investment that brings great rewards. We live in a competitive world where a good education opens the doors of opportunity that may otherwise be closed to you. One of my biggest goals in life is to try to maintain an enthusiasm for education. I find joy in learning about myself, others, and the world around me.

Dustin Green is currently attending classes at Columbia's Adult Center and plans to continue his education at Florida Gateway. He is involved in Columbia's Student Achievement in Reading (STAR) Program.

Education: A Tool that Opens Doors

Education is always about learning. It is a tool to open doors for the future. So is life. Without learning (education), life is stagnant just like a river without flowing water. Education makes me move forward. It helps me think. I feel a little accomplished when I finished high school in Haiti. Because I have an education I am able to fit, help, and share with the society. Every day I get up with a big smile on my lips because I have an education. Meanwhile, I am going to school to learn English so that I can become more accomplished - a better person individually and cooperatively. So,

please remember that education is a great tool that we all need. Once we have it, no one can take it away.

Jean Nazaire Destin is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Education Means to Me

Everyone wants to succeed in life, now days it's nearly impossible to do without a high school diploma or a G.E.D. earning a G.E.D will give you many more opportunities for jobs or careers you might want to pursue. It can also give you more confidence about yourself, it can be the bridge to higher education, advancement in your career, financial stability and last but not least it can open the door to careers you never thought would be possible.

We all need to be confident about ourselves no matter what we do, and earning a G.E.D will be a huge confidence booster. You got your G.E.D now you can go do whatever you put your mind to. You can be what you want to be because you have confidence and an education, and that's all you need to succeed in life.

If you don't have a G.E.D but have a good job and have moved up as far as you can without your high school education, a G.E.D can open many doors, it can even open opportunities within your job you can possibly get paid more, and who knows in time you could be running the company you work for.

Times are getting hard there are not a lot of jobs and a lot of people are living paycheck to paycheck. If you have financial stability you won't have to stress about the bills that need to be paid because the moneys always there. You can go on vacations to places you've never been. You will be working steady and advancing in your career while doing so.

If you put your mind to it you can do things that you never thought were possible, and you can be happy while doing what you love. And you can set a good example for your peers and everyone around you, because you have a good education and a lot of people will look up to you for that.

Anthony Harris is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

What Education Means to Me

Personally in my opinion education is the peace of life. I think without it one cannot accomplish the highest result of one's life. Back home in my country when I was not in school yet, I did not have the knowledge to understand how to have a better future. Then when I started to go to school, I found out that education is my hope for my life in the future. Now, I live in America. I am learning English so that I can continue my education in this country. I have a drive that is challenging me to prove what I could be to help my family and my country. This all depends on my level of education, the key to my success and my future.

Jean Lucman Louis is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Learning English Means to Me

My name is Rider March. To me it is very important to speak English because being bilingual would make my life easier and be better than what it is now. To speak English could help me get a job faster and also make the money I need to do my things. It is my belief that a person fluent in English can reach his/her goals faster than somebody that does not know the language very well.

I am a very methodic person and I have planned to become bilingual as soon as possible so that I will be able to reach each one of my goals. I have been living in the United States for two months and my most important goal is to be able to bring over my mother and my sister who are still living in Cuba. I miss them very much.

I am working hard to dominate this new language not only to bring over my family but also to improve my skills at work and be able to grow professionally in my job.

My name is Rider March and I'm from Cuba. I live in Miami, Florida and I am taking classes at Southwest Adult Community Center, Miami Dade County Public Schools. I am registered in an ESOL multilevel class with Mrs. Ximena Lopez. My ESOL level is low intermediate.

Rider March is a student at Southwest Adult Educational Center. He attends an ESOL multilevel class with Mrs. Lopez.

What Education Means to Me

My name is Dalila Mejia. I am from Guatemala. Education means a lot to me. It is important to me because education can help me reach my goals and ambitions. A first goal was to come to the United States of America to have a better life so my daughter, Iviana, can study and be a professional through the years. I hope my goals comes a reality.

What I have to say to the people who read this book, is that all the goals they have, I hope they come true, and all the good things we do is for a better life so that our children have a nice education and do not go to the wrong road.

Dalila Mejia is a student at Immokalee Technical Center in Immokalee, Florida. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee. She also studied at Even Start.

What Education Means to Me

Education is one of the important things in my life because it can help me have a good future. Because I am a high school graduate from Haiti, it is a little easy for me to get a job for survival need. On the other hand, my pay check is not enough to buy a house, own a car, and travel for a vacation. I see some people are content with some education, but personally, I need so much more. First, I need to study English so that I can speak fluently. Second, I need to further my studies in the U.S. because nowadays, having just a high school diploma is not sufficient to be hired for a better job.

Molaine Pierre is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Education Means to Me

It helps because it helps me when I communicate with other people. We need to be educated from the first moment of our conception. I need English when I go to the doctor and talk to my child. English helps me to find a better job. I spent four years leaning the language and I felt so afraid speaking and reading. I can appreciate that I am always going to be in a process. I worked two jobs and I found out that I didn't need to speak English because everyone around me spoke Creole. I said I was wrong. I need to continue learning English anyway. It will allow me to have a better life. That's why I feel so happy and proud of myself!

My name is Marie Chantale Plaisir and I from Haiti. I moved to the US in 2007 to further my education. I am an extremely motivated and dedicated student at Immokalee Technical Center.

What Learning English Means to Me

I am learning to read and write English because in my work I need to understand English. Sometimes when I'm working they tell me to do something and when I don't really understand, I need someone else to help explain it to me. If I go to the market, I want to understand when people talk to me. I know the importance of learning English is not only for my job but also for wherever I go in The United States. Anywhere you go, you have to speak English. It's good to learn English. That is why I go to school. I am very happy to write this essay about what learning English means to me.

Fritzner zner Romilus is an ESOL student in the Adult and Career Education program in Key West, FL. His teacher is Natalia Duke.

What Education Means to Me

Education is moving from darkness into the light. It is very important for me because without education there is no progress.

Education equates to knowledge and skills. It is a means to empower us to not only reach our goals and ambitions but also help others to get to where they should be in life. Being without education is just like emptiness. There is nothing. Nothing plus nothing is nothing. So, I cannot do anything if I have nothing in my head. Because I have nothing in my head, I can't earn anything. Therefore, I have nothing in my wallet. The result of education is a well-paid job that will help us enjoy our life.

Yovanna Ramos is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Education Means to Me

I had never been away from home and when I came to prison, I was petrified. I have always wanted my GED, but never had the discipline to do so. Now that I have the opportunity to become educated, it has exposed my weaknesses that I never dealt with before. I was raised in church, but now I need to be the church from the inside out. I cannot make it through this experience deceitfully. If I choose not to study in the dorm, or chose the wrong friends, it will show in my work.

I must stay focused to accomplish my goals. I have a very good teacher that is giving me all he has to help me accomplish my dream. I have been in prison for almost 5 years. I'm not going to say I have been the best person, but I can say that I learned from my mistakes. The schooling I didn't get on the outside, I guarantee I will get it at Broward Correctional Institution. I have come a long way. Even though I went to confinement, I am still focused on my education. I truly believe I will get a GED.

I am thankful that I am able to continue my education at Broward CI with the help of the entire education staff and my teacher, Mr. Barr. I couldn't ask for a better support system.

Cynthia Reynolds is a student in Mr. Barr's MLP class at Broward Correctional Institution.

What Education Means to Me?

1. Education is the key to success.
2. Education is powerful.
3. Education is life.

1-Education is the key to a successful future and the key element in helping me developing to my full potential. Education is a life time inheritance. It is life an insurance policy. Education is to success, a vehicle to a brighter future for all people.

2- Education is powerful; it is an important and powerful tool for empowering people to lead a life of dignity and is also essential for sustaining yourself in a high economic society. Education is an important tool in both creating a personnel definition of success and eventually making it life's reality.

3-Education is life. Without education, there is little that a person can actually do. A person is never too old to achieve knowledge; we must be knowledge seekers and we must strive for a better life through education. Education is essential. It's the only way that I can provide a better life for myself as well as for my family.

My goal in life is to become a computer engineer, because I feel that I have a given talent to work with computers. I enjoy helping people, so I will put my experience as a technician and my people

skills together to contribute to the community that has constantly played a role in preparing me for my future. At the present time, I am a student in the Adult ESOL program at William H. Turner Tech. Once I am fluent in English I will go to a local college to pursue a career in Computer Engineering.

I think if I am a computer engineer, it will be better for me and my family. I would like to help them and give them the best. I still think this can only be possible if I stay in school and get a good education. That's the reason why education is the key to Success, education is Powerful and education is Life.

Harry Saint Phar is a 22 year old student. He has been in the United States for 10 months. Harry would like to attend Miami-Dade Community College in the Fall of 2011.

What Education Means to Me

After working twelve years at a fast food restaurant; working many long hours and nights, I feel that furthering my education could help me find a better job. At times it could be overwhelming being busy; however, not enough people to better serve our unhappy customers. They would walk out and even call the 1-800 numbers. These are the three reasons why having an education means so much to me.

Having a good education means that I could find a better paying job to support my family comfortably; above all, have good health benefits for them. Paying to go to the doctors can become overwhelming and expensive when you have to live pay check to pay check.

Working long, stressful, hours not being able to see my family, I know now that it is time for me to make a drastic change and finish school, not just for me but for my children so they could have a better life. So I could give them all the attention they deserve.

Being shorthanded all the time can drain an employee to the point of no return. It's a constant everyday struggle; above all, the stress that comes with the job. Having a high school diploma could open my options, until then I feel stuck in a no future job.

In order for me to have a better education and be able to take

care of my family, I need to apply myself every day in school, so that I learn what I need to learn so that I can pass the GED test. Then I can start building a better life for them, without needing to work long dreadful hours and being able to see my children as often.

Ketsie Stewart is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School

What Education Means to Me

Improving my education means a lot to me because I could not read when I met my husband. He did not know that I could not read and he would ask me to look at a letter or the newspaper and I told him that I couldn't read. He couldn't believe me. He thought that I was joking, but then he realized that I was telling the truth and he started to help me learn to read.

I am so joyful now that I have learned to read. I can now fill out an application properly and was able to learn to drive and pass the driver's test. I can read the newspaper myself and that means so much and it makes me very proud.

I am looking forward to receiving my GED and I will continue to study hard and go to college so that I can be the person I know I can be. God bless the people who have guided me throughout this wonderful learning experience. Without the help I have received I would not have been able to achieve my goal.

I know that I can make it because I am on the right track and I know how important an education is for my future. I will be so proud of myself to receive my GED because education means to world me.

My name is Sharon Thom. I was born in Jamaica, but am now am a resident of Florida. I am happily married and my three beautiful children live in Jamaica.

How Literacy Tutoring Has Improved Your Life

To live in the USA and not be able to communicate is a feeling that for the first few years of my life in Florida. I will never forget. I had lost the touch with the world, with the media, books and theaters—all that I used to enjoy. My only wish was to be able to communicate and not to depend on someone's help translating for me. It is then that by coincidence that in the Safety Harbor Library. I was welcomed with open arms and I got to meet my new teacher

and friend for life, Mrs. Joan Walker who I will carry in my heart for the rest of my life. Her kindness was giving me strength, to carry on every day. The beginning was hard, and there were days where we laughed together about my pronunciations of some words, and there were times where I just could not express what I wanted to say. Slowly with time, things began changing for the better. I began communicating with people and found new friends. I was able to do small things like calling and visiting the post office or doctor's office and even use a computer to connect with my friends across the world.

I truly see my teacher as my second mother. My first mother used to teach me my language by singing songs of my country. My second mother taught me English words through the story of America. Because of Joan Walker, today I am a proud citizen of the United States of America. Thank you, my teacher, you brought me to life again. Love, Enisa

Enisa Aleksic is from Yugoslavia (Bosnia). She moved to Germany as a refugee before coming to the United States with her husband and two sons in 1987. She is now an American citizen and a small business owner.

What Education Means to Me

If I could go back in time and change one thing in my life, it would be to have stayed in school. I am twenty seven years old and finally now know just how very important it is to get my diploma. The reason I want to get my GED is to make my family proud of me, to go to college, and to help build my self-confidence.

I want my two boys and my mom and dad to hear my name called and to watch me walk across the stage with my cap and gown and to receive my diploma. Then, I will make my mother's dream of seeing her little girl graduate come true.

When I was a little girl and was asked what you want to be when you grow up, my reply was always a pediatric nurse. My dreams have never changed. Once I have my GED I plan to go to PTECH for my LPN and then get into St. Petersburg College for my RN. I will then have fulfilled my dreams of becoming a nurse. The last reason I want my GED is to help build my self-confidence because I will have finally done something with my life and brains. Then I can put this to good use by helping children when they are

sick.

Finally, having my GED will show my boys just how very important school really is. Going to college will get me my nursing degree so I can try to make my patients better, and I will have completed my goals and make me feel like I know what my place in this life is besides being a great mother to my sons.

Ariana Shaver is the mother of two wonderful boys and attends the Even Start Family Literacy Program in St. Petersburg, FL. She took her GED exam in March. Her teacher is Anne M. Morgan.

What Education Means to Me

My name is Edouard Jean. I am from Haiti. When I was a little boy I did not know what education meant. Now I know education is very important. Without it I cannot have a better life. It does not matter how much money I have, I think without education my life would not be wonderful. Just imagine that I cannot discern the meaning of many things in life. I would be like an adult with an infant mind. That would be awful, wouldn't it?

Edouard Jean is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Importance of Education and Family

The more important thing in my life right now is my family and a good education. Me being able to provide for my son is what drives me. My education is an essential part in our lives.

The number one person who inspires me is my older sister. She is such an exquisite person. I can tell she cares about me because she is always pushing me to do the right thing. When I take my sister's advice, I know that everything will turn out magnificently.

I am thankful for the wonderful family I have, but also the incredible teachers who got me to where I am today.

Sandra Kirchaine is a student in the Citrus County Even Start Program with her three year old son, Aiden.

My Life in America is Informal Education

My family and I came to the U.S.A. two years ago because of my husband's study and job. He is a post-doctorate student. He tries to go to great lengths for his work, so he is busy with his studies.

When I first moved here I used to stay with my little children at home. My daily routine was taking care of the children, housework and cooking. I didn't have confidence in my English and I felt I wanted to do more for myself. Later, I started English with my tutor and in ESOL class.

Learning English brought more meaning to my life. I am learning American culture, history, manners and way of thinking in English. In informal ways, I am having a variety of experiences learning English: shopping for good deals, being a volunteer at my daughter's school, traveling with my family, talking and playing with my children.

Everything I do and everywhere I go, is informal education for me. I believe this will bring maturity to my mind and extend my wisdom in the future. When my English is more fluent, I will take challenges to improve my life, such as formal education in English.

Kyung Hwa Kim is a student in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program. Rachel Baker is her tutor.

Education Is Very Powerful

My name is Chan B. Kem. I come from Cambodia. I speak Khmer. Khmer is Cambodian language. I came to Florida on May 24, 2007. I did not graduate from high school in my country. The reason I am here is because I want to get a better education. First, I want to learn English. Second, I want to receive my G.E.D. diploma. The reason why I want to study English is because my English is not so good. I want to understand and speak English very well. Then I can prepare for my G.E.D. One more reason why I want to study English is because I want to read books to my daughter and help her with her homework. When she needs me to help her with her homework, I will be able to do it.

I am very happy to come to the English class at the Adult and

Career Education center in Key West. It is very important for me. Because I have 5 year old daughter who speaks good English, I have to learn English to understand her. Likewise, she wants to understand Khmer but she can't speak the language. In addition to helping my daughter, I will be increasing my education as well. The power of education will direct me for higher learning in college so that I can get a better job. As a result, my family and I will have a better future.

Chan B Kem is a student at Adult and Career Education, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Education Means To Me

Education can mean many different things. To most people, it means a degree of some sort. But to me it means so much more. Education is something that you use to further yourself in life. Most of the things I learn in school have nothing to do with life. If it was up to me, instead of having to take really hard math courses that you never use in life, I would have a class on how to pay bills and keep track of my bank account. Things like that help me get ready for life, not trigonometry. Most educational classes should be hands on instead of just book work. Education to me is much more than book work, it is a lifestyle.

Ana Johnson is a GED student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Learning to Read and Write in English Means to Me

Throughout my childhood and adulthood, I have struggled with my lack of education. Now as a parent and responsible adult, I have realized the importance of learning and studying. There have been many times during my life that my lack of education has stopped me from doing things that I have wanted to do-not only stopped me, but my family too.

At the age of 13, my family and I moved from Puerto Rico to the United States. This was a move I did not want to make. Although I begged my parents to let me stay in Puerto Rico with family, I was not allowed to. When I arrived here, I was an angry, young girl. Living in a new country with a very different culture, not knowing the language, and not having any friends, only made me angrier. I

not only rebelled against my parents but also against all authority. By far, this was the most difficult time of my life.

I started hanging out with the wrong crowd and started making some very bad choices and decisions. I began to miss a lot of school. At the age of 17, I became pregnant and had to get married. I also dropped out of school. I now have four daughters and by the Grace of God, my husband and I are still happily married.

Now as a mother, I have become more aware of the importance of having an education. Not only do I want to learn to read and write in English, but I need to learn it. I want to be able to help my daughters with their homework. I want to be a good role model for them as well. I want them to see me work hard and succeed.

Most importantly, I want to accomplish the goal that I have set for myself. I want to learn to read and write in English so that I may get a GED. This is the requirement I need to enter college to be a teacher. I want to be an ESOL teacher so that I can help students like me who need to learn English.

Milta Garcia Lorea is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Vivian Anderson is her teacher.

Why I Need My GED

In order to move forward in today's society, you should be determined to take the necessary steps to be better prepared for life's challenges. The reason I want to get my GED is because I would like to continue my education. Getting my GED diploma will be only the first step that will help me to achieve this goal. Afterward, I could go to college, get a good job, and be successful. I want to do the best I can do to become a better person.

There are so many different careers you can study in the vocational and college world today. I know that when I receive my GED diploma, I will have the opportunity to choose from the few that I am more inclined toward. At that time, I will pray to God for guidance so my choice will be the one that helps me to get a good job and have a better future for me and my family.

Getting my GED will help me support my family. I am a

responsible person, so I want to be a good model for my kids and give them the best opportunities available. I know that when I finally get my career and a good job, I will do my best to scale positions that offer good benefits and salary in order to have a better future for all of us.

Furthermore, by getting my GED I will be a role model for my children. Also, I will inspire them to stay in school. I will have the pleasure of helping them with their homework on their road to graduation. They know that I am making an extra effort to study for the exam beside all my other duties. If they see me earning my GED diploma, surely they will keep trying in school until they finish their high school.

In conclusion, to be somebody in life, you have to make sacrifices to reach your goals. If I continue to work hard and pray, I will accomplish my objective. If I want a better life for my family, I have to start now by getting my GED. This is my year for receiving my High School Diploma! This is one of the best opportunities that has been given to me. That is why, to me, getting my GED is the first step to win.

Lowanda Fequiere is a GED student studying online and in the classroom with TLC Online at The English Center.

Favorite Place

My Favorite Place

My favorite thing is to travel. I have been to New York. Going to New York is fun. There, I like going out to eat dinner, and I like going to the mall. I like New York because I like doing fun things and sightseeing.

I like going to Washington, D.C. because it is very pretty and it is terrific there. I saw malls, the White House and other kinds of buildings. While I was in Chicago, I saw so many buildings and the Sears Tower.

But my favorite place is on a cruise, because I like to go many places on the ship. I went to many islands in the Caribbean, such as the Virgin Islands, Tortola, Haiti and the Bahamas. I went to shop for jewelry, bags and clothes on these islands. I ate dinner on the ship in the dining room, and I spent seven nights on the ship.

I enjoy going many places because I love to go on vacation and travel many places, but I really love the cruise ships very much. Here are several things that I do on cruise vacations. First, I get all my luggage. I get my life vest on and listen to the intro. Next, I get my luggage next to the room, then I put on the right kinds of clothes and I usually go out to eat dinner. Then, I like going to lunch at the Lido Deck, and dinner, also. My favorite things are looking at the swimmers swimming, and going out to dinner at the dining room, because I like to see people in swimsuits and see people in formal dresses. On the islands, I like seeing jewelry, looking at clothes, eating low fat foods, laying down and resting on the beach, and looking at the animals. I go back on the ship and do some other different things, like buying perfumes, clothes, jewelry, T-shirts, and finding some candy. I sometimes use the laptop and the regular computer.

Favorite Place

There are many fun things on the cruise ship. Every time I go on a cruise vacation, I go overseas. I enjoy staying on the ship. I spend the night and go to the Lido Deck to have breakfast. The best thing I do on the ship is take a rest on the Lido Deck, balcony, and cabin. It is absolutely very terrific. I can doodle, and I can watch DVDs in the room. I sometimes swim at the beach. Again, I go back on the cruise ship and have a big formal dinner. I sometimes go to shows and activities.

I usually pack everything and eat breakfast on the last day, then get out of the ship. The cruise is very cool and fun, because there are many crews walking on the ship and swimming in the pools. I have many pictures of people starting and ending on the cruise ship. I also wear clothes from the cruise vacation.

Giovanni Cousins is a student at Lucanus Development Center.

My Favorite Place

Many people have two or three favorite places, but if I have to choose one, I want to choose my home.

My favorite place is my home because it is a place where I can cook something special for my family. I like to cook milanesa and rice with green pigeon because that likes to everyone in my family. We can eat and talk. We spend a little time together. I love my family and I want us to be closer.

When I clean my home I like to smell the odor of pine. Another reason why my home is my favorite place is I love to remove shoes. Then lie down on my queen size bed and relax my eyes. Another way I relax is read a book or watch television.

In conclusion my favorite place is my home, because in my home I can do what I like to do. I love my family and I think my home is the best place to spend time with them. My home is like a paradise.

Margarita Galvan is a student at Immokalee Technical Center in Immokalee, Florida. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee.

The Seasons of Bangladesh

The name of my country is Bangladesh. It is situated in south-east Asia. There are six seasons in my country. The six seasons are: Grisma, Barsa, Sarat, Hemanto, Seet and Basanto. The first season in my country is summer. We call it Grisma. It lasts from March through May. The weather warms up a bit each day. The heat starts intensifying more rapidly, and the soil turns a dusty khaki and then almost white. The rivers dry out and are difficult to navigate. People work in the fields. When the temperature is very high, people rest under the trees and the birds are singing for rain. Everyone waits for the rain.

The next season is the rainy season. We call it Barsa. It starts in June and stays until August. In this season, 70% of the land is under water; water from rivers, the sea, rain, floods and the melting snows of the Himalayas. Fields and homes are flooded, and people and animals have to move to higher ground. During the rains, most villages are isolated, accessible only by boat. Aside from these particular problems, the rain and the water inspires poetry, and the song of the people.

The third season of my country is Sarat. It stays from September through October. When September begins, the sky is blue, and a cool wind blows. The land turns into a carpet of bright green rice. Flowers bloom, the rice ripens, and the harvest begins. Blue, gold and green are the colors of Sarat: blue sky, golden sun, and green vegetation from emerald to jade, pea to lime, shamrock to sea green.

After Sarat, the next season is Hemanto, which stays from October through November. During this season, the land is at its luscious best. The land and its people come to life during Hemanto, when the flowers bloom – Jasmine, water-lily, rose, magnolia, etc. By the season's end, the air is no longer humid.

From mid-November to early January, the weather becomes more arid and less humid, we call it Seet. In this season the earth dries. In the morning, people burn fires to control the Seet (cold). There are lots of date trees in our country. People collect the date juice, it is very sweet. In this season, poor people do not have enough warm clothes, so they suffer from the cold.

The last season of my country is spring. We call it Bosanto. The

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coolest days are from mid-December to February when the days are golden with light, the flowers are blooming, and the nights and early mornings are chilly. During Bosanto, the country-side hums with fairs, parades and festivals. People arrange parties, picnics, tours, music and drama. New leaves appear on all of the trees. The trees look evergreen and different kinds and colors of flowers are blooming in the trees. For this reason, another name of Bosanto is “king of season”.

Swampna Butta is a student at the Lake County Adult Literacy Program.

Lake Ella

Larry and I always go to Lake Ella to walk and feed the ducks. Lake Ella is a good place to go to meet new people. We go several times a week. On some days we carry our own lunch to eat. We carry our dog, Little Joe, with us and he likes to run after the ducks. Lake Ella is a beautiful place to go to have fun. Sometimes we meet new people while we are walking for exercise, and the ducks come right up to you. When we finish exercising, we work in our puzzle books. We like to see who can do the most puzzles. I always do, because Larry likes to talk too much!

Blanche Collins is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Leon County.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is the beach. It calms my heart and relaxes my body. The beauty of the scenery, the freedom of the birds flying, the ability to walk on the shore, the joy of the people playing volley ball, the touch of the wind and the moisture from the ocean on my face creates a sense of peace and tranquility. It is a wonderful place to go into deep thoughts about projects in my near and far away future. I am speechless at the magnificent size, charm, and loveliness of the water, atmosphere, and feelings it gives to my mind, body, and soul.

Danilo Blanco is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Why I love The Ozark Mountains

There are many reasons why I love the Ozark Mountains. The three main reasons are the abundant game available for hunting, the various species of fish for fishing and the scenic trails for hiking.

Hunting in the beautiful Ozarks is a world renowned hunter's paradise. There are many varieties of game such as deer, rabbit, and wild hogs. Wild hogs are the preferred game of choice. They are larger, faster, and meaner than any hogs available in Florida. Many hogs over 500 lbs. have been recorded.

There are many species of fish in the various lakes and rivers in the glorious Ozark Mountains. Species available are trout, brook, perch and most famous of all is the catfish also known as the "mud cat." Mud cats can range from 15 to 20 pounds and are some of the best eating of all catfish. Residents of the Ozarks and myself personally prefer pan fried mud cats.

The wonderful Ozarks have some of the most spectacular and breathtaking views. The scenery can be observed on the many hiking trails. Some of these trails go so deep into the woods that you can see nature untouched by man. The songs of birds perched in the trees and overhead can be so peaceful and has a soothing effect. Hiking these trails is where humans and nature become one.

The Ozark Mountains, known for its beauty, hunting, fishing, and hiking, are among Arkansas finest. Everybody should afford themselves the opportunity to visit when they can. For these reasons and many more, my love for the Ozark Mountains holds a special place in my heart.

Rufus Brooks is an adult education student at Jefferson Correctional Institute.

My Favorite Place

Wacken is one of the leading summer open air heavy metal music festivals. It takes place annually in the small town of Wacken in Schleswig-Holstein, northern Germany. With eighty thousand festival visitors, including personnel, there was a total of roughly 82,500 attendees in 2010. My favorite place in the world is Wacken because it brings heavy metal fans together, it is great to camp there, and it's a fun place to get away.

Wacken attracts all kinds of metal music fans, such as fans of

Favorite Place

Black Metal, Death Metal, Power Metal, Thrash Metal, and Folk Metal. The festival was first held place in 1990 as a small event for local German bands. By 1998, the event had become the major festival on the European metal calendar, and has included over 70 bands from all over Europe, North America and Australia.

W.O.A, Waken Open Air, is usually held at the beginning of August and last three days, during which the festival-goers camp on several large camping grounds surrounding the actual festival area. The 70 or more bands perform across four separate stages over the course of the event. Some bands that have been performed there are Cannibal Corpse, Morbid Angel, Overkill, Obituary, Dio, Amon Amarth, Exodus And Mayhem.

Wacken is a place where you can get away and be yourself when society doesn't let you. It is a place to be free and enjoy yourself by supporting the music you love. You can feel the energy from the music and the thousands of fans; it's like heaven.

The German music festival, Wacken, is a wonderful place for me because I enjoy the music, and the tons of fun you have. Wacken means a lot to me because I feel emotionally connected to the environment around me; therefore, my favorite place is the Wacken festival.

Nico Erbella is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

Damascus, My Favorite Place

Syria has always been a center where East and West meet. It is no wonder that Syria is known as the "Cradle of Civilization." It has flourished throughout history.

One of the most important mosques is the Uma Yad mosque which was built on the Christian basilica dedicated to John the Baptist. The mosque holds a shrine which still today contains the head of John the Baptist who is honored as a prophet by Christians and Muslims alike. The mosque has a triple aisled prayer hall 160 meters long. Its tile and wooden roof is supported by columns taken from Roman temples in the region as well as the Church of Mary at Antioch. Uma Yad has the largest golden mosaic in the world, over 4,000 meters square.

Another important monument is Bab Kisan, the gate on the southeastern side of Damascus. It was the gate through which Paul

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escaped from the Romans. The early Christians used to reenact this event every year. A window beside the Kisan gate is the arch style, typical of the Mameluke Period.

Damascus is my favorite place and I hope everyone will visit and enjoy the beauty of it.

Ikhlas Fregat is a student at the Center for Adult Learning at the Jacksonville Public Library.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Pensacola, FL. Two things I like about Pensacola are the fishing bridge and the beaches. You can fish better on the bridge. You can walk out on it, and the bridge lets you see a better view of the water. You can see many birds like seagulls and pelicans. They are pretty birds. Seagulls sound like they are laughing at you. You can feed the pelicans fish, and seagulls dive into the water to get a fish. Sometimes you can catch fish and sometimes you don't catch fish. The beaches in Pensacola are pretty. The waves are pretty and big in the Gulf of Mexico. The white sand is beautiful, but it is hot to your feet. At the beach, you can see children building sand castles in the sand. They have sand pails and use their hands to build the castles. You can see big boats, little boats, and sailboats in the water.

Ricky Allen lives in Pensacola, Florida and has attended Learn to Read of Northwest Florida's learning lab for more than one year.

Eastern Island, My Favorite Place

There is a place in the world I prefer over other places. It is Eastern Island. I was there in 1997 to see the launch of a ship named "Matarangi". Some reasons why this island is my favorite place are the people, the preservation, and the serenity.

The inhabitants are really friendly with foreign people. They kindly offer visitors the things they have. For example, they will invite them to go in their homes to eat, drink, and have a rest. You can never find people like this in the world. They are unusual. As a tourist destination, the island is hardly exploited. Eastern Island belongs to Chile and is really small, but it has the biggest airport in the southern hemisphere. It can be used as an alternative place to land the "Challenger Shuttle" in case of weather problems in Cape

Favorite Place

Canaveral. The island has three volcanoes which are extinguished. Inside of them you can find canes called “Totora” which was used to build the ship, Matarangi.

On this island you can find the most impressive sculpture you have never seen, “the Moais”, a big human head. Some of them are topped with hats. The sculptures are made of stone. The origin of the Moais is unknown. I guess probably they are religious icons. They are lined up in different places of the island especially close to the sea. Finally the inhabitant, the “Rapa Nui”, a special race, is energetic and has great stamina. They are proud of their origin. They share a common root with Polynesian race, language, culture, and traditions.

Now, you know why I like Eastern Island so much. It preserves an original flavor and taste. There you can forget the stress of your daily life and you can get really relaxed and happy.

Antonio Doblas is a student at the Monroe County Adult and Career Education Center.

My Special Place

My special place is anywhere I can go and relax, and get away from the stress of my life. My special place could be as simple as a memory or as peaceful as sitting on the beach completely alone listening to the sound of the breaking waves. As long as the place brings me peace and a smile to my face, it is special to me. My special place is simply where I can go to escape the craziness of my day and get in touch with myself. There are times when I just need to spend time with myself and breath, reflect on a situation, or object. Then there are times when I need to be outside to take in clean fresh air and exhale all the stale negative air., This is a time when I sit quietly alone on the beach. As I feel the ocean air on my face and listen to the waves crashing on the shore, I feel my mood lighten as all the negative things fade away.

A special memory can also be a special place. Some memories can take you back to a time when things were simple and peaceful. Take for example a memory of your child’s birth; that very special moment when you first look into your baby’s eyes. The birth of my children was a very special time in my life. I sometimes would really like to go back to that place in time. There are many special moments and memories in my life and sometimes I need to

Favorite Place

remember and enjoy those memories. Like focus on getting my G.E.D., or whatever place I can go to remember that special memory can be a special place.

As you can see my special place can be a number of different places. But at each place I can accomplish the same things, peace. As long as I can get away from the negative and be able to relax and self reflect, anywhere can be my special place.

Shawn Alexander is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Favorite Place

Last year, my daughter and I traveled to Cuba. We went to visit my family and some old friends. My mother lives in the city of Havana. My daughter and I go to Cuba around twice a year. Going from Miami to Cuba takes approximately 45 minutes by plane.

The day we arrived to Cuba, we prepared a surprise birthday party just for my mother. She was really surprised and loved it. That day, we danced all day long; and the Mariachis played until midnight. It was a great birthday party.

During our stay in Cuba, we went several times to the beach with my family and many of my childhood friends. We had a wonderful time, my daughter was very happy to be there playing with her relatives. Cuba's beaches are the best! And they are so beautiful too.

The last day of our trip to Cuba, my daughter and I prepared a delicious dinner for all our relatives and friends. They all came to say good-bye to us. Everyone was very sad because we had to leave. However, all my family, friends, and even ourselves, were happy for all the good moments we spent together. This is why my country is my favorite place.

My name is Olga Lidia Perez and I am from Cuba. I live in Miami, Florida and I am a High Beginnings ESOL student at Southwest Adult Center. I attend a multilevel class with Mrs. Lopez.

Olga L. Perez is a student at Southwest Adult Educational Center. She currently attends an ESOL multilevel class with Mrs. Lopez

My Favorite Place - Honduras

My favorite place is Honduras. First of all, the beaches there are so beautiful. Also, the food that is cooked over there is delicious. Finally, Honduras is a beautiful country to live in, generally speaking. This is why Honduras is my favorite place.

Honduras has many divine beaches. The water is so clean and nice looking. For example, the view is so gorgeous you can see the birds flying close to the water, people fishing far away in the ocean, and the boats passing by. Also, outside the beaches you always find a relaxing place to lie down without anybody bothering you. Furthermore, the sand is so clear that when the sun is really hot you can see the sand shining. This is what makes Honduras beaches so beautiful.

Moreover, the food cooked in Honduras is really good food. Honduran people mostly cook their food with coconut milk; that is what makes it so good. Seafood is their second most popular food to eat. Their most popular traditional food in Honduras is the “baleadas;” this plate includes a tortilla with beans, butter, and meat inside the tortilla. Everybody loves them.

Finally, and the most important reason that makes Honduras my favorite place is that it is a beautiful country to live in. Life in Honduras is easy and very calm. You don’t always have to be rushing to do anything. In addition, Honduras has anything you could ask for. For example, it has nice looking houses, supermarkets, and good stores to shop in.

In conclusion, Honduras is my favorite place. The weather is nice; it’s never that hot. Also, it’s never that much traffic in the streets. Lastly, they have wonderful parks to spend time with the family. These are the reasons why Honduras is my favorite place.

Jose Miguel Gavarrete is our future best soccer player. He is working so hard to obtain his GED and be proud of himself.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is the United States Virgin Island of St. Thomas. This island has beautiful beaches. Also, there are a variety of great stores on almost every corner of the island. Best of all, it has very friendly people who live there.

The first day I arrived in St. Thomas, I visited the beach. The water there was so beautiful and clear. For the first time in my life, I could actually see colorful, tropical fish swimming in a school. Before that moment, I had only observed tropical fish in aquariums. The water was so amazing; it was as if there were a giant aquarium in front of me, and I couldn't believe my eyes.

After a wonderful day at the beach, I did the traditional touristic things involving adventure and exploration—I decided to go shopping. The stores downtown have unbelievably low prices. My first purchase was a beautiful dashiki and a pair of sandals beaded to perfection. I was astounded that everything was tax free! After learning that, I went on a MAJOR shopping spree. The cost of gold was very reasonable; I could not resist the necklace, ring, and anklet set with diamond cuts all through it. It was wonderful to shop and save money at the same time!

All of this shopping made me very hungry; so I quickly located a seafood restaurant called “Megans by the Bay.” The place was very clean and nicely decorated. I didn't even have to wait very long before a friendly hostess was taking me to my table. The hospitality was very heart-warming, and it made me feel very comfortable. The people on this island are so respectful and nice. They always speak with a pleasant smile; they go out their way to make you feel at home.

I enjoyed every moment I spent in St. Thomas. Perhaps in the future, I will be fortunate enough to visit there again. If not, I will always have fond memories of the beautiful beaches, the great stores, and the friendly people that made this my favorite place.

Theola, Hudson who is 34 years of age, is currently enrolled in the Miami Dade College GED Prep Program at Wolfson Campus. Her instructor is Sherry Joseph-Dutton.

My Favorite Place

I have to say My Favorite Place is the Beach. The beach is a beautiful and peaceful place where I like to go to unwind. I think of the beach as a place of serenity. It is a big stress reliever for me. I feel like I'm in an enchanted place and my mind seems to drift away from all the worries and pain that I am feeling. I enjoy going in the day or night. I have a lot of fun playing with my son at the beach, I enjoy watching sunsets there, and I like to exercise on the beach.

If I go to the beach in the day time it is so much fun taking my son to go play in the water. My son is 5 years old. He gets really excited when I mention to him that we are going. We like to build sandcastles with each other, or bury ourselves in the sand and try to get out. When we go to the beach we enjoy alone time and being able to communicate with each other without any distractions. After playing around we go and grab some ice cream and watch it melt from our hands because it is so hot outside. We have a great time together.

Another reason the beach is my favorite place is because I like to watch the sun set into the ocean while listening to the waves crashing onto the shore. It is such a wonderful view. I like watching all the colors of the sun glaring off the water. It gives me a peaceful feeling. It makes me feel like I'm in a different place from my daily routine.

I also enjoy exercising at the beach. I like to walk several miles down the shore. The sight and the smell of the beach are uplifting and give me energy. While I'm walking I like to watch the kids surfing in the water, or children playing in the sand. While I'm walking I stare into the ocean to maybe see a dolphin. It is a not very common to see one, but if you're lucky you might.

Overall, the beach is my favorite place to go. It gives me time to spend with my son, and it gives me energy, and is a beautiful place to spend my day. I'm so fortunate to be in a place where I can go to the beach anytime of the year.

Michelle Gomez is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

My Favorite Places

The waves breaking apart at the shore, while the mangroves and animals moving with life; the sun beating down on my skin. The weather is 80 degrees with a slight breeze. I'm getting more excited to go on the water for a peaceful day. My favorite place is on the water in my kayak because it has beautiful wildlife, and has beautiful birds for me to photograph, and I can relax while fishing.

It was 5:00 A.M., dark and foggy. I started putting my kayak on the roof of my jeep, loaded it with all my camera gear, and of course ,a few fishing poles to go fishing once I found that perfect photo. I pulled up to the kayak ramp to unload; there was a fog on the water which made it a beautiful sight. While loading all of my gear into the kayak, an Osprey flew by, and I started getting more excited to get on the water to see all the beautiful wildlife.

I hopped in my kayak and started to paddle through the mangrove's tunnels through an old native Indian trail, when all of a sudden on my right side of my kayak there was a momma boar and two small babies. I was actually a little scared because boars can be very protective with their young. So I kept paddling by them, I didn't want to upset momma since her babies were very young.

The next corner I turned there were a lot of birds, Osprey, Pink Spoon Bills and a handful of Ibis. I grabbed my camera in excitement, since you don't see Pink Spoon Bill too often since they are an endangered bird, and I started shooting to get that perfect picture. As I paddled closer and closer to the birds they started to fly away. I think I get the best pictures as they fly away. They are so beautiful in flight with their wings spread out and gliding through the air with ease.

Kayaking, photography and fishing to me is very relaxing. Since all the birds flew away, it was time to pull out the fishing poles and get that big fish. I casted out to what looked like a pod of Red fish, my favorite fish to catch besides largemouth bass. All of a sudden my line got hit and lines started screaming out, "It feels like a big Red fish!" I reel and reel for what seems like forever to get this fish in; it was only a few minutes but felt like ten minutes. Finally I got the fish in, and it was a 32 inch Red fish with one black spot on the back of its tail.

Favorite Place

As I started paddling back to the Jeep, still in amazement of how beautiful of a day it was seeing all the birds and getting great photos and getting my red fish. My favorite place is on the water; I loved being on the water because it is so relaxing and peaceful and I got some great shots of the wildlife. Kayaking and paddling through the mangroves is so serene.

Cheryl Greco is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

My Favorite Place

My mind runs free with the sound of music in one ear and the water fountain in the other. My children and dogs are my only distraction. My chair is very comfortable which makes my mind run free. The sound of music brings my mind, body, and soul to the studio at my house, which is my favorite place.

The mind set in my studio is very care free; your mind can run wild or go to sleep, if you so desire. After all, I do my best thinking when music is playing, or my fountain is running like a river through my soul. The soul likes to run free every once in awhile, like a free bird soaring in the sky.

The distraction comes with my children and dogs; they run in and jump all over me, therefore putting me in an uncomfortable mood. If they would come in and enjoy the setting, they would see my addiction to the studio but we are talking about children and dogs. An adult with my issues will understand.

Music is food for the brain and your well being. To feel the music is like a baby hearing its mother's voice, it's soothing. The drums vibrate my chest; I can tell what song is playing. The bass feels like a massage on your back. The singer almost knows how you feel, however, it's all in my head.

When I am in my favorite place no one can touch me in my room; it's like a cloud and I'm floating away into space. Have you ever felt that way? I hope I have helped you find peace of mind; therefore, you are welcome in my favorite place anytime. Just come on in and have a sit down. Maybe I will see you there, or maybe you already have your own favorite place.

John Garris is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

A Breath of Fresh Air

Being born and raised in Florida, I have found that the beach is my favorite place to be for many reasons. As a child my parents would take us there often. We would fish, collect pretty shells and shark's teeth, and build sandcastles.

Now that I am older, I find that the beach is a great place to unwind after a long week. Just being around the pretty scenery and in the fresh air calms me. When I am walking along the shore finding shells and sharks teeth, my mind wanders back to when I was a child doing the same thing.

Another of my favorite activities at the beach is getting exercise. After walking along the beach for about an hour, I go for a swim to cool off. Then, just before I pack up to go home, I get to see the beautiful sunset.

I could not imagine living somewhere that does not have a beach.

Tammy Miller is a mother and a student in the GED program at Manatee Technical Institute. She is working toward a career in nursing.

My Special Place

My special place is a river, because it's beautiful, relaxing and a good place to heal. So come along with me and I will show you my river. The river could be anywhere by the mountains, in the desert or by the sea. My rivers are always in the woods.

The river is beautiful. It's scenic and breathtaking. Rivers are abundant with colors that reflect off the river bed. The trees sway in the wind, making shade, perfect for a hot day.

The river is relaxing. I love how you can lay on the riverbed listening to its soothing sounds. The river is a mini-vacation where you can escape from reality; it's calming like when a baby listens to his mother's heartbeat to calm himself.

It's a good place to heal. When my grandmother passed, the river was my shoulder to lean on. I have found it's a perfect place to talk to God and connect with nature. The river is also a great place to let go of the past and zone in to the near future.

The river reminds me of heaven, from its breathtaking beauty to

Favorite Place

its relaxing sound. It's a place to let go. God made the rivers before he made us; therefore we need to care for our river for future generations

Kushaiah Krow is a 21 year old female who goes to Leon County Schools Adult and Community Education GED program . She is planning to go to TCC in the fall.

My Favorite Place

The topic I have chosen to write about is, "My Favorite Place." This place would be considered the oldest city in the United States, St. Augustine. St. Augustine is known for its astonishing historical sites and magnificent beaches. Most of the architecture in the area has been around for centuries, for instance, the first of many buildings: the Fort, schoolhouse, church, lighthouse, and college. They have all managed to survive through several hurricanes.

It's interesting to hear all the amazing stories of St. Augustine. The Spanish were the first to settle in St. Augustine. When they arrived on their vessel, the priest was the first to depart from the ship to bless the land. In time, the British came and fought for the land then won it from the Spanish. The Fort has all the information available to you about the history of the Spanish and British.

There are many areas to explore in St. Augustine. They even have a ghost tour. Locals revealed that the best areas for paranormal sightings are the cemetery, lighthouse, and Fort. At the cemetery, if you take a photo, you can see orbs in them, which are spirits presenting themselves. Also, I saw a show called "Ghost Hunters", who investigated the lighthouse and found it to be haunted. This just excites me to know of all the haunted places to find just in this area. From what I understand, at the college they actually had to close part of the dorm area due to paranormal activity.

St. Augustine is enriched with so much history. It's stimulating to learn all the history that has occurred in such a beautiful place. Your mind just spins with all the knowledge you're learning. But it's not the only you can adventure in St. Augustine. For the fun in the sun adventures, there are numerous amounts of things to do. You are able to drive on the beach, snorkel, go on dolphin tours, and rent boats. There are nature hiking trails to go on. There is just so much to embrace, that you are unable to do it in one day.

I went to St. Augustine on a class field trip and just fell in love

Favorite Place

with architectural scenery and fabulous beaches. We took a mini-tour and heard a few wise tails. We saw the first school house, fort, and the cross that the priest blessed the land with. It was such a pleasant, and educational experience to be a part of. I couldn't get over how all the buildings have lasted throughout the centuries. Our class had lunch on a boat which was awesome because we were able to see dolphins off the side of it. Although our tour was short, I'm looking forward to returning with my children and sharing everything I have experienced and learned.

In ending, my favorite place is St. Augustine, Florida because of its magnificent beaches, historical sites, and lavish scenery. It is the only place I know where you can relax and get educated, and not even realize it. It is such an amazing place to explore. It's just so captivating!

Tina Walker is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is a little town called Catharina. This special town is located in my home country, Nicaragua. I love this place because my family and I went there for a vacation. This town has many things that make me feel happy and alive. The sound of the river, the birds, the animals, the different kinds of fruits and vegetables, and the various kinds of plants that you can buy. There are some small markets where the tourists can bargain for a lower price when they purchase clothes, shoes, furniture and manual skill items. The weather is very nice all year round. The flowers look very beautiful when they blossom especially in October. This is an awesome place. There is no other place like home.

Vanessa Gutierrez is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Place

Everyone has that one special place they have or like to go to escape or relax. It doesn't even matter why you have that favorite place it's just important to have one. The peace and serenity is just simply amazing. My favorite place on this earth is in a garage spinning wrenches and transforming everyday vehicles into my own creation.

It does not matter where the garage is or the condition of the

Favorite Place

building; however, as long as I have my tools and something to work on I'm as happy as I could ever be. Either it's working on a 383 stroker, a four cylinder, or doing custom fabrication, nothing else comes close to how I feel hearing a new motor crank up for the first time, or seeing a one hundred percent custom car pull out of a paint booth, an knowing and seeing my creation that started in my head. is now real.

I can't even begin to fathom what it's like to be able to express myself through building a one of a kind car, truck, or motorcycle. Knowing every inch of the vehicle has to do with a simple thought that began in my mind is surreal. Imagine taking a flat one definitional piece of metal and transforming it into a three dimensional piece of art, like a one of a kind gas tank for a motorcycle, or a side skirt for a car. It's simply amazing.

Another amazing thing about my favorite place is all the excitement of being able to take someone else's ideas or dreams of a car or motorcycle, and not only give them exactly what they want, but go a step further and make it even more knarly and ludicrous than the ever could have imagined. Some people tell me they can't see how working on a car or motorcycle could ever be interesting. Then I take them to my favorite place, my garage and show them some of the things I've created, and they can't help but be interested and want to know more about how I can take something so simple and make it completely original.

Nothing can nor will it ever take away or replace my favorite place, or how I feel when I'm there I might not always be in the same garage, but you can guarantee you will find me in one. No matter the city or state, I will always have my favorite place.

Clayton Montgomery is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

My Favorite Place

My life as I know it, changed when the economy started to take a turn for the worse. My boyfriend and I found ourselves at the mercy of his parents when we could no longer afford to pay our own bills. To be honest, I was very apprehensive about moving in with my in laws but it ended up being my favorite place to be.

Everything that I enjoy doing is all wrapped up in one place. When you pull up to the house the landscape alone takes your

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breath away. I have sat in the yard swinging with my father-in-law many, many times admiring the trees and flowers while drinking a cold beverage and listening to the birds sing.

There is always something going on inside the house. I love to cook dinner and I end up doing it every night of the week. It's about the only thing that brings the entire household together. Another thing I love to do is bake desserts, which is one of the reasons, I think, my mother-in-law loves me so much. For entertainment we gather around the TV to watch American Idol or bowl together on the Wii.

The backyard is a place where my boyfriend and I usually spend most of our time. Playing ball with our four Rottweiler's is the main event of every single day. It doesn't seem so much like a chore when we feed and play with them together. It also gives us a bit more "alone time" that every couple needs.

So, in the long run, as much as I was not all that excited or prepared to be moving in with my in-laws, they made their home readily available to me, and I've realized that it's not what you live in that's more import, it's how you live.

Caralisa Ratliff is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Manasota Key in Englewood, Florida. The beach there is beautiful and the sand is very nice. You can walk along the shoreline and watch the pelicans while they are hunting for fish. Sometimes dolphins swim there in the sea near the beach. They play and jump in and out of the water. In the afternoons the dolphins hunt for fish too and the fish jump out of the water to escape the dolphins. But the best of all is searching for shark teeth. The shark teeth are fossils and they are few millions of years old. Fossil shark teeth are black and they come in different shapes and sizes. The waves bring the shark teeth from the ocean to the beach. A good time to look for these nice fossils is early in the morning, in particular, after a stormy night. These are the reasons I pick Manasota Key as my favorite place.

Juergen Hillebrand is an ESOL student at Lee County Adult Education at Cape Coral High School. His teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Vacations to Never Forget

One of the things I really enjoy in my life is the time I spent for vacation; maybe everyone feels the same way. I love going places, from Theme Parks to National Parks, and of course, interesting cities like New York, Las Vegas or San Francisco. Since I came to the USA in 2002, I have had the opportunity to visit some of them with my family (father, mother, sister, brother, niece and my daughter).

My first big vacation was in 2003. We traveled by Greyhound from Orlando to Niagara Falls. We spent one week in New York, and a couple days in Boston. Finally, we reached our destination. What a beautiful place! I know why Niagara Falls is one of the Seven Wonders of the World.

In 2004, I worked at Walt Disney World. It was a “wonderful one-year experience”. I visited all of the theme parks, not once or twice, but I think hundreds of times. Working there was like having a vacation every day.

For vacation in 2005, we went to Yellowstone National Park in the summer, and Hawaii in the winter. In Yellowstone, for the first time in my life I saw wild animals close up, like bison, bears, deer, foxes, and a huge eagle’s nest. We visited some of the amazing sites such as Old Faithful, geysers and hot springs. Hawaii was a relaxing, peaceful place. We enjoyed the blue green clear water and the white sand beaches. We also had the opportunity to go under the sea in a submarine.

We visited several national parks in a marathon of 30 days in 2007. For the first time, my daughter Alicia traveled with us, she was born in July 2006. We rented a minivan and went from Florida to California. The National Parks that we visited were: Mesa Verde, Petrified, Grand Canyon, Bryce Canyon, Zion, Death Valley, and Yosemite. In addition we spent one night in Paris TX, (yes, the USA has a Paris too), and traveled into Four Corners, Las Vegas, and San Francisco. In our way back home we stopped in Austin Texas and spent couple days with some relatives.

In 2008, we visited The Smoky Mountains in Tennessee, where we saw a mother bear with her two babies bears crossing our path, and also visited the state line between North Carolina and

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Tennessee. We went to Big Bend in Texas in 2009, and enjoy walking through its valleys and mountains. We visited Acadia National Park in Maine, and Shenandoah National Park in Virginia in 2010. We ate a lot of lobster dishes and did a lot of driving.

As you can see, traveling and going to different places during my vacation is one of my favorite things to do. Aside the time I spend with my family, the knowledge that I have gained in history, geography, animal wild life, cuisine and culture of these places, is priceless. I wonder what vacation adventure 2011 will hold for us.

Martha Scott came to the USA in 2002 and she is an ESOL student at the Marion County Literacy Council in Ocala, Fl. Her teacher is Nadia Abdul-Quddus.

Black Water River

Black Water River is my favorite place on earth. I love the outdoors. The river offers many things I enjoy, especially tubing. There are many other things to do such as fishing, swimming, hiking, camping, and cliff climbing.

My favorite sport is tubing. I love to tube because of the feelings of freedom, excitement, and fear, all rolled into one. If you have never been tubing before, all you do is tie all your tubes together and let the current carry you down the river. There is nothing to it but laying back and enjoying yourself. If you want to stop, just look for a sand bar you like, and pull over and claim your spot. I like to bring things with me such as drinks and food. Games are fun for the kids and everyone has a good time.

When you're done tubing, you can also enjoy fishing, swimming, or hiking. There are many great fishing spots all along the river. I choose to tube and find the best ones. As for swimming, the water is not too deep, so everyone can swim. The current can be strong in some places, so life jackets are an important item to take with you.

The hiking is great at Black Water River. There are many nature trails you can hike on. The woods are nice and refreshing when you live in the city. Caution had to be taken because of snakes and gators. Safety is always important while hiking. All these things are the things I love to do during my day at Black Water River.

Another thing that Black Water River has to offer is camping. The cliff areas are a relaxing place to just sit and take in the nature.

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Many people go there to camp for the weekend or several weeks. I bring my tent so I can enjoy the outdoors with my friends and family. The cliffs are fun to climb. There are easy places, as well as very difficult places, to climb. I usually climb the cliffs so I can pitch my tent at the top. That is where relaxation comes in. I can sit up there and look out over the river for hours at a time. It feels like I'm on another planet.

So, over all if you really want to have a great weekend go to Black Water River. Rain or shine, it's all day long fun. The pleasures are endless and the relaxation a must.

Barbara Ritchie is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

My Favorite Place

Ruby Falls is one of the most magical places I've ever visited. It sits on the highest mountain in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Furthermore, it has magnificent caves that go on for miles with incredible rock formations. Just when you think you've seen it all, there lies the most breathtaking waterfall; standing taller than your eyes can see, this waterfall changes colors like an iguana blending into its surrounding. Ruby Falls is my favorite place because of its colossal mountain, bizarre caves, and its astonishing waterfall.

Driving up the mountain to Ruby Falls was a very exciting moment for me. The mountain was so high it sat up in the clouds; it looked as if there was smoke from a fire surrounding it. As we drove up this enormous mountain, my ears began to pop like pop rocks inside a child's mouth. We finally reached the top and there sat a tall gray building covered from top to bottom with thick green moss. We got out of our car, shivering due to the frigid temperature; we walked up a steep incline until we reached the front entrance.

It was the top of the hour and we were one of the first people inside Ruby Falls Mountain. After purchasing our tickets, our tour guide escorted to an over-sized bronzed elevator. Stepping in carefully, our stomachs turning with excitement, the elevator began to drop beneath the ground. Squealing and creaking, it traveled 1200 feet beneath the mountain. When our group exited, we were all amazed at the unusual rock formations that stood in front of us. The caves were built from lime stone. Some of the unusual rocks resembled tobacco leafs and hot dogs; however, the texture was

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smooth like glazed clay. The caves went on for miles and around every corner was something new and exciting.

They say that at the end of every tunnel you will find light. Well, at the end of this two mile adventure through Ruby Falls sat the most exquisite waterfall I had ever seen; the waterfall changed colors like leaves in the fall. Surrounded by an enormous cave, I wondered how this could be possible. Our tour guide informed us that the waterfall comes from the Tennessee River. As I stood there at the base of the waterfall, I felt the cool mist splash across my face. I watched the sheer drop from 145ft above my head; looking at people's amazement, it looked as if God had just blessed everyone in there.

Ruby Falls is an amazing place to visit. With its breathtaking views and unique history, it's definitely a family experience you will never forget. Ruby Falls was an unforgettable trip and that's why it's my favorite place.

My name is Natasha Tanner and I am a 27 year old single mother. I have worked as a Medical Assistant for 8 years. I want to reach my goal of becoming a mobile ultrasound technician. This is why I am currently studying for my GED.

My Favorite Place: Key West

I like Key West because it does not have violence. It is small, about two by four miles. If you don't have a car, you can ride your bicycle to work, to school, to the grocery store, and to the beach. Everything is within bicycling and walking distance. The people are very friendly. You can meet people from all over the world at the Adult Education Center. Some come from China, Poland, Russia, Cuba, Nicaragua, Spain, Colombia, Honduras, Uzbekistan, Brazil, Cambodia, Thailand, Mexico, and Haiti. Duval Street is the main attraction downtown. There are many bars and restaurants: Sloppy Joes, Magarittaville, Southernmost Beach café, Ricks, Blackfin, Salsa Loca and many others.

I like the tropical weather because it is not too hot and it seldom gets cold. A special event you must experience is Fantasy Fest at the end of October. There are many wild decorated floats and people in the parade. If you haven't been to Key West, you should.

Lourdes Maldonado is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Place To Be Is With My Dog, Bubba

My eight month old, loving, American bulldog named Collin Gray has the nickname Bubba and he is loads of fun. When I walk through the front door he gets ridiculously pumped up like a kid waking up on his birthday. Therefore, you think you're getting the best welcome ever. Speeding down the hallway like on the Santa Fe race track, he tackles me down and ends up giving me a lot of kisses and a body hugs. Some of the main reasons that I love my faithful companion are that he is my loyal friend, lots of fun to be with, and he has taught me responsibility.

First of all, my best friend Bubba is always there for me; he listens to me when I need to talk. Even when I leave for ten minutes, he acts like I have been gone for weeks; it is love all over again. It is so surreal how I spoil him as if he was my only kid. I put ice cubes in his silver water bowl, rice and vegetables with his doggy food, toys everywhere and even have his own four by seven foot room with a grand puppy door. He is my most faithful friend and lots of fun too.

Furthermore, Bubba loves to be walked and sometimes he even drags me; he does not mean any harm though. When he wants to play, he will go in his toy box and pick out what he wants to do. Rope means he wants to play tug of war with you; it's fun when Bubba pulls me in a chair on wheels. He will give you the Frisbee to throw. Collin loves that. He also likes learning new fun tricks since he knows he will receive a milk bone.

Last, but not least, is all the good stuff like picking up the poop. My little brother says "something smells atrocious like poop". Yes, it is imperative that I clean up after him as soon as he makes the messes. Sometimes, my mother and father help me out with Bubba bear. I feed him two times a day. It's heated in the microwave just because I love him. Collin basically goes everywhere with us besides "Wally world". He sits up in his own car seat. Sometimes he has mistakes in the house. Where ever he goes he is my responsibility.

In conclusion, my favorite place to be in the whole world is with my dog, Collin Grey. He is the best friend a girl can ask for; he will never tell my secrets. I am never bored around Bubba. He is always ready to have fun. Just to let everyone know, before you get a dog,

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think about all the responsibility you will have; hopefully, others will feel the same way I do about their furry friends.

Levonne Kingsley is a student at Cape Coral High School

The Place I Love

My name is Divina. I am from Brazil. Brazil is a country in Latin America. It is the only Latin American country where people speak Portuguese. There are twenty-six states in Brazil. Before I came to the United States, I lived in Northwest Brazil. It is the poorest part of the country. It is where the Amazon Forest is.

We have so many different colored birds, animals, snakes and wildlife in my country. They are very, very beautiful. Monkeys are all around. I saw them all of the time.

I think that the beaches in the Northwest are the most beautiful beaches in the world. The sea has a beautiful color. The sand is soft and white. There are many beautiful sand dunes. The beaches are not so crowded. For me, they are more beautiful than the beaches in Rio de Janeiro.

Even though I love Brazil, my family moved to the United States because there is better education here. My older girl is in Public School. In Brazil, the public schools are very bad. We moved here so our girls could get the best education.

Divina Pereira, her husband and their two daughters came to Florida from Brazil in the summer of 2010. Divina meets with her tutor Michele at the Homosassa Public Library in Citrus County

My Special Place is the Beach

My favorite place is the beach at Alligator Point. I love the beach because you can see the shiny stars at night. I also love watching the sunset and the beautiful reddish-orange sunrise in the morning above the sparkling water. On a hot sunny day people love cooking out on the grill.

When you're at the beach you can hear the waves splashing and people talking loud. Also you can hear the birds chirping. Sometimes you hear boat engines.

When I'm at the beach I can smell the fresh breeze and the smell of stinky dead fish. Also I love the good smell of the soft smooth sunscreen.

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I can taste the good smelling cooking that my family is cooking, which includes hot grilled fish, BBQ, and iced cold soda with a dessert on the side; hot fudge on the bottom that melt in your mouth, creamy cold delicious ice cream with peanuts on top.

I love the beach because it's more relaxing and a warm comfort place to be with my boyfriend and family.

Cynterrika Jenkins is a student at ACE in Tallahassee FL.

Jamaica Mon

My favorite place to be would be in Jamaica. Jamaica is a small island in the Caribbean. It is an island full of mountains, and waterfalls. Jamaica has a wide variety of food, great landscape, and beautiful white sandy beaches. Here you will find that the locals are very outgoing with their lifestyle and culture.

On the island of Jamaica, you will find a wide assortment of foods, from Jerk Chicken, to hamburgers. The jerk chicken is one of the most popular dishes made on the island. The chicken is cooked to perfection, with a tangy spicy taste, which just makes your mouth water. You can also find another dish called jerk pork; both are a spicy meal that is made each morning.

There are mountains that run through the whole length of the island. As you're driving down the road, you can look up into the mountains and see where people have built their homes. They are perched right up on the mountain sides with stilts. As you climb up some of the numerous mountains, you can see the water falls that rush out at the tops and flow down and eventually hit out into the ocean. The water falls go as far as Ocho Rios, all the way up to Montego Bay.

When you visit Jamaica there is the one thing they have that you just can't miss. The world renowned beaches, by boat or by plane, can't be missed. The sand is white and the water is blue. The sand is a cool temperature due to being in the Caribbean Islands. The temperature all year long is warm to cool. The water is so blue that you can see down as far as twenty feet without so much as a disturbance in the water. It's almost as if you are looking through a piece of glass.

Eric Whitten is a student at the GED Program Cypress Lakes High School.

How Life at Home Differs From Life in the US

My Experience in the United States

On February 10, 2010, my dreams became a reality; I reached the United States of America. I never thought that this would come true. My family was anxious to see me and when I finally arrived, it was a wonderful experience not only for me but for all those that were waiting for me for so many years.

During those days, one of my cousins told me about taking English classes. He told me that first I had to take a test, and then the school will tell me in which level I was supposed to register. So I did, I took the test and after I got my score, I was placed in Foundations, level I.

I decided to call Southwest Adult Educational Center because some of my friends told me great things about this school. I have been coming for the last 3 semesters and I learn something new every day.

This year I started college. The counselor asked me about my educational and work experience and I told him that I was a nurse in my country. I gave him my degree and my diplomas and he registered me in a Phlebotomy and a Therapeutic Massage class while trying to re-validate my degree.

As of today, I am a very happy person. I have my family and I am learning English as a second language because I have a great ESOL teacher. She is a kind and a wonderful person. She knows her students very well and helps them very much.

I would like to say thank you to everyone that has helped me get to the point where I am right now, my family, my teachers, my

friends, my classmates, and especially to my ESOL teacher, Mrs. Lopez. God bless her.

My name is Celso M. Ayra and I am a student at Southwest Adult Educational Center. I came from Cuba in 2010. I attend an ESOL Multilevel Class with Mrs. Lopez.

Celso M. Ayra is a student at Southwest Adult Educational Center. He came from Cuba in 2010. Celso attends an ESOL Multilevel Class with Mrs. Lopez.

Mom Knows Best

My name is Evaristo Baten. I was born in Guatemala in a little community. When I was fifteen years old I had the most important conversation with my momma. She said, “Son, I think you have to go to the United States.” I said, “Momma, may I have a little time to think about it?” She said, “Yes, you can have time because it is very important for us.” A few weeks later I realized that it was true. But, I did not have enough money. I talked again with my momma. She said she was really very happy.

Then I came across Mexico to the United States. I arrived in this country in 2005. My family did not come with me. I was nervous and sad. I lived with my daddy and my friends here. At night I remembered my momma’s words to me, “Son you can always come home.” But I did not go home.

I was nervous and at the same time a little excited about being in a new country. I had no job and no friends here. My daily routine was always the same; get up, look for a job, go to bed. I would go around the neighborhood and speak to the people I saw to make new friends. At night I would remember my momma’s words to me.

I started to study English at night. English is a difficult language and many times I was too tired to study. One teacher, Mrs. Maxwell, is very kind to me. She is teaching me a lot. Thank you, Mrs. Maxwell.

I want to thank my momma for telling me to come to the United States. God bless you momma. I Love You.

My name is Evaristo Baten. I am 21 years old. I love music and would like to someday take guitar lessons. I also love to play soccer.

Why I Came To the U.S.

Let me tell you why I came to United States. I came to United States because my life is not really good in Haiti.

The first reason is because I was not earning enough money to cover my house bills and help my family.

But in America it is different. It is easy to get a job and the pay is much higher. I am able to pay my own rent, utilities, and still have some left to send to Haiti to help my family. In the U.S. I can go to school to learn English so that I can get a better job. Also, in the U.S. there is more help available to assist people like me to get a better life.

Thank you, America. You have been good to me!

Julienne Josaphat is an ESOL student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Letter to Readers

Dear Reader,

I know you are curious to learn something about me and for that reason I'm rushing to put on this paper my short history.

As you see, I arrived in the USA from Romania nearly two years ago. Visiting Florida, I fell in love so much with this land blessed by God. I decided not to return to my country and live here for the rest of my life.

I should have done this a long time ago when I realized that the Communist regime was a brutal dictatorial system based on hate; politics used as a doctrine for the masses.

When the Iron Curtain fell in December 1989, I was shocked when I found out that what I was told about the outside world was a big lie. The truth was that I lived in a country without human rights.

I am, therefore, in the USA, trying to start my life from zero. I am trying to adapt to the American lifestyle, fighting with my mentality, working and learning the hard way for my integration.

Even with all the effort that I make I don't feel tired. I look around and I see how beautiful everything is. The peaceful life that

is surrounding me fills my heart with joy.

I'm fascinated and surprised daily by the things that I find out about this country. The correct behavior of people around me, and especially of the opportunities that I have to live in this civilized world, continues to fill me with joy.

When I was a child, I heard my grandparents saying with whispering words, "the Americans will come to protect us." It was just a dream. It was the dream after the Second World War, when the "Russian boot" crushed nations, culture and the soul in Eastern Europe.

After fifty years, my grandparent's dream has come true, but a little bit differently. The Americans did not come to Romania, but I came to America. I'm sure my grand-mom and my granddad are "watching me" now and they are happy for me.

God Bless America

Love,

Angalita, Lenuta

Lenuta Angalita is an ESOL student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Cape High School.

How Life in My Home Country is Different from Life in the U.S.A.

My country is a beautiful Caribbean Island, which is surrounded by water, trees, mountains and different beauty spots and tourist attractions. It is ninety miles away from Cuba. I love it because I was born and raised there, so I know the history and culture.

There was a time when it was ruled by Great Britain, but it later gained independence. Now we have our own Prime Minister named Bruce Golden. We celebrate National Hero Day; Independence Day; Boxing Day; Christmas; New Years. We also celebrate Reggae Sun Splash; a big holiday which people from all over the world travel to Jamaica to celebrate. They enjoy reggae music, drinking white rum, coconut water, and Jamaican Red Stripe beer. People like to eat the jerk pork, curried chicken, and Manish water. They also like the Ackee and Salt Fish which is our national dish.

Everybody enjoys the cool atmosphere. They have a good time in Jamaica, which brings me happiness, joy and brings a smile to my face.

Then, I remember those days when, I used to go the mountain, just for walk with my brothers and sister and the view was so beautiful. There was a beautiful view as far as my eyes could see. It was magnificent. We also watched birds flying from branch to branch. We listened to grasshoppers making their exotic noise. We saw different kinds of animals and insects doing their daily food hunting. It was such joyous times and remembering it brings a smile to my face. I remember watching our grandparents milking the cows and goats in the mornings. The breakfast my grandmother made was awesome. I also remember picking fresh fruits from the trees. It was great!

There is a big difference between the Jamaican and the American economy. The situation is much different. Some people here are blessed to have so much. People have options, and they can further their education, get a good job, and take care of their priorities. Coming to the United State was the best thing ever happened to me and my family.

In conclusion, life is different in Jamaica. It has different and beautiful attractions; places which enchant tourist, great celebrations and anyone can have a good time. It is so amazing to visit Duns River Alls to watch the beauty of a stream flowing down the rocks. It is also interesting to learn about some of their history. Back here in United States, some people are blessed because of what they can achieve in life. As long as I have the ambition, I will achieve something too. Now I am trying to accomplish a goal. I am in the process of getting my GED and begin a career as a Nursing Assistant. I have set this goal so I will be able to get a good job and take of my family and myself.

Marcia Scippio is a GED student at The English Center, South Florida Workforce.

A Tale of Two Countries

I lived in Peru, which is the third largest country in South America. Peru has an oversized population. People are everywhere. Lima, Peru has a large population. I moved to Bradenton, FL, which is a small city in contrast, but I see many attributes of Lima in Bradenton, FL.

Peru has many volcanoes and earthquakes are frequent. In Bradenton, FL we have hurricanes especially in the summertime. I feel earthquakes are more dangerous than hurricanes. The reason is we have no warning for earthquakes but get five days' warning for hurricanes.

The weather in Lima is cooler (34 to 59 degrees F) than in Bradenton. Lima is cool for 10 months with a little sunshine in the summertime. In Bradenton we always have sunshine. We have nice weather between October to April.

The people of Peru are very interesting. Quechua Indians are the largest ethnic group in Peru but in Lima we have a very young population. Bradenton, however, has an older population. My two children Valeria and Luigi were born in Bradenton, FL.

My daughter is a very good student. She got all A's in her last report card. She can read both in Spanish and English. I'm very proud of her. Not only does she know 2 languages she also is good at math. One time we were at Publix's and Valeria knew that one candy bar and one soda costs more than she had money with her.

My son is a very educated student. He is in preschool. His teacher always tells me he is a very smart boy. He knows the entire alphabet and now he is starting to read. Many times we are driving together and he will read the traffic signs for me.

Valeria and Luigi and I will go shopping in a Latin store in Bradenton and we talk about Peru as we are shopping. There will be snacks such as corn and fruits from Peru that we will buy. I am planning a party for my daughter and I am trying to do similar activities as I did as a young girl in Peru. Valeria wants a magician at her party. The children will dance and they will break the piñata. There will be a birthday cake and her friends will give her gifts. I have bought her a beautiful Barbie doll.

We all are very excited about Valeria's 8th birthday and we hope she will have a very fun party. When Valeria and Luigi go to Peru they will see many of the contracts we have talked about.

Gabby Linearas is the mother of two children Valeria and Luigi. She currently lives in Bradenton, FL but moved from Lima, Peru.

Why I Came to the U.S.A.

I came to the U.S.A. because of the love of my husband, and I know I love him so much, too. I wanted to be with him. His family wanted to meet me and I wanted to meet his family. My husband told me about his home town and how beautiful it is in the fall.

The love of my husband is one of the reasons why I came to the U.S.A. He showed how much he loved me and how much he wanted to be with me. We love each other so much, and we decided to live together. However, because of his work he could not move to Thailand with me. The easier way that we could be together was for me to move to the U.S.A. and share our love every day.

I came to the U.S.A. to meet my husband's family. I was so happy to meet his family in person because when I was in Thailand we only communicated by email. His family is very kind to me, and they make me feel very welcomed and loved.

My husband's home state is Massachusetts. If you look on the globe, it would be the opposite side of the world from where I lived in Thailand. Massachusetts is so beautiful, especially in the fall. You can see all the leaves that are changing color. My husband showed me many different places in his home town, and I loved it.

The love of my husband, meeting his family and seeing his home towns are the reasons why I came to the U.S.A. I am so happy that now my husband and I are living together. I was so glad to meet his family, and I am looking forward to visiting them again as often as I can. Massachusetts is so beautiful. I cannot wait to go back again.

Chompunoot Kozach studied English as a Second Language at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

Growing Up in the Philippines

My childhood began in the Philippines. These are some of my favorite childhood memories. Our family had traditions we honored. My school experience was a very positive time in my life.

The day was March 2, 1981, when my parents let me see for the first time the wonderful world, and everybody was so excited to see me. I remember when I was young I played in the cemetery with my two brothers and all of our friends. We collected all of the candles and flowers in the whole cemetery. Then we changed all of the flowers on each of the graves. We melted the candles and made them into floor wax. Then we decided to sell the wax to our neighbors. When my mother found out about what we had done, she was angry at us, and she punished all of us.

It was a Filipino tradition for children to show our respect for the elders by taking their hand to our forehead. In return, we received a blessing. We used the words “Po” and “Opo” which meant “Yes” in a very polite manner. A young person usually said it to an elder. By saying “Ate” or “kuya” was a sign of respect to the older brother or sister; “ate” to the older sister, “kuya” to the older brother. It was a tradition to hold a family reunion to celebrate a birthday in the family and for Christmas or New Years. We believed that eating Pancit on birthdays would enable us to live longer. Once a year on November 1, we honored the dead by going to the cemeteries. Those who were not able to go might choose to light candles and pray to the souls of their dead relatives.

I was five years old the first time I went to school. The reason why I wanted to go to school was because I was so jealous of my brother for always having a lunch box. I thought my brother was just going to a picnic at the school. I had a good experience at my high school and I was the Prom Queen.

My life in the Philippines is a good memory. My family experiences and my school memories are good to remember.

Airien Papa is an ESOL student at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

How Life at Home is Different from Life in U.S.A.

The United States is a fast-paced country compared to my country, Jamaica. People earn more money for their labor too. The United States is a more developed country than my motherland. People who are living in the United States have more of a chance to own things if they willing to work very hard for them. The technology, the level of safety, and the government help is what makes United States a better country.

First, the technology is amazing. I have seen things that I have never seen before. It makes me realize how good communications are in this country. The fax machines and the Internet connections are some of the wonders of technology here. Also, the smart phone and satellite conferencing helps us to get work done faster. The equipment makes people more productive in a short time. That helps the country in every area of productivity.

Second, the level of security is high because you can depend on law enforcement. When people call for the police, they respond very quickly. So people love this country most of all because of safety. In addition, the system works very well, and people's rights are respected most of the time.

Besides that, the government cares about the citizens very much. When people lose their jobs and the money they have is not enough to take care of everything, people can get help from the government with things like medicine and food.

In summary, for me and the people that I have known who live in United States, everyone is very happy with all opportunity that this country offers. People from other countries want to come here to get a piece of the American Dream. The door is open to those who are on their best behavior.

Owen Smith is a GED Preparation student who is studying so that he might be able to create a better future for his family.

How Life In My Home Country Differs From Life In The U.S.

I'm 36 years old, and for 19 years I have lived in Bradenton, Florida, in the United States. I spent my childhood years in Mexico, which I remember well.

In Mexico, I remember being a little kid and having a lot of fun. I grew up on a farm that had trees, animals, rivers, and mountains all around. I walked to school every day. After classes, my father would be waiting for me to help him work the land. On it we planted corn, pinto beans, peppers, and tomatoes. We planted from one end of the land to the other using donkeys and horses. Before I even noticed, it would be time to go home, where my mother was waiting for us with a delicious dinner. I really miss some of those days because, as a kid, I never had to worry about paying any bills or having problems, and everywhere I went, I could go on foot.

One summer, when I was 17, I left Mexico to visit my brother in Bradenton, Florida. After a few weeks of being in Bradenton, I decided to stay in the city and take advantage of the economic opportunities. I started working at Wellcraft Marine, Inc., a boat manufacturing company.

Since moving here in 1992, my life has been really different from the idyllic days in Mexico. I'm an adult now, and have a lot of responsibilities. These days, I'm married to Maria, and we have three beautiful kids named Vanessa, Kelly, and Horacio Jr. I move myself around by car from one place to another. For the last nineteen years in the U.S., my life has been very busy.

Living in Mexico was good because I was around all my family and friends, and my life was with less stress, but life in the U.S. has given me more opportunities and financial freedom. However, my parents and some brothers are still in Mexico. Every time I have a long vacation, I travel with my wife and kids to my childhood home and enjoy long walks in the country.

Horacio Plata is a student in the GED Program at Manatee Technical Institute and is married with three children.

Moving to Adulthood in the U.S.A.

When I came to the USA I started to feel like a preschooler. There were new discoveries every day, different people to meet, unfamiliar responsibilities, a lot of changes and so much that was unclear around me. In addition, I had plenty of free time again after so many years of working as a computer science teacher.

Soon I changed my status from preschooler to student of ESOL school. The lesson of English literature I would never forget was about love poems. “How do I love thee?” asked Elizabeth Browning. “Let me count the ways...” she answered to herself. A different opinion by W.B. Yeats was “Never give all the Heart.” I learned both poems by heart and I repeated them to myself many times. Love from my kids, my husband and my family in Ukraine helped me to overcome the difficulties of studying. These poems motivated me to know and learn more about English literature. For practically the first time in my life, I was able to read and understand English poems in English. It was amazing.

I felt like a teen reading the book by Harper Lee “To Kill a Mockingbird.” I was attracted to the story of a six year girl Scout and I had fallen in love with her father, Atticus. I was thrilled by the story of Boo Radley and I was very sorry about the unfortunate Tom Robinson, a victim of racial discrimination.

The next step was hard for me. To improve my English, I joined the book club in our school and my first book there was “The Last Lecture” by Randy Pausch. Having the experience of taking care of a cancer patient and saying goodbye to a person close to me, I thought I was ready to read the book about a fourth-stage cancer patient who decided to say goodbye to his kids in a very special way by writing the book. And I was almost calm until I read the words of his wife during his final lecture: “Don’t die.” And then I cried. Not only because of this father of three who had been a successful 37 year old professor, but because of my father, whom I missed so much, and my friend, who died from a heart attack at 33, because of all the people who died before their time. I was again an adult.

There were also a few books which continued to help me delve into the world of English literature in English. “Memories of Geisha” by Arthur Golden was about looking and struggling for

love. Other books such as Khaled Hosseini's "The Kite Runner" and "A Thousand Splendid Suns" and Tracy Kidder's "Strength in What Remains" guided me along my journey. These books made me realize how lucky I was to be with my family in the USA and to be safe, happy, studying the foreign language. Again, I realized what is valuable in my life and how miserable and unimportant were the things which were not currently available. Before coming to the USA, I could not have imagined myself writing an essay in English.

Tetiana Voitseshko is from the Ukraine. She moved to the US with her family on February 14, 2010. In the Ukraine, Tetiana worked as a computer science teacher for ten years.

How Life In My Home Country Differs From Life In The U.S.

I see there is the possibility to go to school in the U.S.A. And in my country, Haiti, many people don't have the possibility to go school. For the moment, the earthquake caused many difficulties in the education system. I would like to change the situation in my country.

The United States develops all levels necessary for a positive society; education, economic, social and cultural. In my country, the police do not give security to the people because of under development.

Many people in my country have the will to work, but there is no opportunity to work. The senior levels of government do not provide jobs for the people.

These are some reasons there is a big difference in life between Haiti and the United States.

Peterson Noe is an ESOL student in the Adult and Career Education program in Key West Florida. His teacher is Natalia Duke.

My Country Sicily

My country is Sicily, a small island surrounded by the Mediterranean Sea. It is an old place rich in history, food and beautiful nature.

A long time ago Sicily was not part of Italy. It was an island which everyone wanted to occupy because it is situated in a good

position. The first settlers who landed in Sicily were the Phoenicians. Later the land was occupied by the Greeks, Romans and Arabs. They made a good contribution to improve the condition of the island. They started building amazing castles, churches and big houses. Today these buildings have become our monuments. When Sicily started growing, especially commercially, it was disrupted by many countries; each of them brought a new culture, language and art. For the inhabitants of the island, it was not easy to adapt to the many changes. In 1851, after many battles, the man called Garibaldi put the region together, and today it is called Italy.

Sicily is famous for having a wide and rich cuisine. Each of the provinces cooks very differently because of the numerous invasions. We are also good producers of oranges and vegetables, provided by good temperatures.

Sicily has beautiful nature. The characteristic of this land which distinguishes it from other countries is that we have beaches and mountains. The inhabitants can choose to spend the time at the beach or go to the mountains. We have different colors of sand: red, yellow, black, dark brown. The ocean is warm, most of the time. We enjoy swimming without being afraid of dangerous marine creatures like sharks. Sicily has a beautiful view of flora and fauna. We have a lot of activities like riding horses, camping and much more.

Sicily is the perfect place to live!

Rosa Scilio-Boylund studied English as a second language at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

My Dream of Living in America

I had a dream about immigrating from Japan to America. My dream came true because my daughter lives in America. When I go somewhere or do something, my daughter helps me, but it is no good. I want to live my own life. I want to be independent. The need for speaking

English is important for one's daily life. I got my driver's license first, but I met difficulties with the language. I needed an interpreter for the test. I asked the library about volunteer teachers of English, and then I met Mrs. Ann Kanuck.. I couldn't do any speaking or

listening at first, so we had our communication with dictionaries. Mrs. Ann caught what was on my mind and what I wanted to do. Soon I fulfilled one goal after another.

For example, I cook for my family, so I need to shop for groceries. I needed to know names of things for shopping. Mrs. Ann taught me areas of where things are and each one's name. I remembered these words, and that was good. I also learned to go to the restaurants and order anything I wanted to eat.

I went to the Botanical Gardens in Sarasota with Mrs. Ann. We saw many flowers, so I went to Home Depot and bought flowers for my garden. And I had no haircut for almost one year, but I practiced salon talk, and I got a haircut. My clothing size is small. Now I can go to clothes stores with petite size areas.

I needed to know the names and words for all this shopping. I learned and remembered the words, and that was good. Shopping was scary for me at first. Mrs. Ann and I talked about going to different shopping places, and I practiced what to say. Shopping does not scare me now.

I am happy too that I can speak and communicate with my son-in-law. At first when my family was speaking English, I could not understand, and I felt alone. Now when they talk, I listen, and I understand. And I am happy.

My granddaughters, Nadia and Karina, see me study hard and do homework and get good grades (A+), and I am a good example for them because they go to school too. I have also learned to read English books to my little granddaughter.

My learning English opened the door to America for me and opened the door to my future. I understand much more about this wide country now, and I am happy to study and learn more. I want to open the door even more.

Fusayo Kado is a 67 year old woman who is a native of Japan. She has two daughters and four grandchildren, with one daughter in Japan and one daughter in Palm Harbor, Florida.

How Life at Home Differs from Life in the U.S.

Life is all about changes and opportunities and it's always a moment of self-examination when I speak about certain changes in my life. I am Francine, a Black, African American who is originally from the island of Jamaica. Jamaica is a small island consisting of fourteen Parishes, many spectacular tourist attractions and beautiful natural environments. Life in Jamaica is different from the life in America because of the economic system, the educational opportunities, and the infrastructure.

Jamaica can be seen as a very tiny dot on the world map. It is almost impossible to compare the life in America from the life in Jamaica. The American Government is well balanced and has the capability to manage and maintain their country, especially within the economic area. The Jamaican economic system does not have the firm government support needed to allow our country to stand on its own. Therefore, the country's economic system can fall into a recession.

The 'American Dream' is to allow every child in the country to obtain a good education. It is a close relationship between a good education and opportunity in the U.S. It all goes back to the economic system within the country. When there is not a strong foundation built under the economic system in a country, the opportunities, especially for jobs and a good education will be less. With the American government, there is a strong foundation built in providing good education, for every child up to college level. The Jamaican government depends solely upon the individual families to provide an education for their children. This leads to a very low percentage of educated citizens within the country. Also, the country develops 'brain-drain', whereas, the technically skilled students whose families cannot further their education, migrate to other countries, to become educated and give their service to that country.

Money makes the world go around is a true proverb. Without money, we cannot provide for ourselves and others. The government in the U.S. invests in giving back to the country. For example; they built I-95 and other highways that provide everyone with easier and faster routes to their destinations. It eliminates a waste of time from our businesses and other personal pleasures. On the island of Jamaica, the roads are filled with pot holes and it takes a lot of time

to get to a destinations. It is fair to say that the infrastructure in the U.S. is better than that of Jamaica.

The economic system, educational system and the infrastructure are three main structures that affect our lives. After having the experience living in both countries, I have seen a big difference between the two. It only leads me to say that the life in the U.S. is better than life in Jamaica.

Francine Strachan is a young, smart, and dedicated student. She attends the GED Program at the English Center, South Florida Workforce.

My Life in Haiti

I was born in Haiti. It's a very beautiful island and has a lot of mountains. Tourists love its nice climate which isn't too cold or too hot. That's why on December the Toussaint Louverture airport is usually full with people from everywhere, especially all people who come from areas with very low temperatures.

Haitian people are very kind people. The neighbors live like family. You can see that around their manner they call each other: Cousin, brother, uncle or aunt in case the person is older. They usually eat together.

However, this commune life did not prevent Haiti from becoming the country which experienced the worst political disruption. This situation has an important impact on all social structure of the land, for example: on the education and economic system.

It is the young people who suffer those problems, because they represent about 95% of the population, so my life can testify to their reality.

I remember when I finished my high school in Haiti, it was difficult for me to go to College because the country did not offer any possibility to do that.

However, I did my best to become a lawyer and an educator. After ending my university career the biggest problem was to find a job. I was stressed out every day because I needed to take care of myself.

Now everything appears to be better because I have the possibility to be in the USA, a country which gives almost all

opportunity to be whomever you want. I know finding a job continues to be difficult for me because of the economic recession. But I believe in God and I think that after a few years I will accomplish my dream. Even though I have not begun my university time yet, I will be a famous cardiologist.

So, even with the bad experience in Haiti, it always lives in my little heart. I'm sure all my dreams will come true. Therefore, I wish that God will bless both Haiti and the United States.

Adly Cadet is a student in the ESOL program at Cape Coral High School in Lee County.

Why I Came To America

Sometimes, your life can change in most unexpected ways. My life changed when I came to the U.S. as a tourist. By that time I had already graduated from law school, and I was working as a lawyer in an office. I was unsatisfied with my job and I decided to quit. I was very upset, so my mother gave me a ticket to visit my aunt who lives in Florida.

My aunt is a teacher in a public school. She also works in an after care, so she works long hours and does not have time to go out. One day, we were talking about her busy life when she said that it would be better if she introduced me to a friend who works with her who had time to take me sightseeing.

We met each other at my aunt's house, and we went out to Las Olas Blvd. with my cousin. After that, we started to go out frequently but just as good friends. Then what was a good friendship became a relationship. We fell in love. Thus, we started thinking about our future together and we made plans. However, it was not easy because my life was in Brazil and his life was here.

After a while, I went back to Brazil, but my mind and heart were in the U.S. While I was in Brazil I spoke with my parents about what had happened and my decision to go back to the U.S. They were surprised, but they understood. During that period, I had a difficult time being far away from him, but at least we talked on the phone every day.

Finally, after four months, I came back to the U.S. and four months later we got married. Sometimes, your life can change in the

most unexpected ways, and sometimes it is the best change of all.

Carolina Garcia is an advanced student at Piper Community School. She plans to continue her education and she is happily married!

My Country

I would like to introduce you to the near past of my native country. This is a story of a country's foundation and the collapse of its political ideal. Also, this paper explains the causes of identity problems and the exile of its native people.

I was born into a Croatian family in 1963, in Travnik, a city of Yugoslavia, a country that does not exist anymore. Geographically, it was located in Southeast Europe. It was surrounded with Italy on the west side, Austria and Hungary on the north side; on the east side was Romania and Bulgaria; Greece and Albania were on the south.

The foundation of Yugoslavia was after WWII. It was named "Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia". The capital was Belgrade (today the capital of Serbia). Yugoslavia was a communist country at this time. However, Yugoslavia was already the most open of East European communist nations. It was constituted with six small republics: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Slovenia. Two autonomous provinces were in Serbia: Vojvodina in the North and Kosovo next to Albania.

There was a violent disintegration of Yugoslavia after the death in 1980 of President Josip Broz (Tito) who had ruled the country as a dictator. In 1991, the independence of Slovenia and Croatia came about. In 1992, Bosnia-Herzegovina and Macedonia caused the end of the country. Serbia and Montenegro were the last two republics in the Socialist Yugoslavia. Also, these two republics formed together a new "Federal Republic of Yugoslavia". On February 3, 2003, The Federal Republic of Yugoslavia became the "State Union of Serbia and Montenegro". In mid-2006, the state union ended when Montenegro decided to be independent. Now, Yugoslavia has been split up and made into these countries that we know today: Bosnia-Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Slovenia and Kosovo.

Regarding the map today, I can say that I am a Bosnian, but

literally I cannot. At the time, it was not a country; it was a state, a republic of Yugoslavia. Also, because my ethnicity is Croatian, my family is Catholic, and because we had been going to churches, we were not very welcomed in this communist country. At an early age, I moved with my family to the western countries of Europe where the people had similar democratic ideas and opinions. That is why I am a different nationality than Yugoslavians, and I cannot remember that I was once a Yugoslavian.

Regarding the history of Yugoslavia, we can conclude that the only Yugoslavian was Tito himself. All others kept their original ethnic titles. Anyway, nobody can choose his parents; people have to choose to become what they want to be.

Ivica Kresovljak is an ESOL/ABE student at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

Why I Came to the USA

My name is Yolanda and I am from Guatemala. This is the history of Guatemala when I lived in Guatemala. My life was difficult and very, very sad because we had no food. It was very hard to find food. Sometimes, my mother had no food to give me. My father lived in the United States, but he does not think about his family. He thinks only in himself and he is selfish with his money. He never called my mother to ask about his children and sometimes he called only one time a month. That's why I came to the United States of America. In my country it is very different; the children suffer. When I was little, I wanted to study but it is very hard to do something because you need a lot of money.

When I came to the United States of America it was very difficult to pass from Guatemala to the United States. I walked three times for many nights and days with my friend and strange people.

Now, I am not sure that I will go to Guatemala again. I love my country so much, but the situation is sad. Now, I have a husband and two beautiful daughters. Their names are Zulmy and Melissa Garcia. Now, I believe in God because he is the only one that knows that future. Let God Bless everyone that reads this story. Thank you.

Yolanda Lucas is a student at Immokalee Technical Center in Immokalee, Florida. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee. She has been studying English for two years with her daughters. She wants to study more English.

Why I Came to the United States

I came to the U.S. because the U.S. has jobs. I came to take care of my family and my friends too. The U.S. has good teachers and good students. I love the U.S. because I'm going to make everything ok for my family in Haiti. In my country some people have jobs but many people do not. Some people in my family have a job, a car and a business. Some don't have anything. Some get clothes, some do not. Some people always go to the supermarket and go shopping and some people can never do that. I am sad when I think about that. That is my experience in Haiti and that is why I came to the United States.

Rose Clement is an ESOL student in the Adult and Career Education program in Key West, FL.

How Life In My Home Country Differs From Life In U.S.

It is like a dream come true to live in United States. At first, I have a view that life is easier in United States than in my country, Brazil. But now I realize that it is not so. The reason is that living here creates a gap between my family and me. This leads to longing and loneliness without them. On the other hand, there are many good things when we live in another country, especially in the United States. I can improve my English, meet new people and travel around the states to learn the different cultures.

Comparatively, in Brazil I need to study so much in order to get a good job even though it does not pay well. However, it is a wonderful country to live. Brazil has many beautiful places and the environment is perfect. Nature is very much alive there. You will enjoy seeing the greenery of the trees and colorful flowers. In addition, the people are friendly and you can eat the best food in the world. Mmmm...it is scrumptious. The food is more natural and cheaper than those in United States. The Brazilian cooks a variety of food and has myriads of culture because the country was colonized by the Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, and Italian. If you ever want to visit Brazil, you must plan to stay longer so that you can visit the fantastic places and it will marvel you about the nature.

Lais Machado is a student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

How Life at Home Differs from Life in the U.S.A

Life in Mexico differs from the life in the United States of America in culture and technology. Mexico's cultural differences allow it to stand alone as a country known for fun, technology and everyday life. Mexico differs from the U.S.A, for example, in their food and diversified technological advances. An example of the latter is a train which can go to every part of Mexico City. In the U.S.A., which has fifty states, the culture is diversified. Here in the U.S.A. you can meet many people from different countries and different cultures. As for cultural differences, Mexico is unique in its past, present and future.

Patricia Eslava is a hard-working and dedicated online student at TLC Online at the English Center.

How Life In My Home Country Is Different From Life In The United States

In Haiti there are no jobs because the government does nothing for many of its people. We do not have power, factories, or good education. Students go to school but teachers are not there because they do not get paid. In Haiti, I drove a car. I used my car to pick up people every week because there were no jobs. I worked every day with my car.

Life in the United States is different because there are many places with many jobs. People work every day and every night. I go to work and I go to school to learn English, and sometimes I even go to the movies. I like the United States. It's a good country and I have a good secure life here.

Erode Fils-Arime is an ESOL student in Adult and Career Education in Key West, FL.

Why I Came to the U.S.

I came to the U.S. because I was not able to reach my financial and personal goal. Even though I was not dying of hunger nor was I penniless, my country did not fulfill the satisfaction in my life. I have goals and ambitions in my life. When I was little nobody cared about me. So, I came to the U.S. because I needed a change in my life. My life is very important to me. I have three kids. I have my house in my country, but I rent an apartment in the U.S. My

country is very different from America. If I don't support my government, I can't get a better job. In my country, I didn't have a good job, but I had a boat. Now in America, I earn more a month but I don't have a boat. However, I am able to send some money to my family and my children. Unlike my country, I am getting more education here and I hope to go to college and have a better future. In the U.S. help is everywhere, but in Haiti, it is not easy to get help.

Lecene Odney is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Why I Came to the United States

I left Haiti to save my children's lives. After the earthquake my children had terrible problems there. I left my job and separated from my family and friends for the safety of my children.

I don't know when I will have a social security card or be able to get a job but I need one soon because I have two children.

In Haiti, I was attacked and beaten at home. One of the men had a pistol, he fired it to kill me but the gun exploded in his hands. The explosion hurt the man and he ran out.

I was afraid to stay home I remained in hiding until I could leave my country. I came to the U.S.A for the safety of my children. I can protect them here and give them a better life.

Johanne Murat is a beginner ESOL student in Key West, Florida.

Why I Came to the USA

Hello my name is Magdalena Francisco. I came to United States 21 years ago and I left my family and friends in Guatemala.

When I left my country I was scared because I did not know anyone. I was excited. I'm learning how to read and speak English. I think it is good that I'm learning to write, read and speak English so I can understand my children and help them when they need it.

I came to United States because I was scared of the soldiers because they killed and burned down the houses of people. I came with my husband, mother and father. It took 3 days and 3 nights and finally we came to United States. We have six children. My first daughter is in college and she has a better life. I like USA so much.

Magdalena Francisco is a student at Immokalee Technical Center in Immokalee, Florida. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee. She is thankful for her nice teacher who helps her to learn to read and write. She has six children.

My Life in United States

When I first came to the U.S., I felt like I came to a new world. Also, I thought this new world is such a fine place, but I was wrong. I found out that here in the U.S. the language is very different from Chinese, the food does not agree with me, and it makes my life very difficult. After six months I got used to the life here, but my communication is not very good. I know that I need to learn English. I am sure that when I grasp the skills to speak English, it will allow me to have a more comfortable life here.

On the other hand, there are some things I like about living in the U.S. The air is good, especially in Key West. The people are very nice and the place is very beautiful. So, I must change myself to adapt to the lifestyle here. Now, I like the U.S. very much.

Jian Song Zhang is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

How Life In My Home Country Differs From Life In The U.S.

My name is Panida Finn. I am from Thailand. I came to Key west in November 2006. I am so happy to live here, but a lot things are different: people, food, language, and money. When I was in Thailand, I could buy food easily. Whatever I wanted to eat I could get them very cheap; but in America I have to cook at home. It is very expensive to eat at the restaurants. I would to go to the temple every week when I was in Thailand but in Key West there is no Buddhist temple. After a while, I got used to living here. Now, I am married. I have a son who is 2 years old.

I enjoy living in Key West and meeting all the different people who live or visit here. Most people are very nice. Although things are different, we are all basically the same.

Panida Finn is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center in Monroe County.

My Country - the Philippines

Let me introduce you to the country from which I came. I am proud to say I am from the Philippines. This is my native country. The Philippines are made of many islands, some beautiful places and also the industry of wood carving on furniture.

My country is made of many islands. If you check the world map, you will see. Better yet, if you go there, just ride a small airplane. You will be so amazed at how many islands we have. Many of these islands are far away. To get there you have to ride a ferry boat. Some islands are closer, so you can just ride a small boat that has a small motor engine.

In my country, we have some beautiful places to visit. We have beaches where many visitors go. We have a place called Baquio in the mountains. Many rich people live there. We also have a place called Hundred Islands. They named this place Hundred Islands because it is made of a hundred little islands. This is also a great place to visit for those people who like to wander around or to explore.

My country is also big in making hand wood carving on furniture. Some of the wood carvings they make are entertainment centers, curio and china cabinets, dining tables and different kinds of statues like animals. These wood carvings are beautiful; they are like a work of art. I said this because I happened to have some of these kinds of furniture in my home.

The Philippines is my native country. It is where I was born, grew up and then got married. My country is made of many islands. We have beautiful places that everyone can visit, and also we are big in hand made wood carvings. These are some of the things that make my country special.

Marlene Viherek is an ESOL/ABE student at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

How Life in my Home Country Differs from the Life in the USA

There are many differences in the life in my home country and life in the United States. To me, the three most important differences are in the weather, the lifestyle, and the food.

I came from Bucaramanga, Colombia. Most of the time, the climate is warm and sunny. Sometimes, it rains. But the weather is the same all year long. Colombians do not need different clothes for different seasons because the change in season does not exist.

Another difference is the lifestyle of Colombians. The places you go to are never far away. Usually if you need to go someplace, you just walk. You spend a lot of time visiting family. The people love to dance and party especially with their families. Life in Colombia is not fast-paced like it is in America. A typical habit of most Colombians is to take a nap after lunch.

Colombian food is the best! The people love to cook and spend a lot of time in their kitchens. The meat and vegetables are always fresh. They are not bought in the store like it is here.

Lucia Scragg is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult Learning Center.

My Life in the Philippines from 1958

My childhood began in Dagupan, Philippines, and I am going to talk about some of my favorite memories. I will talk about our traditions, my school experience and some awards I received.

One of my favorite traditions was going to church. My sister and I would go every Sunday. We would also have big birthday celebrations with lots of people and food. Finally, we would also celebrate the New Year with fireworks and party horns. Another thing I enjoyed was school.

In school I liked my science and history teachers. I liked their classes because they made learning fun and not boring. I also had a lot of friends in school. We would eat together and play volleyball during recess. Overall, I enjoyed school because it gave me many happy memories and taught me good values. One of the other things I liked about school was dance.

In school I joined the dance team. We had several contests that

we competed in. My high school group won the school contest twice, and was also a first runner up. I enjoyed the dance team a lot.

In conclusion, I have a lot of good memories from the Philippines. I enjoyed going to church with my sister. I liked science and history classes and the way the teachers made the class fun. I also enjoyed the dance competition. My team always did well, and we had fun. These are some of my favorite memories of the Philippines.

Andra Peterson is studying ESOL at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

How Education in My Country, India, Is Different from Education in the U.S.

My country is India. The United States and Indian educational systems are different. Here, in the United States, pre-kindergarten to 12th grade there is no school fee. In India, pre-kindergarten to 12th grade, parents pay the fee.

Here, in the U.S., pre-kindergarten to 12th grade, a school bus picks up and drops off students. In India, there is no school bus service. In India, pre-kindergarten to 2nd grade, the parents pickup and drop off. From 3rd to 7th grade, students go to school on bicycle. 8th to 12th grade students go on a scooter.

In India, when you are in 12th grade, you decide to take science, commerce or arts degree. After 12th grade, there are 3 years in college. Then after college you study 2 years for master degree. Indian school is very expensive.

In India, 2nd grade to 12th grade class size is 40 to 50 students in each class. There are 7 subjects taught in each class every day. There is a different teacher for each subject, so 7 teachers go from one class to other class with students staying in the same room. . 30 minutes are spent on one subject.

Every day in India students carry 1 subject's book and notebook for each class from school to home in a school bag. In the U.S., each student has a locker. Each kid keeps his book in his locker.

Anonymous meets with her tutor at the Homosassa Public Library as part of the Citrus County Library System's Adult Literacy Education Program. She is from India and is lovingly devoted to her family.

How Life at Home Differs from Life in the U.S.

Life at home is different from life in the U.S. At home, the cost of living is so much more expensive. It takes so much money just to buy the basics. You have to pay for everything; there is nothing for free. The main things that you need are food, health care, education, housing, and security.

Food is the stuff of life and most of the time you cannot buy it. There is no discount on food. Burgers, pizza and other fast foods are a luxury for many people. Some people eat them only on Friday, when they get paid, at month's end or on special occasions. We do a lot of cooking at home in order to make ends meet. People who live in the country do a lot of farming. Our soil is very fertile.

Health care is not a priority, even when you call for emergency rescue, they won't be there before you die. The health system is a mess. If you go to a clinic to see a doctor you can get help, but after that, you can't find the money to buy the medicines he prescribed. It is also hard to get surgery. Most of the time, you are so far down on the list that you will not make it if you are suffering. We need a better health care system that caters to people who are poor.

The housing is very expensive and most people who cannot rent or buy squat on other people's land. Some people who live in the country don't have to worry about a place to live. We who live in the city are the ones that are at a disadvantage. Some people live on the street if they can't afford housing. It is very hard to get places to rent at a good price.

Security is not a priority even when there is an emergency. Citizens have no trust in the police force. People in most garrison communities are afraid to call the police because of the Dons in the area. The police are sometimes associated with the Dons.

Life at home is beautiful sometimes; we need money to enjoy it. Our beaches are great and our food is delicious. The mountains are wonderful. The air is fresh and pure. We need to come together as one people and unite to build a better country. There are always hardships but the sun still shines and grass is green.

Marva Wright is a very dedicated GED student with TLC Online.

Why I Came To The United States

People migrate for various reasons. I am from a little country called Jamaica, where the people are friendly, the climate is great and the land is very fruitful. You may ask why I came to the U.S. in spite all of the good things I just mentioned about Jamaica. Sometimes good things go unnoticed when you are lacking the greatest things in life. My children deserve a better life. Sometimes families have to make sacrifices to make their lives better. No matter how hard things get you can never give up.

I am a thirty two year old mother of two. I have a son and a daughter. My Son Franchino is thirteen years old and my daughter Danielle is eleven years old. These two wonderful children mean the world to me and I needed to give them the life that I never had. While in Jamaica, I worked a regular nine-to-five job but my salary was less than my expenses. I cried ever so often and have sleepless nights just thinking about the quality life I'm not able to give my children.

I was happy to be given a chance to live and work in the US. I thought about it long and hard because I knew I would have to leave my children behind in Jamaica. This was the hardest thing I had ever done in my life. I realized it was a sacrifice I had to make. My only contact with my children was the cell phone for three long years and that was devastating. At least I got to hear their voices and that kept me going. Even today, the most painful thing of all is the fact that I had to deal with the memories of the last moments I spent with them.

Many times I felt like giving up and returning home, but when I reflect on the reason for me being here, I realize I had to eliminate that thought from my mind. It was very difficult being away from them. I was alone in a strange place, with no family or friends. I conditioned my mind and kept encouraging myself to press forward. If I had the chance to do it again, I honestly think it would have the same effect and be just as hard.

Being here, I realized it is not all a "Bed of Roses". Nor is it smooth sailing everyday like I thought it would be! Based on what I was told, I kept my goals in mind and focused. Though it was not easy, through perseverance and determination, I am now able to be

with my children and give them a life I never thought I could. Sometimes, circumstances hinder people from having a comfortable life and they have to seek opportunities elsewhere. That is the reason I came to the United States and I'll never regret it!

Tiesha Thorpe is a proud mother of two children: Franchino and Danielle. She is a student of the Cypress Lake High School Adult Education program in Florida. Her teacher is Mr. Jim Guffey.

An Immigrant Experience

Moving to America was and challenging at the same time. I am from Ecuador, a very small country in South America with a different culture, food, language and lifestyle. I moved to the United States five years ago. When I arrived in the States, I was impressed at its neighborhoods with open front yards and marvelous landscapes. I enjoyed going for walks every day, which was totally different from my country where the houses are enclosed with high walls.

It has been a really exciting experience immersing myself in a new culture, learning the language, meeting people from all over the world and enjoying the delicious American food. American people are very open-minded, friendly, patient and always eager to help. It's something that I admired and feel very grateful to the literacy volunteers and teachers of English Café that helped me achieve my goals of becoming an American citizen and improving my English skills.

The most challenging thing about learning a new language was listening and learning the correct pronunciation, which is still a big challenge for me. In a group, I couldn't understand a lot of conversation. I always had to rely on my husband for an explanation or translation. But with a lot of effort and listening to the news every day, I have improved my listening skills and I am working on my other difficulties. From my experience, I have learned that each person faces different kind of challenges and I think the key to success is to be patient, keep trying and never give up.

Irma Villamarin Box is an ESOL student at the English Café at the Cape Coral Library.

My Home Country

My home country is South Korea. Korea is located in North Asia, between Japan and China. Korea is also known as the “Land of the Morning Calm”. Koreans are a smart people. My country has become an industrialized country.

In my home country, people are very diligent and smart. Asia has some of the world’s top mathematical schools. Also, Asians go to school every day for up to twelve hours.

My home country is small, but has 50 million people. Its economy is #14 in the world; its beginning was in farming. Because of a high level of savings, high protective tariffs, and investment in technical education, Korea has become industrialized. My country exports 70 percent of its production.

My small home country Korea takes pride in the education of its people. It has become an important exporting country in the world. Now this small country is big in the world!

Mi Kyoung Sheehan is studying English at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida in the Santa Rosa Adult Learning Center.

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

My name is Rosemitha Joseph. I am from Haiti. I have been here for 1 year. When I was in Haiti, I was very sad. I did not have a job. I could not drive a car. I could not pay the bills. I did not speak English. Now I am United States, my life has changed. I have money because I have a job. I can speak some English. I am happy. I hope to keep my job so that I can help my family. America has changed my life.

Rosemitha Joseph is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Someone or Something I Admire

The World's Greatest Mom

Everyone has one thing, person, or place that they are thankful for. I am thankful for my mom. I'm thankful for my mom because she is all that I have, she understands me, and she is a very loving person.

The first reason that I am thankful for my mom is because she is all I have. Growing up, things were difficult, but we managed to make it because we had each other. I have always considered my mom as my grandma, grandpa, daddy, and all of my other relatives that were never around.

My second reason that I am thankful for my mom is because she understands me. My mom and I talk about everything. All of the things we talk about are to enable me to be prepared for the world. I love that I am able to talk to her without being judged.

The final reason I am thankful for my mom is for the simple fact that she is very loving. My mom has a heart of gold. She always goes out of her way to help me and others without question. She is an angel in disguise.

That is why I am most thankful for my mom. She is all I have; she understands; and she is very loving. My mom is an awesome and outgoing lady with a lot of energy. She is also very respectful towards other people. I consider her to be my best friend.

Ashley Turpin is currently attending ACE for her GED. She moved to Lakeland, FL on February 23, 2011, and will finish school there. She plans on attending Everest University for Crime Scene Investigating.

The One I Admire

The person I admire most is my wife. When I first met this young lady, my heart suddenly started to pound. I felt that she was a part of me. Wisely, I approached to inquire about her. She answered me in such a way I could not sleep the following night, thinking how I could convince her to be my bride. After a long talk, I finally convinced her to marry me.

From our union, we have three kids. Because of our desire to accomplish the best for our family, I was obliged to leave the house for days or months. In my absence, my wife stepped up to assume my duties. She never complained, but with courage she usually said, "To succeed in life one needs to suffer privation and sacrifices with ease." Her Christian faith is very strong in the midst of tough times. She is very wise in counseling me when I have to make important decisions. Since our marriage constitutes a sacred circle around the family, she cares a lot about our privacy. The well-being of the family is her preoccupation. The experiences that I have with my wife make me believe stronger and stronger that this beautiful being was created for me. I love her a lot! I am indebted to my wife for the rest of my life.

Jean Esaie Herrisemen is a GED student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Admire My Family

I admire my family. I am married to Mr. Edward Amey, and I have three kids with him -- one son and two daughters -- and we all live together. We live in North Miami in a house with four bedrooms and a fence around it.

My husband, Edward Kwawu Amey, is born in Ghana, West Africa. He is 52 years old. He's black in complexion, and he is tall. He works at CSI Care Registration at Flamingo. He is hard working, and he likes his job. He is a Christian person and loves his church and family.

My son is Joshua Kwawu; he is the oldest, and he is 20 years old. He is a student at Miami-Dade College. He takes his studies very seriously, and he's very good in math. He loves everyone who comes his way. In addition, he is humble and helps a lot in the

media department at church.

My eldest daughter is Edna Kwawu. She is 17 years old, and a student at North Miami Senior High; she's in eleventh grade. She is in the International Business program and a very good girl -- obedient to everyone. She is doing well in her studies. Edna loves the word of God and helps in the Children's Department at the Sunday school class in church.

Mary Kwawu, my youngest daughter, is 14 years old. She is a student in North Miami Senior High in ninth grade. She is very talented in the Arts and her favorite color is pink. She is nice to everyone and kind to her family and friends. She is in the youth choir in church.

This why I admire my family so much. Without them I don't know what I would do. Although it's been two years now without a job, with God's help, they are praying for me, taking good care of me, loving me and making me happy. Having them in my life keeps me strong and alive!

Grace Amey speaks Twi and English. She attends the GED class in North Miami to complete her high school diploma and find a better job.

Who I am Thankful For

I am thankful for my kids and the Even Start Program. I am now 36 years old, and I never thought I would be going back to school. I have two girls, ages 3 and 11. They are my pride and joy.

What got me started at the Even Start Program was my mom, dad, and my oldest daughter. I was always sad because I wasn't able to help my daughter with her homework. It really got bad when my daughter would say, "Mom, I can't believe you can't spell that, and I can't believe you don't know how to read." That was hurtful. My Mom told me to try to get my GED. I called and set up time to walk with the Even Start staff. They were all nice and kind. In August of 2010, I started school and I am still here, trying my hardest to get my GED. I am thankful for Mrs. Seijas, Mrs. Quinn, Miss Connie, Miss Linda and Mrs. Stokes. They have nice and kind words to say and they give you a lot of confidence. They are great with my daughter, Allison. She loves coming here, and she has also learned a lot.

As for my other daughter, Carly, I am so proud of her. She is a type one diabetic. She goes through a lot. I figure if my daughter Carly can handle that, then I should be able to handle going back to school.

My three biggest accomplishments would be my girls and my diploma. I am thankful for my mom, dad and my two girls: Carley and Alison.

I love you all. Thank you all at Even Start.

Tara Hebert, age 36, lives in Homosassa with her two girls, Carly and Allison.

Someone I Admire

The person I love and admire in my life is my wife. We have been living together for nearly twenty years. I admire her for being a strong and smart woman who sticks with her goals. Besides being the loving mother of my two children, she always has been devoted to us even during the time I suffered awfully with cancer.

After we moved to Miami, she wanted to go back to school to take some sort of courses. Initially, she studied early childcare education. At the same time, she became interested in getting into the medical field. Right away, she enrolled and is currently studying for her Certified Nursing Assistant diploma. Soon after, her plan is to go further and enter a course on surgical technologies. Next, she plans to add another notch on her belt by continuing her career studying to be a Registered Nurse to assist in surgical procedures.

All of the above are the reasons why I admire my wife. Besides being the mother of my kids and being there for us in good and bad times, she has achieved so much just to reach her career goals. In fact, she is my inspiration to achieve my goals too. I would like to get my GED diploma in a little while and, in a similar way, continuing my education by enrolling in a vocational program or in the medical field.

Praxedes Lozada is a GED student with TLC Online/Homestead One Stop Center.

Someone I Admire

I wanted to share with you a little history about someone I admire, my mother. Elsa Josefina is the second of fourteen siblings. She was born into poverty in Lagunillas, Venezuela. At the age of sixteen, she got a degree in education with the help of an uncle who wanted her to succeed. Due to the low education and economic levels of her parents, my mom took over as head of the household from the age of seventeen. She took care of her brothers and sisters and her parents and provided each one of them with an education, a home, food, clothes, and above all, she gave her love.

Over the years, on her teacher's salary, she was able to acquire loans for some of her siblings to study abroad. One sister studied English in Trinidad and became a secretary. One of her brothers studied in Spain and became a mechanical technician. Two others studied in Iowa where they received an American education and became mechanical engineers. Despite all of this work, it never caused her to fail to enjoy her youth. She loved to go dancing with friends and spend pleasant moments with family. In addition, she enjoyed knitting, embroidery, and cooking. She was also part of a baseball team in Lagunillas.

She always had an outstanding character and was a fighter and entrepreneur. She always worked hard to insure her family was doing well. Even after she was married, she continued to look after each of them. She had a few very happy years with my father. When I was seven years old, for inexplicable reasons, he went and left us alone. Although she sacrificed a lot by raising me alone, she was a wonderful mother. She taught me that the most important things are the people in your life, not the things you have. Above all, she taught me to love myself, always fight for my dreams, and to never stop studying. Most importantly, she taught me to be independent.

Currently, she is happily enjoying her retirement. After teaching thirty- three years of her life, to thousands of children, and among them, myself included, who when they see her on the street proudly say , "There goes my teacher, Elsa".

Mom, thanks to you, I am the woman you see here today: a strong, professional, woman who will stand up for what she believes in. You gave me a fighting spirit, a determination to never give up,

that I will always have because you instilled it in me. I love you and I thank you for everything you have taught me.

Heralie Guaramata is a student at the Parent Power Family Literacy Academy at Freedom Shores Elementary School in Boynton Beach, FL. She is the proud mother of two beautiful children.

Someone I Admire

To start things off, my mom is the one that I admire the most. Why, you might ask? Well, let me tell you. She is the one that brought me in to this world. I admire her so much because she will always have my back, and she has also been the mom and dad. She is someone I can really open up to, and the one that loves me the most out of everyone.

Again, she will always have my back, no matter what I say or do. I think she has done a great job on the way she has raised me. She has given me many opportunities to learn right from wrong. She also does not like me fighting.

Equally important, my mom has always been the one to take care of my sister and me. Ever since my sister was 10 years old and I was 12 years old, my mom has been the mom and the dad. My dad got hooked on drugs and walked out on his family. She has got to be the strongest person I know. My sister, my mom, and I have been through thick and thin trying to make it. Somehow my mom always seems to find a way.

Furthermore, I can talk to her about anything in the world, and she will just sit there and listen the whole time. I think my mom can give out the best advice that anyone could ever ask for. Mothers are always right. For instance, I'll tell her I'm going to do something, and she will tell me, "No, because *something bad* is going to happen." Then, I seem to want to do stuff *more* after I'm told no. So, I'll do it anyway, and that *something bad* always seems to happen.

In conclusion, I think that's all there is to know about my wonderful mom. She is my best friend. If there was something I could change about her it would be nothing at all. There is no way I could ask for someone better in my life.

Josh Cooley is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Rhonda Currier is his teacher.

Virgil Flynn Fox (The Man I Admire)

This story is about my grandfather, Virgil Flynn Fox. To me, he was the most outstanding extraordinary and exceptional man. He has done so much with his life, more than what most people would do with theirs, including myself. Virgil was born in Atlanta, Georgia on June 1911. He had a twin sister who joined him, and 10 other brothers and sisters. They sure weren't a small family. Growing up on a farm with strong family values and a very strong belief in God, he grew up to be a wonderful man. He went on to college at Georgia Tech and met the most beautiful woman of his dreams, who turned out to be my grandmother.

Not too long after that he married and went into the Army. It was about the time of World War II. That's when he had his little bundle of joy burst into his life, and she turned out to be my mother. He stayed in the Army for many years and retired as a colonel. When he came home, he worked for Westinghouse and moved on to working in banks. He soon became Vice President of The Bank of Green Cove Springs, along with being a Project Manager. While he was tackling his jobs, he also made time for his family, became a Sunday school teacher, was active in all church activities, and worked with J.P. Hall Jr. to build many industrial parks in Green Cove Springs. This also created a lot of new jobs for all who needed them.

My grandfather and Claude Kelly (his best friend.) and started the Clay County Fair at Penny Farms, which has grown so much that it has become one of the biggest events in Clay County and surrounding areas. One of his favorite hobbies was to help out people who were less fortunate than he was. In turn, he was also giving generously to organizations and opened on his own, The Clothes Closet in Orange Park, FL.

While doing all this, he couldn't help but to get older. This leads me to write about him. He taught me so many things about life and has given me some of the best advice that I carry with me and share among the people I have met. My grandfather does all the things some of us never thought possible. This is why Virgil Flynn Fox is the person I admire most, not to mention that I love him.

Kym Lackland is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

My Wonderful Family!

My family is amazing! Personally, I believe I have the greatest family in the world. Some people are rich with money and material possessions, but my family is rich with love. My family includes my dad, my mama, and my siblings, Emilie and Mikey. I love my family, and I would not trade any of them for all the money in the world. My family is my heart and my life. I don't know what I would do if I lost any of them. I love them all.

First, I will introduce you to my dad. My dad is a welder by trade and works very hard. When my siblings and I were younger and my dad was not working, he spent his time with us. He always made time to be with us even if it was just watching television together. Now that we are older, he continues to make time to be with us. I remember when I was a young child, we would wrestle with each other, and he would always win, of course! My dad is a great friend.

Next, I would like you to meet my mama. She is going to college and working in a daycare program. She wants to be a physical therapist. Mama always makes time to be with us. My mama's best quality is making people smile and laugh (well she makes me smile and laugh a lot). She loves to crochet, and she enjoys watching us learn to do unique things. She often says that her favorite thing on earth is being with us. She is always ready to help us when we are in trouble. My mama is a very special person.

Finally, there is my sister, Emilie, and my brother, Mikey. Emilie is a kind and sweet little girl. She loves pandas and has many stuffed panda bears. Purple is Emilie's favorite color and she loves to sing. She is smart and learns quickly.

Mikey can be really nice, when he wants to be; however, he also enjoys annoying his siblings, but in a nice way. He loves playing with cars. He **tries** to tell jokes. Mikey's favorite thing to do is play with Emilie, when he is not trying to aggravate her. I love my sister and brother very much. As you can see, I personally believe I have the greatest family in the world.

My family includes my dad, my mama, and my siblings. Each family member has unique qualities, and I love all of them. Each

Someone or Something I Admire

one makes me smile, and I feel blessed to have such a loving and caring family. The person I am today is due to my loving family, and I am so very grateful.

Michelle Forehand is a student in the Learning Resource Center located at Washington Holmes Technical Center Campus in Chipley, Florida. Her goal is to enroll in college and study to be a veterinarian.

Someone I Admire, Nelson Mandela

I would like to talk about Nelson Mandela. He is the person that I really admire. Nelson Mandela is a legend alive. He showed the world that it is possible to make changes without war. He changed his people's lives forever. He is the most universally respected figure of South Africa.

Nelson Mandela was the first president of South Africa elected by democracy. He resumed his presidency after spending 30 years in jail. He went to the jail on the accusation of conspiracy against apartheid. Mr. Mandela was a smart leader and had a great soul. He made his enemies admire him. He never took revenge against the people who put him in jail. He showed mercy and compassion. He received more than one hundred awards and most notably the Nobel Peace Prize in 1993. He is a symbol of freedom and equality.

Regis Luis Cerutti is an ESOL student at the Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Best Friend Cherry

God put Cherry in my life in my time of need. My husband had walked out of my life, leaving me with three daughters. I had no money and no self-esteem.

I was in the laundromat, and Cherry came to play with my girls. She helped me with my clothes, carrying them home. Then she asked me, "How are you?" I didn't say anything.

A day later she knocked on the door and brought four bags of groceries and a case of milk. Cherry said, "You need a friend." She remains friends with me to this day.

Patricia Robinson is a student with Learn to Read of NW Florida. Her teacher is Suzanne Wells.

Let Me Tell You Something About Someone I Admire

This is a great opportunity for me to talk about someone I have always said is my shining star. When Ms. Lopez, my teacher, asked me to write about one of the topics in the list for this essay book, without any hesitation, I thought it was a great moment to write some words about my dear brother, Ernesto. Now, our families are far away from each other. Ernesto and his family are still living in Cuba, and we moved to the United States four months ago.

First of all, I would like to say that Ernesto has been my father since I was 15 years old. At that time, my father passed away and my brother was 21 years old. Ernesto and my mother not only taught me all I needed to know as I grew up, but how to reach my goals both professionally and personally.

I have had to learn about several unfair defeats Ernesto has suffered in his profession, but fortunately he has known how to keep going with life without anyone's help. It was only the strong determination to reach his goals that has made Ernesto who he is now, but more important than anything, truth will always prevail.

Today, if I can write these words in English, it is because Ernesto has always told me the importance of learning a second language. It is because of him that I studied some English courses in Cuba. And now, that I have been in the United States of America for only three months, I am able to write this essay for my ESOL class.

Ernesto, I would like to say thank you for everything you have done for me. May these words help remember you today. My dearest brother, I love you very much!

Tania Noriega is a student at Southwest Adult Educational Center in Miami, Florida. She attends a multilevel ESOL class with Mrs. Lopez.

Someone I Admire

The important person in my life is my Mom. I have looked up to my Mom for many reasons. She has been through a lot in her life, and she has taught me a lot from what she has learned from her past. My Mom has overcome everything she has been through. She has helped me when no one else would and she has always been there for me no matter what.

My Mom has been through some discouraging things in her life and always comes out on top of the situation. She has learned a lot from her mistakes, what people have done to her, and how she got through whatever was coming at her. Luckily for her children, she wanted to teach us how to deal with life as it comes to us. I feel my sister, my brother, and I know how to be good people and deal with problems in a good manner because of what she has taught us. I feel she has given us a cheat sheet because we know that life comes with good and bad people, situations, and places. She taught us how to deal with it all head on not to run away from it.

My Mom has overcome everything that has come her way. I look up to her because she is still standing strong after all of it. My mom used to be an alcoholic, but quit. It takes a strong person to do that. She used to get beat up by the man she was with. She was brave enough to leave him. It is hard to get out of an abusive relationship alive. It is very dangerous for anyone involved, but she did it, and I'm very proud of her for it. I have to say just her being brave enough to leave the man that beat on her has helped me to know not to put up with anyone putting their hands on me.

My Mom has helped me just by being there for me when I needed her. If I ever need a shoulder to cry on, someone to vent to, or just need a hug, she is there no matter what. If my problem was big or small, she will be there to help me get through it. She also helped me when I was pregnant with my first son. His father left me when I was three months pregnant, but she was right there. I was so scared and she helped me be strong. She was the only one who stayed with me the whole time I was in labor and delivery.

My Mom is very important to me. If it was not for her I don't know who I would be today. I look up to her for all she does and who she is. I call on her every time I need advice or need her love. No one loves anyone like a mom loves her child. My Mom is always there waiting with a big smile and open arms. She always says, "I love you toots, you can do anything you put your mind to." I love my Mom.

Bethany Ragland is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Catie Griffith is her teacher.

Let Me Tell You About Someone I Admire

This wonderful person I admire is my mom, Shirley. She is my best friend, my strengthener, and my comforter. To know her is to love and to forgive. I would be blessed to be half the lady she is. The sunshine has nothing on the glow my mom has.

As I became a young lady, my mom became my best friend. We laugh together and cry together. We can “read” each other’s minds and body language. She’s always there for me no matter what. She is a true leader in humanity and in all she does.

I’ll never meet anyone with the strength my mom has. She has a husband, nine boys, and two girls. The sacrifices she made with her mind, body, and soul for our family can only be out-done by one other person, Jesus. My mom lost two of her sons (one on Mother’s Day) to a disease called alcoholism; she carries herself even stronger today than before. She says, “I still have nine more children that love and need their mom at one point or another”.

She has this magical smile and touch that comforts all who are around her. When I was sick for years with this same disease, she was by my side feeding me, clothing me, sleeping with me in case I quit breathing, and giving me endless words of encouragement. My mom gave me freedom from pain, sorrow, and anxiety. My mother’s love for God and His will for her life has brought everyone she meets a great amount of true comfort. I am in recovery now because I want what she has: serenity.

My mom earns the admiration of all who know her. God blessed me with her being my best friend, my strengthener, and my comforter. She is small in stature, but huge in heart. She fears no one and loves all. I often wonder if my mom is a heavenly angel sent to earth. There’s no other person in the world, that I know, that can juggle all of what life brings, and does it with a genuine smile and a caring heart. She is the one I admire intensely, my beautiful mom Shirley.

Kimberly D. Rudisill is an ABE student in Tampa, FL. Her teacher is Mrs. Steele. She would like to further her education in psychology, so she can help dual-diagnosed people like herself.

“POMPO” Someone I Admire!

Pompo used to work at my grandparents’ home. Her daily routine was to hand wash the family clothes, to hang them on the line to dry under the bright Caribbean sun, and then to patiently starch and iron them.

Her name was Maria Pomposa Caraballo, a name that has always had a musical sound to me. We affectionately called her “Pompo.” When I met her, she was probably in her fifties or perhaps younger. The fine lines that crossed her face could have been the result of years of working the arid land of her family in a remote village of the country.

As I lived across from my grandparents’ home I loved to spend as much time as I could with them during school vacations. Their home was a kind of magic realm for me, not only because of its beautiful interior garden, but because of my grandfather’s library. Located on the second floor of the house, its balcony allowed me to see the steamboats that sailed the Magdalena River, a view that I never tired of contemplating. Or I could just quietly sit down to read a book, depending on my mood.

However, there was another reason for my visits ... Pompo. Although I was only eight years old, I could perceive that she was different from the other workers of the house. Instead of taking a nap, a habit imposed by the perennial summer of the Colombian Caribbean, Pompo used to sit down with a book under a big tree in the backyard. Curious as I was, she was a magnet for me ...

What are you reading, Pompo?

Why aren’t you taking a nap, Pompo?

How is it that you are the only one who reads, Pompo?

Books are expensive, Pompo. How can you afford them?

And so on...She used to smile and lovingly answer my unending questions.

However, one day she produced a worn out membership card for the local library. As she took it from the pocket of her apron, she proudly showed it to me saying, “with this card, niña, I can get all

the books I want. I went to school only a few years, but I learned to read and I love it. I have traveled the world and even to the stars while sitting under this tree and if I can stand life's ups and downs, it is because of my book." And then softly, as if speaking to herself, she said something I have never forgotten, "to read, Rosie, is to drink the nectar of the Gods. It will give you wings."

Pompo truly encouraged my passion for reading, and I even think that it was the beginning of my desire to become a teacher. To have Maria Pomposa Caraballo in my life was a blessing that confirms my belief of the fact that we can learn from the most unexpected persons. We just need to be aware and open to discover these unique and unforgettable characters who can change our lives forever.

Rose Nieto is a grandmother and former elementary education school teacher from Colombia. She is in the Advanced Conversation class at Clay County Literacy Coalition. Her tutor is Bobbi Moore.

Let Me Tell You About Someone I Admire.

Sometimes we call movie stars, musicians, singers, idols admirable but there is someone else that will influence your life completely. This person helps you understand your problems, obstacles, happiness, and decisions that are a part of life. My admiration goes to a very kind and intelligent woman, Ms. Carol

Ms. Carol has been my tutor for almost two years. During this time period she has impacted my life, not only in the way that she teaches each class, but also in the way she helps me to reach each one of my goals. When I started studying with Ms. Carol, I was attending the Leary Technical School in Tampa, Florida struggling to finish the class to obtain a Child Care Specialist Credential. Now after almost two years, I have finished the class. I now have obtained my National CDA (Child Development Associate Credential), a Director Credential, Associate Degree in Early Childhood Education, and right now I'm working to obtain my Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education. I know that without Ms. Carol's support it would not have been possible.

I think that everyone needs a role model; Ms. Carol is mine. I want to try to accomplish the goals that I have in mind. It helps when you have someone you look up to make your decisions easier.

Someone or Something I Admire

You have heard the expression, “I want to be like Mike,” well I want to be like Ms. Carol. I want to have the passion, the drive, and the desire to succeed like she has in life.

Now my life has been transformed. One of my goals and desires is to help other people. I want to give my time and listen to others. Ms. Carol taught me a lot of things. The most valuable things of all are to have passion in all that I do, live one day at a time, enjoy life, and be a wonderful human being.

True success involves a sense of achievement that I believe everybody can reach. We come to this world to make a difference. I see the kindness in Ms. Carol’s eyes as she transforms the lives of others. Having been a nurse all her life, I believe that she still feels the need to help people and that is why she teaches. I have to say that her husband has a lot of influence on what she does. He is also a person that gives his time to teach since he was a principal in a school. This wonderful couple has impacted the lives of my husband and me.

I bless the work that she is doing, and I want to sincerely thank her for her unconditional support, guidance, and patience.

Cristina Narvaez is a student at the United Way Literacy Council of Manatee County. Her teacher is Ms. Carol.

Someone I Admire

I have never written an essay in my life, but it means a lot to me in my heart and in my life to tell you about my uncle, whom I admire, because he has shown a lot of courage throughout his life. So here goes nothing!

In 2003, in my early twenties, I was going through a lot, so my mom and dad decided that I should go to Puerto Rico to live with my grandparents. My uncle was living at my grand parents’ house too.

I admired my uncle, even though at that time, he was in the streets living a hard core life. I could not believe my eyes. He was once a preacher who inspired many people, and now he was staying with my grandma and grandpa who were his mom and dad. He would sleep in the day and go out at night.

It was very hard to see him like that because I admired him. Among the reasons that I admired him were because, he had been a good father and a great husband to his wife. Everything he has, he has fought for, including his beautiful two story house that he built himself with his two bare hands. He has three beautiful kids; two girls and one boy.

One Friday night it was payday, and I felt like going out. I was waiting for my ride to go to San Juan, the capitol of Puerto Rico, and my uncle was coming out of the house to roam the streets. I stopped him and asked, “Do you ever think about going back to being the person you once were?”

As tears rushed down my cheeks he said, “I think about it every day.” He was in a rush, but when he saw that I was hurt by his actions, he stopped to say what I wanted him to say at that point in time. He said that he will soon be himself again and that he misses being on the pulpit, preaching the word of our God.

So my uncle whom I admire, he is now an even better preacher than he was before and a good family man. I don’t know where he might be if I did not ask him that question at that point in time, but right now, he is doing what he was born to do. He is preaching the word of God and taking care of his lovely wife. The three kids are all grown up, so now he is a grandpa, but he will always be my brave uncle whom I admire.

Juan Carlos Rivera is a student in the GED program at Manatee Technical Institute.

A Role Model

Who do I admire? I wish to be like my mother. She was married and had 12 children. Her family was the most important part of her life. She had many goals. Her first goal was to learn how to raise her children. Even though she was very busy with her family, she was a professional midwife. Her dream was to someday send her children to college. That is why she began going to school and taking classes for a master’s degree. I really admire her. She sets goals and works hard to reach them. I want to be a life-long learner just like her.

Blanca Tello is an ESOL student at Lee County Adult Education at Cape Coral High School. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

My Hero

My hero is my daughter, because she has overcome so many things since birth and is such a joy to have! Khloe was born at 27 weeks and weighed 2 pounds 7 ounces and was 13 inches long. When she was delivered, she died and they brought her back to life. She was born at Lake Shore, our local hospital, and was flown to Gainesville.

She stayed on a breathing tube for just over a month and stayed on a feeding tube for 3 months. Khloe also had bacterial meningitis and can be fatal to infants. It affects the fluid around the brain. She was so small and could only have IV's in her head. She had two surgeries and stayed in the hospital for over 4 months.

It was rough on everyone, but mostly on her. She is such a strong fighter and I can truly say she's been fighting since day one. Khloe is such a healthy little girl now it's almost impossible to remember how sick and tiny she used to be. This is why I consider her my hero.

Gabrielle Timmerman is pursuing her GED at Columbia's Career and Adult Education Program.

Love of a Mother

My mother's love has to be the greatest love of all.

My mother came to this country alone with just her mother. As she grew, she met and fell in love with my father. Time passed, they got married, and had three girls. Now this love and marriage did not last long, and sadly, my mother and father parted ways. Suddenly, my mother was alone with three girls to raise on her own. She worked from sun up to sun down driven by her love for her girls.

Tired and hungry, she would come home to feed and bathe her three little girls. Finding herself alone in this country, raising three girls on her own, made her a strong and wonderful mom. With the loving guidance of this amazing woman, we are all three grown women with children of our own. Now three strong women stand together, never alone, thanks to the love of our mother.

Icela Chavarria is a student in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program. She takes her role and responsibility as a student very seriously and will achieve her goals and dreams.

Someone I Admire

Someone I admire is my mom. My mother is very intelligent, humble, and hard working.

My mother graduated from high school with honors, went to college, and got her Bachelor's Degree in Computer Programming. She didn't stop there, although my mother landed a job with One Stop Career Center. She also went back to college and received her Master's in Accounting. I truly admire her determination to continue with schooling like she did. My mother told me that she loved school coming up and her grades stayed above average. Also, she was quick to listen and open minded to learning.

Another thing I adore about my mother is her humbleness. No matter what comes, my mother is humble. No matter what comes my mother's way, she stays in good spirits and is very uplifting with words. I promise you a personal or mind blowing situation may arise, my mother would keep a smile on her face with encouraging words and a precious look on her face that melts a heart. I'm saying my mother is a very kind, generous, and easy going person. Anyone would love her if they were to meet.

Now on top of all those qualities, I must say that the one that fascinates me is her hard work. Throughout school, she maintained a job, stayed working that same job for 35 years. My mother never missed a day or came to work late. She always put in extra-curricular time to help someone else find work. I never heard her complain about anything relating to her job. I must say, rain or snow, she's at work. Nothing could have stopped her from going to her job because she loved what she did for others. So I respect those qualities in her and wish that I had them instilled within myself. That's why I admire my mother!

Ms. Wilson is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

Someone I Admire

The one I look up to, the one I call on,
when no other is there.

The only person who cares, who feels my pain.

My mother, she's my all also, my everything.

Her love keeps me going, through this hard time.

My mother the woman I admire is one of a kind.

She's hardworking and raised up eleven kids, but pulled it off.

She sacrificed so much, at all cost.

I know it's hard on her with having three kids in prison.

It's hard on us too because a part of our hearts are missing.

My mother, strong is not enough to say about her.

My mother, the one I admire.

Lorenna Tyson is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

The Most Important Person In My Life

Life is the greatest riches on earth. The only person who can put you on earth and give you life is a mother. So my mother is the most important person in my life. She worked hard to provide me the best education. She showed me how to treat others with kindness and myself with respect. She told me if I wanted respect, I should respect others or if I want someone to serve me, I should serve them or others. She never left me hungry. She gives me good advice and when I feel bad, she takes care of me and she always has something special for me. Finally, she taught me to be a good person. She is the only person who loves me truly, sincerely, and who will never forsake me.

Syndia Sime-Lauture is an ESOL student at the Adult Learning Center Osceola in Kissimmee.

I Admire Wanda Klaijbor

I enjoy writing about my good friend Wanda. She is 81 years old now. I met her when I came to the U.S. in 2007. It was in Virginia, a beautiful state. I admire Wanda because she was a strong and optimistic person, although she lost her husband 45 years ago in a plane accident. They had three children. They were little when Wanda became a widow. She taught them good values, behavior, and principles that they will need during their lifetime.

Wanda lived right across my house in Virginia. That's why I know a lot about her. Every morning Wanda had a routine. She went for a walk with her dog for about 35 minutes. Then she organized her house. She went to the supermarket to buy a fresh delicious loaf of bread for breakfast. In the afternoons she visited people to give them 'The Eucharist'. Many people were sick or they could not walk to the church. Three times during the week she drove to see a friend who needed some help.

Wanda was and is still an understanding and reliable person. She always has time for everyone. It does not matter what race, religion or social status. Her advice is almost always perfect. Her life has not been easy but she continues to take life in a good way. She has a big heart. There is an endless smile on her face. Having a person like Wanda in my life is like a gift. I am very thankful because I had the opportunity to meet her.

Martha Lucia Sanchez is a student at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Pepo, My Lovable Father

My grandparents, Maria Ubach Catla and Jose Diaz Margaff, were born and married in Spain. They moved to Cuba where my father, Jose Maria Diaz, was born on July 29, 1921. He was one of six children.

My father and my mother, Migdalia Lopez, had a simple family wedding. When I was born I had to wear a cast for my club foot, and I later needed crutches. I was not allowed to swim or run or skate or ride a bicycle. My father spoiled me and never spanked me because he either felt sorry for me or he loved me so much—probably both. My brother, Pedro, is a year younger than I am. We both called our father Pepo.

Pepo was a brave man who stood up for his beliefs. He was openly against communism, so he had to hide from the Cuban government. In 1961, when I was eight years old, Pepo and his friend built a boat to hold 14 family members. It took us three days to sail to Key West. Although it was a very dangerous journey, Pepo made it fun by constantly joking with everyone.

After a week in Florida, a family friend sponsored us. He flew the four of us to Los Angeles and paid our rent for two months. My parents both worked. Pepo worked from sunrise to sunset. Pedro and I stayed home alone since there was no money for babysitters. At first, Pepo was a janitor in a sweater factory. After he got a promotion, he was encouraged by his boss to build a more modern sweater-making machine since he enjoyed mechanical projects.

A year later he owned and operated his own gasoline station. He was an honest man and was successful because he charged fair prices for all car repairs.

Pepo was a happy man who loved to dance. He danced salsa with my mother, friends, and with me at parties. He was also a kind, sensitive man who hated gossip and refused to get involved in other people's business.

My mother chose a loving husband and compassionate father for her children. Pepo had a quiet nature and would laugh whenever my mother got angry, which always made her laugh, too. We had a very happy home.

Even our dog loved Pepo. Whenever Pepo would lie down on his bed, the dog would sit up and put his front paws and his head near Pepo who would pet him until one of them fell asleep.

When the Masons decided to build a new temple, Pepo volunteered to help since he was very dedicated to the organization. He had many friends there.

In 1962, when I was 11, Pepo had his first heart attack. He was told to exercise and change his diet, but he found that very difficult to do. Two years later he had a fatal heart attack. The temple he helped build was named after him.

Gisela Villar works very hard as a toll collector on the Florida Turnpike. She lives in Miami with her husband. She meets with her tutor once a week.

Let Me Tell You About Someone I Admire

I admire more than one person. It's my family and friends that help me when I feel like everything is going downhill. For instance, when my children and I became homeless, I didn't know if I was going to make it through the hard times. My children, however, had faith in our Lord God that I didn't have at that time. They said that we would make it, and we did. Then I found Pensacola United Methodist Community Ministries (P.U.M.C.M.) and the kindest pastor that I have met in a long time. Pastor Joe has a big heart for the community and anyone who needs help. I started the Learn to Read class at the church two years ago. I am now studying for the GED, which I hope to take soon. One day while I was waiting for Ms. Jo Ann to come and open the doors, Pastor Joe came by and asked me if I would like to help, and I have been helping four days a week at P.U.M.C.M. ever since and at the thrift store when needed. I know now that my God was in all of what was going on in my life. God brought me to Pastor Joe and everyone at P.U.M.C.M. and Richards Memorial Church to teach me that I can make it through anything if I just put my trust in Him all the time.

Norma Cash has been attending Learn to Read of Northwest Florida's learning lab at Richards Memorial UMC for 2 1/2 years. She lives in Pensacola, FL.

Someone I Admire

Many people in this world have that special someone that they truly admire. In my heart, that extraordinary human being is my gorgeous mother, whose name I say with pride, Teresa. This woman had to work very hard to raise eight kids along with me. She also suffered deeply by crossing the border to come to the United States and leaving behind her kids with the purpose of giving them a better tomorrow.

Teresa, the woman I admire most, is the mother that sacrificed herself for the sake of her children after our father passed away. She did what she could to finish raising us on her own. I remember her working hard as a man all the time. Over there in Mexico, she had to lift those heavy sacks of lemons to earn a couple of pesos (dollars). It was a small amount back then, no more than 30 dollars a week. That money was not enough for food, clothes and all we needed, but she went on the struggle.

Crossing the border in order to achieve the American dream and

Someone or Something I Admire

give her kids the better tomorrow was my mother next decision. Such a resolution was tearing her heart in pieces. She knew that it would be a long goodbye to her beloved kids, but we were always first in her life. She came and worked so hard that bit by bit she earned enough to send us money. However, she knew that America would give us that better future she dreamt about. After a while, she was able to bring all of us and give us a better home and life.

Teresa has always been more than a best friend to me; she is my mom. Furthermore, she is a hardworking and loving mother that is the cause of us being together nowadays. She is also a person who would do so much just to have her kids well-raised and give them a change for the better. That is why with much honor, I say Teresa is the person I admire most. What else can I ask for?

Rosa Villaseñor is a GED student with TLC Online at The English Center at The English Center/Homestead One Stop Center.

My Role Model

My role model is my father. He was born in 1948. He only received a middle school degree. He started working when he was very young. He worked very hard so his family would always have what they needed. He, however, always liked to learn something new. He earned different diplomas, for example plumbing, locksmith, gardening, and others. When he lost his job, he started the production of pouches for eye glasses. In the beginning everything was difficult, but today he sells his pouches to the biggest eye care clinics. He is my role model because he taught me to work hard, and that it is never too late to learn.

Evelyn Acuna is an ESOL student at Lee County Adult Education at Cape Coral High School. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

The Most Important Person In My Life

My father is the most important person in my life. When I was eight years old my parents separated, and he took care of me on his own. He taught me good values. He also taught me how to live on my own by doing chores around the house and even how to cook. He managed to give me everything I needed, from the clothes on my back to the roof over my head. Finally, whenever I had a problem he was always there for me. I love my Dad with all my heart.

Ivette Aponte an ESOL student at Adult Learning Center Osceola.

Someone I Admire

My sister is a very beautiful, strong willed, strong minded, and a very intelligent person. I can remember when we would go everywhere together. She's so special to me. Early in her life she had an addiction, which was crack cocaine. My sister had the mind and willpower to become sober. And guess what? She has. My sister has been clean for 11 years. Now my wonderful sister has been diagnosed with bone and stomach cancer within the last 4 or 5 months. She is now going through chemo. What I love so much about my sister is she believes if she can pull through one trauma, she can also pull through this one. Because God is on her side, I, myself, believe too. God bless my sister, Denise.

Alice Green is a student in Ms. Toole ABE III Class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

My Heroes

My kids are my heroes and are a blessing from up above. I thank God that he blessed me with the greatest gift a woman could have. I know they are in my life for a reason. God has a season just for a reason. If they were not in my life today I would not try to make a change.

GED classes would have not been on my mind at all because having fun would have taken that pride. That's why they are my heroes because they saved me from my death. It's because of them why I want to succeed. They focus on me. When they get older and see what I did, they will do the same.

My girls saved me from the street life before I got deep in. It's just wonderful to know how your hero can have an effect on your life that's so life changing. My kids are three and two, and they showed me how to love, be a better mother, and also cook.

My heroes show me a lot of love on my sad and happy days. They cheer me up every time I'm down. It feels so good and so blessed to have a smile on my face when I'm so stressed. Having little heroes are so fun and will make your frown turn upside down. Most of all, I want to be their hero by loving and caring for them as they do for me. I want to make them smile when they frown and also encourage them to do the same for their kids one day.

Someone or Something I Admire

I thank God for giving me my heroes from above. They saved me from this cold, cruel world that shows no love. I know I'll be fine and will make it because that's what heroes are there for, to save you and want you to succeed in what you do.

Britney Graham is the single mother of two children and is pursuing her GED in Columbia's Adult Education Program. She is actively involved in the Even Start Family Literacy Program

A Special Person in My Life

A very special person in my life that I admire is my oldest sister Stephanie Maria Lewis. My sister passed away 3 years ago from a car accident on July 29, 2009. I have 2 other younger sisters, but she was the oldest. I feel like a piece of me left with her. When she passed away it affected my life in a very negative way. I didn't care about anything. I was living life with my eyes and feelings shut from the world. I had an "I don't care" attitude, and I didn't care about anything I felt empty, sad, mad, and confused. I kept asking myself and God "Why? Why my sister?" I still at times feel very depressed on holidays and her birthday. My sister kept me strong where I was weak. When any advice or opinion was needed, she was there for me as a big sister and my best friend, mainly because I have a mother who is an active user. So I never counted on my mom for anything, only my big sister. When she passed away I felt more comfortable with the hurt inside doing illegal activities, getting high, and numbing my pain. I learned the hard way that it's not the way to cope with my feelings. I know my sister doesn't want me wasting my life away in the way I was doing it. Today, I'm learning how to cope with her death. If it's to cry, then I cry. I'm trying to be a good person like the way I know she would want me to be. I, admire my sister the most in my life.

Crystal Lewis is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

The Sunshine In My House

My name is Juana. I'm from Oaxaca, Mexico. I have my family. I love them, but my brother is who I admire more because when he lived with us he showed us a lot things.

My brother was about ten years old, that I know, when he helped my parents and my siblings. He fed more than 200 rabbits and bulls without my parents asking. We had a well to pull out the water, and later had an idea to get the donkey to pull the water out. He trained the bulls to pull a plow for planting corn. While he was working, he like to put the radio on the window and turn on the loud music. Sometimes the bulls got loose and chased me, they made me run fast. I was crying and scared. I felt like my body was shaking, only he tried to calm me. He helped me to feel more comfortable with the bulls by touching them and not to be scared of them.

My siblings and I had a lot of fun with him. He organized us to play, do homework together, and not fight. He liked to do a lot of tricks with his bicycle so we watched what our brother did. He also liked to use the typewriter to write poems and express himself. He always motivated my mom on Christmas or special feast days to make tamales or food that we like. While my mom cooked, he put on his music so my mom did not get bored.

One day he went to a Posada that are celebrated in Mexico. After that he went to a Quinceañera riding his bicycle four miles from home. He met his friends to have fun and dance, but they got drunk, something happened. In the morning, he was found lying down with his bicycle in the middle of the road dead. Someone put him there and ran so that we would think that the car killed him, but that isn't true. He was 18 years old. In my country there is no justice, only God's justice. Our life changed a lot because my big brother would have liked a different future for us. He was the understudy of the family and guide of us. That happened 22 years ago, but he'll live forever with us. My goal is to learn more English and help my family progress. That is what he would have liked.

I love you forever ANTONIO FRANCO VASQUEZ.

J.F.V is a student at Immokalee Technical Center in Immokalee, Florida. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee.

Someone I Admire

There is someone that I admire so much and that person is my husband.

There is so much to say about him, and I have only a little time. The day God blessed me with this man was the best day of my life. He is such a loving person and has a good heart and is very friendly. There are times I say to him “Baby, why are you so friendly?” His response is, “I am sweetheart; I like to socialize with people.”

He is a hard worker and would do anything for me and his family. My husband sacrifices

for us. At this moment, I don't have a job and I am going to school to further my education, and he is the one that is doing what every husband is supposed to do. He says, “Baby, in anything you're going to do I will be there to support you.” Tears always run down my face when he says that to me because I know he cares and that's why I admire him so much.

We are from the same country and went to elementary school together but when he was thirteen years old he left to go to St.Croix. Later, we got married and we came to the United State to be together and now we have a two-year-old daughter and our anniversary is in February. We are a happy couple with God in the center of everything we do.

One day he went to the hospital for a checkup because he was complaining about a pain

in his side. When the doctor was done with all the tests and gave him a body scan, his doctor told him that he had kidney problems. I was at the hospital with him and when they told him, I was so hurt and started crying. He told me that everything will be fine. Thank God he is such a strong person. I never met anyone like him.

These are the things I admire about my husband. I love him, and I will stay by his side to support him the same way he is doing for me. I will love him till death do us part.

Valda Joseph is a young wife and mother. She is helpful and attentive to others and wants to complete a Nursing program after attaining her GED.

My Mother

An important person in my life is my mother. She is a great person, and I like her so much. She's a widow and a house wife. I'm very grateful to her for making a good life for us.

When my father died, my mom had seven daughters and four sons. At that time, the eldest was a teenager. Since then my mom has had on her shoulders a big responsibility. She had to be a mother and a father at the same time. She looked after all of us until we grew up and graduated. Now most of us are married, and she has grandchildren.

Although she has a great deal of responsibility she has never been bored or complained. You always see her smiling and happy. My mom can solve any problem. She never gets fed up because she is very patient. When my siblings and I used to study, my mom tried to make us feel comfortable by preparing food for us and taking care of us.

My mom has had an interesting life. She used to travel all over the world. In the last few years she has come to the United States to spend time with her three sons who are living here.

My mom is going on eighty years old now, but she is still quite young in spirit. She's very kind and sociable, and she likes to help everybody. Despite her age, mom is like a friend to us. She's happy whenever we are happy. I respect her. She's very tolerant of people and has concern for people. She is a good cook. We learned a lot from mom.

I hope to be as patient and happy as my mother.

Laila Kadkad is from Libya and lives with her husband. She is a student at the Center for Adult Learning - Jacksonville Public Library - Southeast Branch.

My Ryanna

My world is called Ryanna. Ryanna means the world to me, or in other words she is my world. She is my reason for breathing.

My first reason that Ryanna means the world to me is simply because she is my daughter. I had her in my womb for nine months and went through the beginning struggles of her infancy. With all of

her health problems, it was a very hard beginning for the both of us.

The second reason that Ryanna is my world is that I had always wanted to be a mom, and I never felt complete until I had Ryanna. Ryanna has pushed me to places that I never dreamed I would want to be. For instance, I am going to school and, for the first time, liking it.

And thirdly, we have so much fun together; I feel like I am revisiting my own childhood at times. I do things with her that I would have been scared stiff to try three years ago. But today I am singing, dancing, making funny faces, and talking about sippy cups with a blanket. People look at me like I am crazy, but they will have their day of completely not caring what people in public think of them, too.

I guess that Ryanna made my world begin. I am crazy about her in every way. She has made me content to come out of my shell and has pushed me to better myself in every way. I love her very much and would not have my life any other way. So here I am content, happy, and over all inspired to be a creative mother to my daughter. I hope that I can be as inspiring of a mother to her as she has been to me.

Kathirine Lay is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

A Birthday of a Loving Son

There's a young man in my life, and his name is Antonio L. Aviles. He's a significant part of my life, and every year there's a date that I enjoy. That day is December 9th of every year.

On December 9th 1997, my son was born. It was a special day for me and his mother. It was also a special day for me, because I got to see my son come to this world. I gave him my name, but in a different order and to him this is something special.

He's 13 years old and in the 7th grade. I am so proud of him, because he's a good kid in school and at home. He also attends church with his grandmother. He's being raised very well by his mother and grandmother, so I thank God for this blessing.

We get to talk on the phone as much as we can, because it's hard

to get a visit from him. He lives in Miami and I'm too far to get a visit from him. So my plans are to get a good adjust transfer to be closer down south, and enjoy my visits again with him.

So this is the significant date of my life: Antonio L. Aviles' birthday. There are other dates that are also significant in my life and I enjoy every one of them, but Antonio L. Aviles is special, because he's the last and the youngest of my heritage and that holds a special part in my heart.

My name is Luis Aviles and I'm doing a life sentence, but that doesn't stop me in furthering my education. So when I got the chance to get my GED I was happy to achieve one of my goals in life. I am doing this to better myself and to show my children how important having a high school diploma is. I thank the Lord for the blessing.

My Mother

There are many people that I find inspirational, however, the person that I admire most is my mother, Adelle Frye. She raised 15 children. Amazingly, she still found time to be involved in many charitable organizations. She overcame many adversities and went back to school to further her education.

Having a big family requires constant care and attention. My mother struggled to support her family. She worked two jobs; and still she made sure that everything was perfect. Her husband physically abused her, but because of the era, she had no outside help. This did not keep her from protecting her children. Her situation was stressful; however, she persevered. Mother showed each and every one of us how to be more responsible. She taught us to help one another and to be there for each another. Moreover, Mother showed us lots of love and security. She upheld these qualities to the highest degree.

Motherhood is a full-time job, especially when you have 15 children to care for. Yet, my mother still engaged in activities to make the community better. She was a very strong-willed individual and once she set her mind on something, she carried it out. Cooking meals for others and taking care of the elderly in hospitals were just two things that she did to make a difference. They always say that "Charity begins at home," but my mother demonstrated that it was not meant to stop there.

Mother ensured that all her children understood the importance of education. As children, when we had homework, she was there to help us. She taught us to carry ourselves in a respectable manner and to become independent. Later on in years when we understood these ideas better, Mother went back to school to further her own education. By doing so, she instilled in our minds that the need for education was a very important factor in her life, just as well as ours.

My mother passed away at the tender age of 58. Up until her dying day, she continued to advise us and impart her knowledge and moral values. She gave so much of herself to her children and her grandchildren. Although she is gone, she still has a very special place in my heart. She is the person I admire most.

At age 55, Lavon Hardin chose to further her education by enrolling in GED Classes at Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus. She has 3 children. Her instructor is Sherry Joseph-Dutton.

The Person I Admire The Most

The person I admire most in this life is my mom, Anita Jean Nations, and this is the story about God's favorite angel that was sent to be my mom.

Anita was born in Walla Walla, Washington on March 9, 1957. When she was born she weighed 3lbs and had a rare blood type called RH. She survived having a blood transfusion when born. God created her to do mighty things in this world and she has come a long way from birth. She was so tiny, her parents used a small dresser drawer as her crib. My mom also had two brothers and sisters and her family was poor.

Her mother was a homemaker and her father was a lumberjack. Growing up my mom had an unfathomable childhood. Her parents had over 100 cats, so the living conditions in her home were very unsanitary. She was forced to clean up after the cats and go to school smelling like cat feces daily. She was also picked on and teased in school. This made it harder to get a proper education.

My mom also endured sexual and physical abuse from her alcoholic father. Something no child deserves, especially someone as precious as her. When my mom was 14 years old, she began

walking to a nearby church every week. The pastor at the church took an interest in my mom. She was concerned about her situation and wanted to learn more about this sweet spirited little girl who began to attend her church. The pastor's name is Bonnie Small. She is my foster grandmother. Bonnie went to my grandparents and asked to adopt my mom. And they gladly accepted. That is when my mom's life changed for the best. My mom helped in the nursery at the church and Bonnie taught her many skills such as cooking, cleaning, and about life in general. Bonnie also had four other children and life was good.

At the age of 27 years old, my mom met my dad, Dale Nations. They married and shortly after I was conceived. I am thankful for God bringing me into this world. I am also thankful that she strived and survived through the trials she had as a child. The life my mom had is what molded her into the person she is today. Her life made her the kindest, caring and big hearted person in the world. My mom is the most patient, loving, caring and preserving person I know and I am thankful God sent me his favorite angel to be my mom.

Crystal Allen is working towards earning her GED. She is a student in Ms. John-Pierre's class at Broward Correctional Institution.

Let Me Tell You About Someone I Admire

Let me tell you about someone I admire. I admire my dad because he is always there for me. He is a hard worker, and he is a great dad to me and my siblings. This is a story about my dad.

First, let me tell you the first reason I admire my dad. He is always there for me when I need him the most, even though we get into fights. He still goofs around and makes me laugh. I know if I ever get into a bind, I can always depend on my dad to be there for me.

Second, let me tell you the next reason I admire my dad. My dad is a very hard worker. My dad is always up early every morning at 5:30 AM to go straight to work. He is always doing more than one thing at once, and he is a dependable person. My dad is definitely one of those people that works hard for his money. I know I want to be a hard worker like him in whatever I end up doing after school.

Third, let me tell you about the last reason I admire my dad. He is a great dad to me and all my siblings. He did a great job raising us to be adults and to teach us how to be successful in life. My dad has taught us how life really is and the obstacles you will run into. He has taught us to work for your money and to pay your bills to keep your house going every day.

In conclusion, the person I admire is a huge impact on my life, and I know I can always go to him for anything. I know he is a hard worker. I also know he is a great dad. I definitely know I want to be just like him when I get older and have a family one day.

Shelby Ragas is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Sandy Ebanks.

A Person I Look Upon Very High and Admire

A person I look upon highly and admire is my grandfather, whom I have been working for, with, and around since I could walk. I cannot fathom where I would be without his guidance. However when I was younger I was naïve as to how imperative his teaching was, but I am grateful now. My grandfather is an auctioneer, is in the auction hall of fame, and has owned an auction company for over fifty years. With many other businesses to his credit, I am proud to follow in his footsteps.

My grandfather taught me early on how paramount it is to be very honest, have a lot of integrity, and how honesty is beneficial to you in many ways. When you are honest people trust and respect you and that will affect the bottom line. Most importantly, I learned from him you are honest not because it is profitable, but because it is the right thing to do.

I learned from him not only how to talk the talk, but how to walk the walk. My grandfather built many businesses from nothing and made them something substantial because being mediocre is unacceptable. Everything he did, he did well with integrity and never hurt anybody in the process. In situations I often think what would he have done and what would make him proud.

One day, I heard some people talking about my grandfather's name; they spoke very highly of him. I hope I can earn that kind of respect someday. My grandfather is a humble man who would never

embellish on his accomplishments, skill, or businesses, but is highly respected, and I will often have people tell me what a great person he is. Someone once told me they implied that they liked his car so he gave it to them; I only hope to be half the man he is.

Chad Ruparis is an adult education student at Cape Coral High School.

My Idol!

I believe everyone has problems in their life, but everyone handles each of their problems differently.

My friend had cancer for the second time in her life. The first time that she had cancer, she was in her 20's with three children, and for three months after she had surgery, she couldn't be around her children because of her radiation. She had to live in a camper behind her house and couldn't be around any one.

Today, my friend is 44 year old, and again, she had to fight cancer. This is the same cancer that she fought 20 years ago, but this time she didn't have it as bad. She didn't have to stay away from people or her kids. They got all the cancer in surgery, and they actually sent her home the same day of her surgery.

If anyone believes in strong people, I do, because I have a very strong woman in my life. One day, I hope I can be half the woman she is.

Shannon Poston is a student at the Citrus County Even Start.

Original Poetry

We Came From Many Countries

We came from many countries,
We came from near and far
We speak different languages
We each followed our own star.

Some came for an adventure
Others freedom sought
Some left family behind
Others were by family brought.

We came to class as strangers
We shared a certain goal
To learn the language of America
To have our stories told.

Marcelina needs to learn English
That's the reason that she's here
Her teacher is **patient** and funny
Writing on the computer is her fear.

Maritza echoes the same story
Her classmates make it fun
A new good job is her hope
When all her work is done.

David thinks that English
Will help him with his goals
It was hard to learn it in his country
Because the books were very old.
Luis was nervous when first he came to school

He almost went back to his home
Now he's a leader and helps his classmates
His words take on a different tone.

Aeryon and Yong are best friends
They met each other at church
They come from the same country
They come to help each other learn.

Elaine wants a job in accounting
And to talk to her new friends
Taking classes in English
Will help her to this end.

Fei Li comes with his mother Wang
Papa comes with her son Sogay
To share learning the customs and language
Of the place they hope to stay.

Mimose comes from Haiti
To have a better life
She needs better English
To eliminate her strife.

We are many students
That spend as much time as we can
Learning the English language
And the customs of this land.

We love this, our new country
We love the people that we meet.
We are trying to learn your language
So please speak **slowly** and please repeat.

Please accept us with our accents
And the customs that we know
We came here for the freedom
To live and learn and grow.

Barbara's ESOL class worked together to create this poem. They are students taking classes in Lee County Adult Education at Cape Coral High School.

Way Too Young

They say that you were depressed
And that you've been for awhile
They say that you weren't happy
And that you couldn't take it anymore

But you were only 16
And way too young to die
You had your whole life ahead of you
So why didn't you try?

They say that you felt all alone
And that nobody cared
But you were never alone
Because I was always there

They say that you put on a smile
Just to put everyone else at ease
But at night when you were all alone
You would cry yourself to sleep

But you were only 16
And way **too** young to die
You had your whole life ahead of you
So why didn't you try?

After a while you decided to give up
You didn't think that life was worth the pain
So you climbed the stairs two at a time
Went to your room and ended it all.

While I was out I enjoying myself
I got the call from your mom
I completely lost it and fell apart
I hadn't even known that something was wrong.

So now as I sit here all alone
And think about all I've lost
You took your life and left me here all alone
And now all I can do is cry.

But you were only 16
And way too young to die
You could've had an amazing life
If only you tried

Devante' Ruth is a student at Indian River Correctional Institution. His teacher is Cathy Bradshaw.

Summer Time

Summer time is here again
The blue sky with the clouds on high
Gone away and here's the sun
Shining in the sky

I love to watch the children play
Cool breeze in the summer time
Butterfly, get away
From honey bees playing in the flowers

Even the wild flowers smell good
They spring out like they are laughing
And waiting for summer to come after them

The trees are old and young
The sun shines on them as they keep growing
And branching out so they will be in the breeze
The leaves are flying in the wind

Iced tea and lemonade on the table
With hot dogs and chips to eat
Picking blackberries and strawberries
Or sitting in the shade, away from the heat

Mother Nature does a good job
With all four seasons
But the country is especially nice
In the summer time season

Eridell Hill is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Leon County. Brenda Owens is her tutor

Through My Eyes

Through the eyes of a child the innocence bleeds
Unchecked corruption, a lock with no key
Learns by example to mimic what he sees:
A product of our misbegotten society.

Through the eyes of a child, ignorance is bliss
No Right and No Wrong, a time sorely missed
Traded for times when expectations persist
And fear of a father's clenched fist

Through the eyes of a child, its pain screams out
For someone to hear their insecurities and doubts
He begs us to listen as his eyes flicker about
Searching for the reasons, the Why's and the How's

Through the eyes of a child, the World is all bright
Until reality encroaches and muddles his sight
With choices to make, and causes to **fight**
And nothing to stand on but a wire strung tight

Through the eyes of a child, the tears finally race
Burning streaks in his soul as they seep down his face
A shame that when grown, his heart will never smile
Sometimes I wish I saw through the eyes of a child

Now through the eyes of a Man, I finally see what's been wrought
Of this land that men died for, with their blood it was bought
Where freedom is a commodity, a prize widely sought
Yet forgetting the Values that we once were taught

Through the eyes of a Man, the Truth becomes clear
We are enslaved by our Greed and ruled by our fears
If we question, we are ridiculed, friendly smiles turn to sneers
Should we rise up, we are crushed by the Machine's
mighty gears

Through the eyes of a Man, forged in the fires of pain
Who sees beauty, now in life, as he walks in the rain
Deep inside is a soul that's been ravaged and stained
By the loss of identity and forced acceptance of shame

Through the eyes of a Man, I search without and within
At where I went wrong and stopped wanting to win
To where I am going and from whence I have been
At **whom** I am now compared to who I was then

Through the eyes of Man, I can see where I fell
Too beaten to stand, to afraid to seek help
With pride in the way and a soul unfit to sell
I fated myself to be chained in this Hell

Through the eyes of a Man, the tears freely flow
As the child within him still seeks to know
When will his heart finally allow him to smile?
How I wish that this man could see through the eyes of a
child.

Brian Slocum is a student at DeSoto Correctional Institution.

My Goals and Ambitions

I'm now in the last decade of my life.

I would like to be happy and healthy until I die.

I eat healthy food and study new things.

I travel around the world because I like to meet people.

Gisela Goebel is an ESOL student at Lee County Adult Education at Cape Coral High School. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

Graceful Beta Fish

Light and water flow,

Long, flowing fins wave and shine.

Graceful, swimming fish.

Faye L. Smith is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

The Hill I Had To Climb

I start another day playing out my role
Just doing what I have to do,
Don't have much of a goal

My road keeps getting steeper
But still I've gotta climb
I'm in a little deeper, every time I try

Now I know the reason
Why I had to climb
It really wasn't so hard
With Jesus by my side

Now I have a reason,
I can read and write
The climb has gotten easier
I'm beginning to see the light!

Lucille Roe dropped out of school after 4th grade to raise her 6 siblings. At age 53, she has now decided to pursue her education. Her tutor is Pat Heaton.

Open Your Eyes

Open your eyes to what contains you
Confusing your heart and soul.
Always thinking your life is empty
Never feeling whole.

Clinging on to the temporary
Not knowing where to go.
Only feeling what is scary
Never saying no.

Not wanting to face the truth
That you've hurt the ones who love you
Just open your eyes and you will see
That help is right above you.

He will lead you where you need to go

Not where you thought you would be.
But to a place that will release you
Setting both heart and soul free.

Now looking back at all the things
You see that you've done wrong.
With open eyes you will find
It only made you strong.

So don't feel sad, keep moving ahead
Envision a great life
You can do it now –
Trust and believe
And always open your eyes.

Anne Hall is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

Someday

Someday I'll see you again
In the skies of blue,
And dusts of wind.

Someday we'll fly together
Over the oceans
And through the horizons.

Someday in the dark of night,
You'll guide me home
And show me the light.

Someday you'll come down for me,
And scoop me up
With your beautiful wing.

Someday our tears will dry
When we are back together
Standing side by side.
Someday I'll call your name.

Never thinking I would be able to say the word
“Daddy” again.

Someday when the time is right
I’ll be able to feel you kiss my cheek,
And whisper “goodnight.”

Someday we’ll embrace each other,
Knowing then,
We’ll be together forever.

So someday is what I look forward to,
That glorious day
I get to see you.

By: Amy Lowe “This is dedicated to my father, who I am lucky enough to have as my guardian angel now. Thanks to my teacher Jim Guffey for helping me make this what it is”.

An Acrostic About My Tutor

M arvelous tutor
A ttitude positive
R emembers to compliment
Y outhful personality
E ncourages everyone
L istens with interest
L oves to teach
E lates spirits
N otices me

Submitted by Mar Hood, a first year READ Lakeland learner in Polk County, FL who was born in Colombia, S.A. and is now a U.S. citizen.

I Am From...

I am from where girls wore shorts, T-shirts, and tennis shoes when they played basketball -- running down the court, dribbling the ball to take a shot at the basket.

I am from hot steaming bowls of chili, full of meat and
Kidney beans, with a touch of spice.

I am from where you have to drive for a
Half mile to see another house.

I am from big open fields,
Full of green tall grass that waved in the wind.

I am from a small town where everyone knows everybody.

I am from where the older folks sat on
The porch and waved at whoever passed by.

I am from where the family is very close.

I am from people getting together often to spend quality time.

I am from playing volleyball in the sand.

I am from *America's Bread Basket*.

Chasity Angeles is a GED student at TLC Online at The English Center's Homestead One Stop Center.

Summer Time

It's almost one hundred degrees under the blue sky
Most of the children are out of school
And spring break is now in session. Fun, fun, fun...
One of the most beautiful seasons of the year

At night time many stars can be seen with the naked eye
Fair grounds are all over the towns and everyone running up
And down the trails on the ATVs having good times

This is the season that all Floridians gathered all of the supplies

Needed for hurricane season
Surrounding us we have the Atlantic and the Gulf of Mexico
Oceans warming us up and getting ready to rage on the peninsula

That is also the season most animals replenish their food
Reserve and get ready for the bad season
Otherwise there'll be no back up and starvation can take place

After all summer time is summer time, ain't nothing like it
Every year we all have the same expectation, can't wait for summer
To come. What a beautiful season

*Bernard Louis is a focused and **brilliant** student in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program. He has dedicated his life to reaching his goal and getting his GED*

Second Chance

Before you were born, I was already in love
With you, baby boy, my gift from above.
I never knew how deep a mother's love could be
Until they handed you wrapped in a blanket to me.

The minute they placed you against my chest
I knew that I had truly been blessed.
Such a perfect baby that could have been sent to anyone.
How did I get so lucky that God let you be my son?

I looked at your cherub cheeks and your chestnut brown eyes
And knew that I loved you more than all the stars in the skies.

I counted your fingers and each of your tiny toes
Anticipating the days I'd enjoy just watching you grow.

I watched you grow bigger day by day
Excited by every movement and sound that you made.
No amount of gold could ever compare
To the love you and your mommy will share.

You give me a reason to get through each day.
You fill my life with joy with your own special ways.
The sound of your laughter gives me such delight
With you as my son, life will always be bright.
I watched you laughing and running and playing all day,

Until an illness came and took it all away.
I was gripped with fear as you became so ill,
My heart broke as you lay in that hospital bed, so still.

Not moving or smiling, not even awake
It was almost more pain than my heart could take.
Not knowing if I'd ever again hear your sweet voice
Or watch you run and jump and make lots of noise.

Life without you in it, I just couldn't face,
I prayed to the Heavens above and trusted my faith.
I vowed I would be the best mom I could be
If God gave you a second chance here with me.
God, let me watch my baby boy grow to be a good man
I'll love him and teach him the best that I can!
His time can't be up, he has so much yet to see
Let me keep him this gift that you've given to me.

God granted my wish and made you like new
I promise every morning and night that I'll cherish you.
For your life I am grateful and each day my heart smiles
All because I am able to call you my child.

For Gabriel, Love Mommy

Trista Brim has been very successful in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. Her positive energy pushed her through to achieve her dreams.

Dreams

In the middle of the night,
God heard my thankful prayers.
When they broke off through the sky,
Was so peaceful, heaven level.

In my dream a chorus sang.
Only a verse can forget ever
My own mind can just remember.
Ask my mind to never forget.

In the middle of the night,
Is a couple praying their prayers

For the health of loved ones
Asking always heal the members.

Were some voices heard up high,
I saw everyone together.
But time past and I decided
Think that humans went to heaven

I heard babies playing together
I thought that is my loved one
My beloved was seen in heaven.

I heard noises on my side.
I kept listening forever.
But is gorgeous as an ark
Where our prayers collect together.

In the middle of the night,
Everyone always remembers
Who else not to leave behind
Just before the time passes.

All the prayers will be found
By the humming of my elders.
When they bend knees in the ground
All of heaven hears their prayers.

Also looking at the sky
I felt like doing it forever.
I saw all the shiny stars.
I would like to always remember.

In my dream I saw my Lord
Walking down the stairs of heaven
Because the trumpet is about to blow
Calling saints to live forever.

Gladys DeMayol is dedicated to her church and dreams of being a bilingual preacher. She is in the ESOL program at Aparicio-Levy Technical Center in Tampa.

Prison Thoughts

Although I only made one mistake
Sixty-two months of my life it did take.
Leaving behind my family and friends
I would never want to end up here again.

Now changing is something I must do when I leave this place
I will leave with a new outlook on life and plans for success.
I know that I'll make it, if I try my best.
So I live each day here on at a time
They have my freedom, but not my mind.
So I think about the day when I leave the gate
And the things I will have accomplished before my EOS date.

I will be grateful because I decided to change
And that my time spent here was not in vain.
Now a mother and a daughter is what I can be.

I won't let my DC number define me
So when I feel bad I remember what a wise man told me.
"Without a test, there is no testimony".
So I hold my head high and continue to smile
Because this will all be over after while.

Nakisha Sullivan is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

I Am From

I am from wherever streets, corner to corner, plagued by drugs
I am from dwellings known as projects
I am from fried chicken and french fries
I am from snack food, burgers, sodas, junk
I am from flea markets that have everything you wish for
I am from church houses on every corner
...And as a final point...
I am from a city called, ironically, Liberty.

Jamie Barnett is a GED online student from TLC Online at Homestead One Stop Center. Her teacher is Mrs. Ramirez.

Do You Know Who I Am?

I go on. Floating through
Minutes, hours, months
And years. Everything a swirl of
Colors, faces, voices, names
And numbers. I just live life.

Do you

Really want to follow? Let's go
Check out the ocean. Feel salty
Breeze and summer drafts sink
Into our skin. While we sink into
Each other. I want you to

Know

Who I am. I want to know
Every inch of your silky soft
Skin. So fragile. As if you
Could shatter into a million
Little pieces. Yet that isn't

Who

I am. I would wrap you in
Gold and silver if I could.
So pure. Shimmering water
Reflected by clear blue sky.
I need you here where

I am.

George Arias is registered in the GED Program at The English Center. His teacher is Elena Jakubowicz.

Carlee

Her bright hazel eyes
Her soft ivory skin
Her warm innocence
Has taken my breath again

Her blonde curly hair
Her cute chubby cheeks
Her giant loving heart,
That loves me

Her ten little fingers
Her ten little toes
Her amazing smile,
That makes me glow

Her charming button nose
Her beautiful playful laugh
Her presence is welcomed,
More than she knows
Nothing like watching your
Baby grow

Love always, **Mama!**

Valerie Archer is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Catie Griffith is her teacher.

Friendship Corner

In the friendship corner,
All creatures are moving in an abstract order.
Well-mannered, the German Shepherd Dog
As sitting for the illustrated catalog.

Dressed in a fancy coat, all dusky,
Unleashed, the Siberian Husky
Bumped into the wheel rim,
But nothing happened to him.

All is well, that ends well -
Gracefully said the French Spaniel.
There is a fine smell around her,
She has flowing blond hair.

The dogs don't need any stage-manage,
To give owners a social advantage.
Surrounding the friendship corner
The pet lovers start talking on the grass border.

Malgorzata Cwierzinska is a student of Miami Beach Adult and Community Education Center, ESOL 5 Program. Her teacher is Sherman Bergman

For Love Lingers

The luckiest person of all times is the one who finds true love.

I've crossed oceans of times to find you.

My destiny is you.

When all else fails, love prevails.

My face a river of tears and fears without you.

A bond of love of times of past can make you recall the feeling still
last.

Like a dog without a bone, I am without you.

*Josephine Cunliffe lives in Beverly Hills, FL with her husband and young son,
Tommy.*

Never Knew I Needed You

When you fell from up above,

I knew I was in love.

When I fell in love with you,

You made me feel complete.

And when the time for love was over,

I never knew I needed you.

And for all the times I needed you,

You were there for me in my soul.

And when it was time for you to go,

Tears came to my eyes.

You were always there to wipe them away,

I never knew I needed you.

*Yasmine Gunter attends classes at Columbia's Adult Education Program in pursuit
of her GED.*

I Am From

I am from a family of four
Who have little in common, but the same parents.
I am from being raised to stick together,
No matter what our disagreements.
I am from two different cultures that created me out of love.
I am from feeling affection
Which has taught me to be who I am today.
I am from loving, caring, and sharing in a time of need.
I am from a special breed.

Katrina Kitchens is the personification of a positive attitude. Working on getting her GED diploma, she attends a blended learning class at TLC Online at The English Center with Mrs. Ramirez.

I Love You

Roses are red, violets are blue
This poem is just for you;
Roses are sweet just like you
I hope you love them too!
You are my first love, too
Every day I think about you.
I feel loved when I am with you.
Now it's time to kiss you;
I will always love you.

Devan Stuggis is a bright student who loves to read, and write poetry. He lives in a Group Home in Hollywood and attends Lucarus Developmental Center. His teacher is Betty Lewis.

The Queen in Me

Alone in my bed, I sit and stare,
Wondering what the day will hold,
As the night hours unfold.

In my mind, thoughts of time race by,
Some so good, I wished would have last,
Others, I'm so happy they have all passed.

I know that things have to change,
It's not just for me, to rearrange.
Not sure, where I should start,
I'm searching, for His special mark.

It will begin, first within me, this I know.
From the inside, where only He and I can see the show.
Then the light will shine its way,
To the outer surface, to brighten all of my days.

It will guide, my steps to places unknown,
To show me, it's where I've belonged.
Places with depth and height,
To help me reach all my goals,
That I have in my sight.

To become, The Queen of me,
To be able to lead my daughter,
To her destiny.

To be the Mother with wisdom from above,
To teach her all, that I know and love.
Being the Mother whose embrace,
Is full of love, warmth, and grace.

A mother that's a friend,
Who offers advice that can only mend.
Sharing time, just us two,
That will last, a life time too.

Expressing love for her and me,
So that we are able to give it freely.

Crying, laughing, dancing, and singing
Enjoying all of life's glories.

These fragments of thoughts,
That has come to me, of the person,
Mother, that I long to be.

So I ask, Dear Lord take my hand,
Lead me to your paths, so that I can stand.
I know now, that it was me leading before,
And now I know, I need you more.

I'm reaching out, right hand extended,
Ready and willing, to follow your call.
This time I know...
I will not, fall!

Valarie Annalisa Schlosser lives in South Florida with her daughter. She has been divorced 8 years now, after 19 years of marriage. She is on the journey to find the "Queen" in her.

Abandoned

Why don't you care about who I am or who I'm going to be?

Nobody sees this pain. I don't tell anybody.

I keep it hidden deep inside me.

No phone calls. Not even a short term visit.

Jump in your car and drive. It's not that hard is it?

Pain lives inside me. Insecurity surrounds my mind.

Seeing you once or twice out of the year isn't enough time.

This empty space in my heart should be filled with your presences.

Still no phone call or visit. I guess Daddy hasn't learned his lesson.

Kiley Thomson is a dedicated student at Lehigh Sr. High School, GED Program.

Lost In This World

Sometimes
I feel so lost,
I'm trying to find my place in this world!

I look around at this place,
Scared out of my mind!

Where to go?
What to do?
Who to open up to?

There are so many things to do
But, so little time!
I shout for HELP!

It's like no one can hear me! HELP!

Does anyone hear me? HELP!

Why can't I be loved like other girls are loved?

I'm crying out to be heard
And to be loved!

I'm so sick of being lost,
Can someone HELP ME?
PLEASE

I need to be found,
I have no clue what to do
In this world.

I'm lost,
HELP
PLEASE
HELP

I'm so lost in this world!

Tori Rawlins is pursuing her GED at Columbia's Adult Education Program.

In My Dream...

Somewhere in my dreams tonight
I'll see you standing there.
You look at me with a smile. "Life isn't fair."

You say you were chosen for his
Garden, his preciously hard picked bouquet,
"God really needs me, that's why I couldn't stay!"

It's said to be that angels are sent from above,
I've always had my angel, my brother
Whose heart was filled with love.

Whenever the oceans meet the sky,
There will be memories of you and I.

When I look up at the sky so blue,
All I see are visions of you.

"While there is a heart in my body,
You'll be a part of me."

Brittany Sumner is in the GED Program at Lee County Adult & Career Education, and plans to go on to become a Paramedic.

Actions

Actions speak louder than words.
Actions are your choices.
Actions are the results of your thoughts.
Actions can get you sent to places good and bad.
Actions can come as your mistakes.
Actions are your ideas put in play.
Actions whether good or bad are the choices you make on your
own.

Brewanna Haugen is a GED student in Leon County

Love and an Empty Page

Maybe I'm tired of this empty page or
Maybe I'm tired of my heart's pain and rage.
 Maybe I'm tired of being in the rain
 Or sad songs on this lonely day.
I need a little sunshine, a crystal blue day.
 No winds of trouble, no clouds of gray
 To blow throughout or cover our day.
 Just a walk down a wooden path then
To feel the warmth of his breath on my lips,
 While his hands are on my hips.
 Maybe I'm tired of falling to the floor
And watching my dreams just pass through the door
 Or maybe I need his love like never before,
 To help heal my heart from its closing door.
 Or maybe I'm just tired of this empty page
 And need a little love to ease the pain.

Lynn Tranter is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

I Am From Conquering Life's Possibilities

I am from a mom of strength that carried the burdens of her family.
I am from a place full of sunshine rays, where the heat is always on.
I am from a time of dancing with my tutu, tap shoes, and long legs.
I am from soul food, a heaping of collard greens, black-eyed peas,
 and a slice of Mama's famous sweet potato pie.
I am from a place of living out my dreams and goals.

I am from a spot of conquering life's possibilities.

I am from a family of leadership,

Leading and guiding my daughter into her destiny.

I am from the joy of laughter watching *Sanford and Son*,
What's Happening, *In Living Color*, and *The Three Stooges*.

I am from a home of unity with a father and mother,

Three sisters, and two brothers.

I am from a culture of determination,

Where adversity does not matter.

I am from a place of survival, a healthy mind, body and soul.

I am from a faith where God has called me and blessed me.

Tatoya Knox is a GED student at TLC Online at The English Center's Homestead One Stop Center.

Time Is Winding Up

Time is winding up I can see it so clear
My E.O.S. is nearing I can feel it in the air
Now I ask the question, "What will I do?"
Will I enjoy my exit or leave here feeling blue?

I have so many people I've met along the way
My heart will leave here heavy because behind they will stay
I know that it's not easy to sit here doing time
My new found family and loved ones, I'll have to leave inclined

Time is winding up there's so much I want to do
To those I leave here in this place, I'll make sure I stay true
I'll shower them with letters and cards for the holidays
With the money that I will make, my tithes to them I'll pay

I know my God will lead me in all I plan to do
He's molding and shaping me, I'll leave here fresh and new
I know I must stay focused to make it to that day
This soon will be behind me, "Hallelujah" I will say

Time is winding up I thought it would never come
My days here have been lengthy, but the new me has begun
The Lord has kept me healthy and peaceful along the way
I pray now for people to allow God not to lead them astray

Angela Shepherd is under the leadership of Mrs. Jackson-Orange, PC Support Services at Broward Correctional Institution. She is a loving mother of her two little angels, De'Andrey and Andreka Shepherd.

From Pain to Joy

Tomorrow is promised to no one.
There's no guarantee.
Joy and pain goes together
This you will see.

It's hard to find a true friend
For they are but a few
It's not many you can depend on
That will go through hard **times** with you.

People take your kindness for weakness
To feed their selfish ways
Not knowing how much you're blessed
And protected because you pray.

While you're down
Others turn their back and laugh
None know why God put you in their paths.

The world is filled with so much hate
It's hard to find someone to admire,
But I've found the best friend in God
Because he's not a liar.

When all else fails
And no one else is true.
Lift your head to the sky.
God's waiting on you.

Sophia Milton is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

Flip Mode

I remember playing outside as a little girl,
Being with my friends, going to school hand in hand
Learning my ABC's and 1, 2, 3's
Although it seems it was all a dream

Now what I remember is screaming at age 3
To the top of my lungs,
"Mom please help, he's burning me!"
Although it seems it was all a dream

I remember going to middle school
Being a cheerleader
Celebrating my 12th birthday with family and loved ones
Although it seems it was just a dream

Now what I remember, is being raped by my brother
Not knowing what "the pill" was
While my family pushed it down my throat
But, did it work? NO
Although it seems it was just a dream

It was all a dream
I remember going out with boys...
And my Mom telling me,
"Now don't be late. Hurry back so we can talk about your date."
Although it seems it was just a dream

Hey! I remember jumping in and out of cars
Trying to put clothes on my back, food in my mouth, and not be late
to pay the rent
Although it seems it was all a dream

I remember graduating, getting my own place,
Enjoying nightlife, and one getting married to someone who love
me
Although it seems it was all a dream

Sure, I do remember getting married
Being a punching bag when he felt it was time
Or being locked up in the house until he decided to let me out

Although it seems it was just a dream

Maybe one day I will wake up...

Although it seems just a dream

Latasha Redding is a student in Ms. John-Pierre's GED class at Broward Correctional Institution.

My Baby Lynn

She loves me just the way I am.

She loves me that the way I am supposed to be loved.

There used to be a big, dark cloud over me.

She showed me how life was meant to be.

She loves me just the way I am.

The last four and a half years have been sublime.

The four and a half years I can call all mine.

She loves me just the way I am.

We have dealt with a lot of issues that required a lot of tissues.

She loves me just the way I am.

We have a family of our own.

It's so much better than being alone.

She loves me just the way I am.

Our relationship can be a little outlandish,

But at the end of the day our love is as sweet as a candy dish.

She loves me just the way I am.

I didn't think very much of myself some time ago.

Now my self-esteem and morale are no longer low.

She loves me just the way I am.

A lot of sacrifices have been made for me.

I was an obnoxious, bratty Julie.

She loves me just the way I am.

I just want to tell the world how much I love her.
I also wanted to say that we will be together forever.

She loves me just the way I am.

I love me just the way I am!!

Julie Croisetu, age 32, lives in Homosassa, FL, with her 6 yr. old, Naomi. The poem is about the love of her life, her girlfriend Wendy Lynn.

I Am From

I am from a place with four seasons.

I am from a winter when the trees go bare.

I am from snowball fights and early release from school.

I am from a spring when everything seems to blossom to perfection.

I am from riding bikes and baseball games in the backyard.

I am from a fall when the leaves turn vibrant colors.

I am from foliage piles and spaghetti and meatball dinners with
family.

I am from a summer when the warmth wraps around your body.

I am from pool parties and all night fun.

I am from the Ocean State.

I am from Rhode Island.

Destiny Bruno is a GED student studying online and in the classroom with TLC Online at The English Center.

The Woman That I Admire

The woman that I admire has something magical
She makes me smile when nothing is fine.
I could tell her all my feelings and she always tells me happy
endings.

With her by my side I'll never be down,
Because when I'm sad she is such a clown;
She makes me stronger, I won't fall,
She will make me happy till the end of time.

She is my aunt, she is my lifelong friend,
And I will live my life doing things that will make her proud
I will always sing it out loud:
She is the woman that I admire, the one that I miss, the one that I
will always love
But near or far, she'll be forever in my heart!

She is the greatest woman that I know,
She blows my pain away
I just love her more and more every single day!

She makes me believe, so I'll never lose my faith,
God makes her a better human being,
The best woman I've ever seen!

When she is by my side all that I can see is Jesus' love,
Because when you look at her,
You feel like Jesus is right there!

She is the woman that I love,
For all these things and more,
She is the woman that I admire
I will praise the Lord
For giving me the best AUNT in the world!

Vivianne Perez is an advanced student at Piper Community School. She has only been here since October 2010, but she already is showing off her poetry.

I Am From

I am from a sunshine state.

I am from an old soul.

I am from some good lip-smacking candied yams.

I am from yummy potato bread.

I am from mama's respect and honor.

I am from a place where when it rains it pours.

I am from love of knowledge and learning.

I am from a helping hand!

Maranda Griffin is a GED student with TLC Online at The English Center/Homestead One Stop Center.

I Am From

I am from Hoosier territory

Where we picked pumpkins, squash, bell peppers, and corn.

I am from the harvesting of delicious apples and peaches.

I am from a family of twelve siblings,

But we still live to tell the tale.

I am from a place of surviving and hard work.

I am from being able to enjoy helping others.

I am from a good family that cares, and

Taught us to be honest and responsible.

I am from communication and media.

Diana Contreras is a GED Student at TLC Conline at the English Center/Homestead Campus One Stop Center.

Silent Cry For Help

The time has come for me to take a look at my past
A life of being a public nuisance and a family outcast

Looking back, I see nothing picturesque or pretty
Only a kaleidoscope of misery and self-pity!

Thinking back on a life of drinking and smoking crack
Only to go through withdrawals as hallucinations rode heavily on
my back

Going from being the perfect mother and wife-
To taking a 360 degree turn with my life!!!

With only the memories of holding my child at night close to me
And these desperate, silent pleas...

Calling out to a Father whom I had no idea existed
Until He heard my cry and my life began to tenderly and lovingly
fix

Thank God that He heard my Silent and sincere cry for help
Not only did He hear my cry, He showed me the way step by step

Counting my blessings, trials tribulations and past experiences
And the manner in which my Silent plea was heard and answered...

After my mistakes I find myself in prison with much time to idle
away
I use it instead to thank God for hearing my cry each and every day

I thank God for intervening and lending me a hand
Today with His loving mercy, in my recovery I am able to stand!

Shelia Smith is a PC Support Student at Broward Correctional Institution at the young age of 45.

He Played Guitar

He played guitar in a three room shack, out on the porch, out in the back. We gather round to hear him play his songs. Yeah, we were just kids, but he let us play along. We played on anything we found at hand, table spoons and pots and pans. He made us believe we were part of his band. And when the song was over he smiled and clapped his hands. We all believed he was gonna go far. If he had only gone he'd been a star. He never left he always stayed. Yeah, his family was more important to him, I bet.

'Cause he could play the guitar just like Johnny Be Good. Sing and dance just like Elvis could. He made it look easy just like ringing a bell. Yeah if he had any regrets it was hard to tell.

Then Monday morning he'd hit the road. In a raggedy Mac truck with a heavy load. Dragging them chains on and off all day. Yeah it was a hell of a waste of a talent, but he had that pay to make.

'Cause he could play the guitar just like Johnny Be Good. Sing and dance just like Elvis could. He made it look easy just like ringing a bell. Yeah if he had any regrets it was hard to tell.

Then Sunday morning we would gather round. In that three room shack at the edge of town. To listen to Papa play that old guitar. Yeah if he'd only gone he would have been a star.

'Cause he could play the guitar just like Johnny Be Good. Sing and dance just like Elvis could. He made it look easy just like ringing a bell. Yeah if he had any regrets it was hard to tell.

Then Monday morning came rain or shine. He'd get that load there right on time. Working for hours before daybreak. Yeah it was a hell of a wasted talent, but logging made his pay.

'Causehe could play the guitar just like Johnny Be Good. Sing and dance just like Elvis could. He made it look easy just like ringing a bell. Yeah if he had any regrets it was hard to tell.

Edward A Hodges Jr. is a student at Jefferson Correctional Facility.

I Am From

I am from a beautiful red-bone, curly-haired
Mother smiling and loving me daily.
I am from a mom raising me to become a strong intelligent man.
I am from a big beautiful Puerto Rican family that's loud and proud.
I am from pork chops, rice and beans, and avocado
With lettuce and tomatoes.
I am from the borough of all boroughs.
I am from the fast pace and always looking back.
I am from the subways and graffiti art.
I am from the metal benches and brick projects of
"Bedstye Do or Die."
I am from where the buildings are so tall,
It seems they are touching the clouds.
I am from where Kings and Bloods are
Running crazy... selling drugs.
I am from the jungle -- and if you make it there,
You could make it anywhere.

*Christian Gonzalez is preparing for the GED with Mrs. Ramirez at TLC Online at
The English Center/Homestead One Stop Center.*

A Woman's Cry

A woman's teardrop what does that mean
Joy, excitement, sorrow or shame
A woman's teardrop in the corner of her eyes
The day she became one with her chosen guy
A woman's teardrop crystal clear and uniquely shaped
The day she bore a child holding and rocking in faith
A woman's teardrop raging water over a fall
Calling, praying, pleading, believing in it all
A woman's teardrop, alone in the dark
Listening in the moonlight, falling one at a time on her heart
Secrets being told, secrets she holds
Many days many nights as memories unfold
Thoughts and fears, burdens she bears
Shedding her cares through tears

Father, are you there?
Hear her, cover her, hold her, mold her, teach her, shower her
With the love, grace and mercy you share
Patiently she waits, torn battered and raped
Until that day comes you wipe her tears away

Dianne Greene is a Fashion Design student at Broward CI. Her teacher is Mrs. Terrelonge-Fawcett.

Favorite Place

Cocoa brown skin, straight black hair
Beautiful she is, no one else compares
With the voice of an angel that I miss oh so much
In my mother's arms is the place that I love.
Stars are what they are, bright as can be
Stars that twinkle with every blink
I see them when I look into mine
Yes I do have my Mother's Eyes.
Close your eyes and imagine this
A small peck from someone's lips
Upon your cheek every night
Along with a lullaby that you like.
By just looking you would swear she couldn't hear
Upon the side of her head were these tiny ears
I would talk and talk for hours on end
She would listen, respond and listen again.
It's as good as cool ocean breezes
Give me a hug for no apparent reason
With a touch like a pillow, all snuggled and warm
This, my favorite place, is where I belong.
Shhhh!!!...Can you hear that? Well I can
She's singing once again and clapping her hands
She smiles every time there is a pause in the song
I guess she is waiting for me to sing along.
One last look is what I ask
Even a glimpse wouldn't be too fast
Anything, an eye, an ear, her nose is what I'd like to see
Near my mother is my favorite place to be.

Krisany Ghosh is an adult education TLC Online student at The English Center.

I Am From

I am from barefoot kids running all the way through the fields
I am from mud and multicolored marbles and
 Fun with all my friends
I am from sunny days eating ice cream on the driveway
I am from love that brought my parents together
I am from dirt and grassland, watering plants, and plucking weeds
 I am from warm tortillas and spicy sauces
 I am from caring and hard working parents
I am from life-learned lessons that made me the person I am today.

Elizabeth Avalos is a GED student with TLC Online at The English Center at The English Center/Homestead One Stop Center.

A Bad Day

To have a day a day like mine
I swear you'd think you've lost your mind
 To try so hard just to fail
It makes you scream "all bloody hell"
 To stub your toe not once or twice
 To be so tired of being nice
You want to scream but yet you don't
 It's almost like you want to choke
 Not a word that you utter
 You hold your breath
Blue is a nice color but so are the rest
So take a deep breath and soon you will see
This world is full of crazy people just like me
 To fight to hit, to throw a fit
It sounds like someone needs a fix
 To be so cruel and not so nice
It like you put your head in a vice
 To torch it down not once or twice
 It almost sounds kind of nice
So don't you worry and don't you fret
Tomorrow is coming it could be a better day yet

Kristine Bartlett was a single mom of 2 kids that she raised by herself after her ex-husband died in 2002. Her kids are gone and now it's her turn to do for her.

I'm All Better Now

I cannot tell you why I feel the way I do.
Sometimes I'm up, sometimes I'm down.
 You can see it in my face
 When I'm happy or when I'm sad.
There's usually a smile when happiness hangs around,
 When the sadness comes, there is a frown.
I need some excitement, or a good friend to keep me up.
 I don't need any more bad ones they do the opposite.
There are days when I forget about all the wrong in my life,
And then it all hits me, feels like I'm being stabbed by a knife.
 I do not talk to anyone
 Everything is okay,
 I write my feelings down on paper;
 I get it all out somehow.
Now it's all gone, and I feel just fine
I knew things would come around for this life of mine.
All I really have to do is think of all the positive things I have
 going.
 I'm strong enough to smile.
 I may get sad from time to time
 But it is not showing.
 I have a huge smile on my face,
 It is bright and I am glowing.
I can now tell you why I feel the way I do,
 I am all better now, that is true.
I am a lucky girl, and I should not think anything less.

Taylor Bush attends classes at Columbia's Adult Education Center and plans on pursuing her college education.

**Portraits of Beauty
(Picture This)**

(Picture this)

I am just, more than the average man
Even though they judge my past, they just don't understand
A victim of the streets, and dramatized by my dreams
Though I am stared at, as if the most
beautiful thing you've ever seen
Crooked man, wit' crooked ways, and willing to change
I just wish I could have changed before my time came

(Picture this)

The sun will set, beautiful skies, hair blows in the wind
Nice sculptures of ice, smoother than a baby's skin
Sunny days, children play, the night full of stars
The night grass caresses you, in a distance you see Mars
Now ain't that to tell the truth, the nicest I've ever seen
Only to wake up and see it was just a dream

(Picture this)

Imagine meeting a girl that makes you want to love
Figuring that she has to be an angel sent from above
Beautiful in all ways, she is all I want to see
The reason I smile, the reason I sing, the reason I breathe
She's a piece of my heart, I'll never let go
I only pray to God that she knows

(Picture this)

I only think for today, each second
And understand that each day is a blessing
So I ask the lord to guide me, give me guidance
Maybe I'll be a man, and stop all this hiding
He said understand my right, and respect my left
And all these portraits I've painted were portraits of myself.

NOW

PICTURE DAT!!!

Derek Johnson is pursuing his GED in Columbia County and plans on attending college.

I Am From

I am from a place where the rum is sweet like sugar
I am from a place where you never see snow,
But see lots of sunshine
I am originally from a place where the coquis sing at night,
But I was raised where dolphins jump and splash
I am from a time when money wasn't everything
I am from a time when the air smelled like
my mother's cooking – sweet and spicy
I am from a time when you could have chickens and
Roosters in your back yard, and no one cared.
I am from a time when on Halloween you could hear,
“Trick-or-treat,” from a mile away.
I am from a time when you could see
Real people acting -- not computer-animated actors.
I am from a time when every family had a clown or someone who
Made us laugh; my Auntie was that clown. Unique!
I am from a time where we played football
On asphalt -- not on grass.
I am from a time when neighbors were family
Not just people who lived next door to us.
I am from a time when we used our fists to fight.
I am from family togetherness, a little spice, and lots of love.

Miguel Ozuna is a family man and an ABE/ Reading student with TLC Online at The English Center.

Grandma's Reminiscences

Hot cocoa breakfast,
Carbon stove pipe outdoor meal,
Countryside lifestyle.

Zoila Plumer is an online student at TLC Online at The English Center's Homestead One-Stop Outreach GED Class.

I Am From

I am from the land where you wake up to the rooster singing
And you fall asleep with “el coqui’s” songs
I am from a place full of mountains everywhere
I am from a place where you could go walking everywhere
I am from a place where the beach is fifteen minutes away
I am from a place where night time is best
I am from a place where you could find a party every day
I am from a place where you could raise
Your own pigs, chickens, and goats
I am from a place where the whole neighborhood
Knows one another
I am from a place where you wake up to a
Cup of coffee, fried eggs, and sweet sobao bread
I am from a place where you eat pork almost every day
I am from a place where you fly colorful kites in “El Morro”
I am from a place where you could eat the best
“bacalaitos, alcapurrias and piononos”
I am from a place where the beautiful “El Yunque” stays
I am from a place where your skin color
Doesn’t make you be more important or less.
I am from a land of the Indians “Tainos.”
I am from the island Spain named Puerto Rico – the rich port.

Juan Rodriguez is an online GED student with TLC Online at The English Center.

Beautiful

She is so beautiful
I feel like there is no tomorrow looking at her.
Her eyes shine like the morning sun rising.
Her hair is as soft as a little teddy bear.
My heart stops when she looks back at me.
Her smile brightens up the entire room.
She is the most beautiful girl in this world.
And she is perfect in every way.
I love her, she is beautiful.

David Swisloksy is a committed student in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program. He has dedicated his life to reaching his goal and getting his GED.

I Am From Faith

I am from a beautiful world which God created.
I am from an African culture that knows how to survive with the
 little they have
I am from a family that encouraged me never to give up
I am from a pot of collard greens and neck bones that I can still
 smell today
I am from a lot of memories such as: walking in the rain, throwing
 rocks in the pond, and being grateful for all things
I am from a place where I have to work hard to succeed
I am from a position where I have to stay positive, so I can achieve
 my goals
I am from faith!

Elizabeth Dewberry is a dedicated GED student at TLC Online at The English Center's Homestead One Stop Center.

Black Masks

We enter this new world with our shiny black faces
 Seeking for our true identity among other races

 Shackled aboard slave ships
We were brought and we were sold,
All around the world as black gold.

Each one of us should feel Mother Africa's pain,
 She weeps for the children,
 Stolen from her womb in chains.

We are the sons and daughters of a mother neglected and deprived.

 Wearing these shiny black masks
 Since the day we arrived.

Marcel M Thomas is a student at Jefferson Correctional Institution.

I Am From

I am from dirt roads tucked neatly away in a small town.

I am from the breast of no-nonsense firmness, strength, endurance --
from the rod not being spared, yet so gentle and delicate.

I am from dressing up with my sister in our mother's high-heel
shoes and wigs, imitating our favorite teachers -- Mrs. Betty and
Mrs. Shelifield.

I am from sitting on the laps of elders whose cheeks smelled of
peppermint.

I am from the church on the hilltop.

I am from long tables of candied yams, collard greens, turnip
greens, rutabagas, homemade hot buttermilk biscuits, country-fried
catfish, lemon cake, and homemade ice cream topped off with Kool-
Aid and peach cobbler.

I am from windmill cookies which were two cents each.

I am from coming home from school to peanut butter and jelly
sandwiches, and hanging out with *Tom and Jerry* and then the
Welcome Back Kotter crew, *Good Times*, *What's Happening*, *Happy
Days*, *Laverne and Shirley*, and the *Dukes of Hazards* -- just to name
a few.

I am from tattling on my siblings to save myself.

I am from games of hide-and-seek, hopscotch, boys catch the girls,
London Bridge, jumping jacks, and bola bat.

I am from long, hot summer days playing as if tomorrow would
never come.

I am from where women gathered for prayer meetings on the front
porch.

I am from an era where children respected their elders.

I am from a time when children played in harmony while adults
laughed, washed, cooked, sang, and danced.

I am from the essence of blackness and proud of it!

*Leann Thompson is a home-based online GED student with TLC Online at The
English Center. Leann loves to read various types of literature and write poetry.*

The Mirror

We sometimes think life is just a mirror. Not necessarily.
Maybe, I wonder! But a mirror just shows our reflection.
Maybe if we look a little deeper we can contrast our way of living.

By reminiscing, the way we carry ourselves,
And how we live our life.

Sometimes I feel alone, abandoned and unloved.
But there is one who cares and he is infinite God.
He gives and takes, but he is just the greatest of all
But I create the mirror to reflect on life and
How we live, and view it.

The least we can do in life is to make the best of it.

But what if we don't do well?

But what if we don't live how we should?

But what if we forget to pray?

To be thankful? To love? And to serve?

But what if we forget to do well in just about everything?

What a careless and **wasted** life we would live.

Likewise, my friends do well. It makes sense.

Who knows, but the one above? Just think about it.

Well that's just "The Mirror"

Terry Walker is 20 years old and was born in Rochester, New York. Terry was raised in Jamaica and is currently a student in Collier County.

Memories Of You

You were like a fresh breath of air first thing in the morning,
You were my therapy when I needed help

You were my superhero when I needed to be saved,
And my one true friend that I could tell everything and it would stay
between us

You were like a big brother and dad at the same time. You knew just
what to say to put a smile on my face, and keep me out of trouble

You always gave the best advice about everything and always kept a
positive attitude toward everyone

You were the life of every party we went to

You kept the fun going and were always the one person that I could
depend on no matter what the situation was. Now that you're gone, I
find it hard to go through the day without you

You were like sunshine on a rainy day to me, but now all I have is a
picture in a frame to see your face

I only wish that I could've seen you one more time before you
walked out of my life forever

I will always cherish the memories that I have of you and me
together.

Shay Williams attends classes at the Columbia County Career and Adult Education Center in pursuit of her GED. She plans to attend Florida Gateway College upon graduation.

Pretty Little Angel

Never would have thought at the age of 16, I was going to have to give a permanent goodbye forever.

Never understood the reason why God takes people out of your life that you love so dearly.

That night he took you away; he took a piece of my heart too.

I would've never thought that you were on God's list to join him.

Four years later I still think, smile, and laugh at all we did while growing up.

If you were still here with me today, we will probably be laughing and finding something to do on a boring day.

Sometimes as I lay in bed, all of a sudden I smile out of the blue; as I know it's you saying, "Violet I'm right here with you," smiling right along with me.

Yeah, I have my days and want to cry, but your spirit won't let me.

You want me to be happy and move on letting me know you're with me every step of the way.

The way you guide me through life, removing all obstacles away from me, removing the ones that mean nothing but harm to me.

I never feel alone even when I am.
I love you always and forever, and I miss you so much!
RIP Qusmilee Russ, Branquanya Griffin

Sincerely Yours, Violet Williams

Violet Williams is pursuing her GED and plans to attend Florida Gateway College.

Emotions

Emotions come and go
Some are good, some are bad
Some are mixed, some are sad
Words can define the feeling of our emotions
Many people say, "I'm an emotional roller coaster"
That most definitely explains my feeling
I'm up then down sad then happy
Some of my emotions have me feeling numb
I'm sad but I can't cry
My eyes are all dried out
My Bunkie say what's wrong
I can't speak don't eat
My life seems like a never ending road
I've hit the dead end zone
The road doesn't go on once I turn around I must not look back
I must have a different mindset
The pavement had on yellow line so you must walk a straight line
The life I strive I have 4 wheel drive with two yellow lines
My life line consists of mail and phone
As you can tell I'm ready **to go** home
This one day pray come my way May 28, 2011
All this will fade away
Never again will I say my emotions got the best of me
Because I've EOS. And I can see clearly
I'm back on the road the dead end sign is 22 miles gone
I've made it! I'm on my way home.

Lachavious Woods is a student in Ms. Toole's ABE III class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.

I Am From

I am from a big family of twelve, eight girls and four boys

I am from a mom who baked her own bread and
tortillas -- a delightful smell

I am from a mom who taught us to get up early and go to work
because, "I won't always be here to take care of you"

I am from where you see cows, horses, and ranchos

I am from where you see tall, handsome cowboys riding on
horseback through the sun-baked desert

I am from the fields picking bell peppers,
tomatoes, okra, limes, and green beans

I am from working in packing houses,
making boxes, and packing vegetables

I am from eating beef tacos, chicken enchiladas, hot spicy menudo,
tamales cooked on corn leaves, spicy foods made out of onions,
tomatoes, and red hot peppers

I am from green cactus cooked with onions and jalapeños

I am from a little black and white TV where I watched *Tom and
Jerry*, *The Three Stooges*, and *Little House on the Prairie*
with all my sisters

I am from those 45 rpms that played mariachi music for us to dance
to with our big old brightly colored dresses

I am from the Lone Star.

*Amelia Zepeda is a hardworking GED student at TLC Online at The English
Center's Homestead One Stop Center.*

Precious Princess Palace

Pure is the princess and perfect is her love
The person I adore has shown me this love
She stands on this earth leaving a blueprint
A pattern of a princess perfecting her palace

Peace and prayer are placed in my princess
A favorite place I want to be no matter the distance

Pearly precious is my princess to me
I thank the Lord she's my mommy
My princess is perfect in every blessed way
I love her more each and every day

Pride for my princess is present in me
In her pattern one day I wish to be
My princess is present is present all through her palace
Whether she's in Rome or even in Dallas
The moon and the stars are so much brighter
My princess is a warrior and always a fighter

I'm proud of my precious princess
She's prayer perfect for me
Thank you Lord, thank you my King
For the perfect and precious princess that makes my place a palace
Even in my dreams.

Scarlett Streber is a student in Broward Correctional Institution. She dedicates this to her Precious Princess Linda Virginia.

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How My Life Changed in 35 Seconds

On a beautiful sunny day in January 2010, I experienced an event that would change my life forever. Life is surprising; you never know what the future holds for you, what it will be like in a minute from now. That's how 35 seconds suddenly changed my life on January 12, 2010 and I knew for sure that it would never be the same.

Last year, on a regular day, I woke up as usual and got myself ready to do my daily activities such as dropping off my kids at school and going to work. The day proceeded normally. I was having a nice day until suddenly at 4:53 PM a horrible earthquake occurred in Haiti, my country, where everything from then on was going to be very different.

Strangely, although it happened, it was still a blessed day for me and my family compared to others that saw their loved ones buried under buildings and houses. They stood unable to do anything to save the ones who were struggling under debris and who were still waiting to be saved.

I was petrified to see friends, co-workers, and neighbors die in this terrible event. My family and I were fortunate to walk away alive from this catastrophe. We were evacuated to the U.S., seven days later, where I have lived since then. In this country, I learn something new every day, and I was lucky enough to encounter my English teacher, Debbie, who teaches me, not only how to improve my English, but also how to face, react and cope with everyday life.

Life is short, life is surprising. Since that day, I have learned to treasure every single day that I live, because it can be changed at

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any given second. I have also learned not to put off tasks I have to do today for tomorrow, because tomorrow doesn't belong to anybody. Every day I thank the Mighty Lord for this chance, this opportunity He gives me and my family to be healthy and alive today and to enjoy life to the fullest.

Woodlyne Alphonse is a student at Piper Community School. She's made amazing progress since she began her studies. There is no doubt she will be successful in whatever path she takes.

Why I Vote

The importance of voting should never decline within a Republic, and understanding its value concerns anyone who prizes freedom, including myself. Without our participation, individual apathy or anything more organized could cause it to fail. What is important to me is that freedoms and rights are protected.

Putting our vote into action can produce change and may allow us to get what we need. Our system works best when everyone is involved. By voting, we pool our concerns and arrive at a solution for those concerns in the fairest way possible.

If we participate by voting, we help maintain our government. Voting ensures that all views are taken into account. The only flaw in this mechanism, again, is the energy devoted to it, or lack thereof. We need to be involved, no matter what party you subscribe to. Voting keeps our government open and evolving with the needs of the people.

The value of voting is immense. There is a prize to protect; for, without the republic, we may still be subjects of kings, and could lose everything we've acquired in our democratic society. And, although the ultimate reason for voting lies in each of us, if our ballot is not cast, there will be nothing left to watch, and we will be far from a Republic.

Daryl Barry is a musician and student in the GED program at Manatee Technical Institute.

Everyone Has Something They Can Teach Others

Martial Arts, is a way of life. In Martial Arts, you have to train your mind. Your mind controls everything you do. Even the way you move. So what you think in your mind you can do. It's called mind over matter, or visualization. You need it for work, school, and sports.

For Martial Arts, you need to eat proper foods. You should eat lots of vegetables, fruit, soy, herbs, and water. It is life for the body. It gives you energy, heals, and purges the body, so you can perform Martial Arts.

Physical training is a part of Martial Arts, or any sport. It is very needed to build muscle, so you can block punches, kicks, and go the distance.

So Martial Arts, is not only for fighting, it's for physical health, diet, mental health, and for accomplishing goals.

Jerry Reynolds is a student with Literacy Volunteers of Leon County. He and his tutor Bobbie Carpenter meet each week to work on reading and spelling skills.

To My 1st and 2nd

To Joseph and my sweet little Marley,

It's your Dad, I just had a few words for you guys. I wanted to tell you both that I have lots of love and respect for y'all and I'm going to keep working hard as hell so that I can provide the things that you're going to need in this cold world. Honestly, just like every other responsible parent, your mother and I just want what's best for you despite what goes on between us. I want you guys to understand that it's really hard raising two kids in these times due to the economic struggles that myself and millions of others are going through. But none the less, Daddy is going to make sure that we are financially stable and it doesn't matter to me what I have to do to make it work.

On another note, Marley as I write you and your brother this letter you haven't even been born yet. Your mom is seven months pregnant with you so I'm trying to get this GED completed in order to better myself before you arrive. And Joseph, my son, you already know our bond is tight and it's going to remain that way forever.

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I also want you guys to know that I made a world of sacrifices for us to be together because I could have been one of those dead beat Dads who don't care about you, but I am far from that. To tell you the truth, living in the fast lane, hustling and doing my illegal actions would do so much more for us, but it's different for me now because one false move then I wouldn't be able to see you again. And that scares me a lot. That's why I'm stuck doing these dead end jobs and the reason I'm going to this GED class at night.

Because not only do you need a Dad, you need a good role model just like Ms. Barbara Esno, my math teacher who inspired me to write this letter to you.

Finally I would be absolutely wrong if I didn't say thanks to your mom, Shereese because she really is a gigantic part of me being a success. So to Shereese, I want to say thanks for everything from the great advice down to the nagging and complaining that made me stronger.

Love You Dearly,

Daddy

Joseph Henry is an inspirational student in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program. He works very hard and is an excellent student.

Living with the Pain You Left Behind

I'll never forget the day you went away. It's like a fire that burns through my mind every day. The reasons you left are still so unclear. I wonder why? Why did you leave me? Didn't you know how much I loved you? Didn't you know I'd grieve for you. Why? Why did you put that gun to your head? Why did you pull that trigger?

I hear all the time that time will heal my wounds, but these tears are still falling. My walls are built so high. You were supposed to be here. You were supposed to be my friend. I'll replay that night over and over a million times, looking for an answer, looking for a reason.

I miss you so much, it will never change. I'll love you forever.

Sabrina Champion lives in Citrus County with her husband and two children, Caleb and Riley.

In The City

I want to learn how to read to make a better future for myself.

I grew up in Lowell, Massachusetts. The neighborhood was tough and was full of gangs so my parents moved our family to Florida when I was ten years old.

In school it was so hard because I couldn't read. I stuck with school because my parents made me and I finished twelfth grade. After a few years, I realized I needed to learn to read so I could be independent. I did not want to be illiterate the rest of my life. I want to have my own car, start my own business and have a family of my own.

At Pinellas Park Library I asked about an adult reading program. They referred me to the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. On January 5, 2010 I began studying with a tutor at Northeast Community School and now I am able to write this story.

Joel Baez is studying with the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg at the Northeast Community School. His tutor is Nancy Brown.

My Name is Miguel

My name is Miguel. I am from Cuba. I have lived in the United States for 7 years. I have lived in Cape Coral, Florida for 5 years. I left Cuba in 2000 and went to Spain. In 2003, I came here without legal papers. I left Cuba because it has a communist regime and dictator, Fidel Castro.

When I first came here, I lived in Miami. I worked in roofing and flooring. This was hard work, and required a lot of strength. After this, I moved to Michigan for 2 years working in a factory making military clothing. I did not like the cold weather, so I came down to Florida to live and have been here since 2005. First I drove a truck, then I cut grass. Now, I have a good job doing maintenance at a school. This is my best job because of the benefits.

I love Florida. I love the climate and to be close to my Cuba. It only takes 40 minutes in an airplane and I hope someday to return to my country, but without tyrants and with my freedom.

Miguel Alvarez is an ESOL student in Lee County's Adult Education Program at Cape Coral High School.

My Country Life

As early morning fog fades it gives way to the clear dawn of a beautiful sunny day.

I sit here by an open window on this warm spring-like morning listening to the sounds of many different birds singing, and watching what seems to be an uncountable amount of squirrels playing chase across the yard under and around the old oak trees. They aren't too busy searching for the nuts and acorns they buried all over the place last fall.

With the fresh warm breeze blowing the sweet smell from the blooms of the wisteria bushes through the house, I sit here taking it all in and I feel fortunate to live in such a place. Time doesn't matter and I am on no one's schedule but my own.

The occasional fox comes by and plenty of deer roam all around both day and night.

The night air is usually always filled with the sound of an owl and, as summer approaches, that of the songs of whippoorwills going from tree to tree make the perfect lullaby to fall asleep listening to.

Being that I live on a dead end dirt road out in the country, there's no traffic. You never hear the sound of a car riding by with the radio turned up too loud or see anyone driving recklessly, it's a great place where I enjoy taking a good long walk. Just the surrounding noises of nature are all that fall upon the ears.

No horns honking, no sirens, no guns being fired in violence, no foul smells, no pollution, no noisy neighbors.

No bright lights at night to block out the perfect view of billions of stars in the sky and a clear view of the moon, only the beauty and serenity God intended us all to enjoy in this life.

It is in this place where I find happiness and peace.

I am so grateful and blessed to live the country life that I always have and hopefully always will.

Julie Brown's husband brought her to the Calhoun County Public Library to earn her GED after receiving his own. Lavaine Williams was their original VISTA and has worked with literacy issues for 20 years.

Growing Up Pains

I grew up in Kanagawa Prefecture, next to Tokyo, Japan. The Japanese school system started in April each year. I was born in the beginning of the month of May, so I was always the biggest and the smartest in the class. Even if I did not study hard, all the subjects looked easy to me. It made me really enjoy life at school, and I liked that other students respected me because I was smarter and stronger.

To be born earlier than everybody else in the class, however, does not always have good aspects. One day, the boy I liked called me a sumo wrestler. On another day, a classmate boy said, “Hey, professional wrestler, please help me move these chairs.”

After the fourth grade of elementary school life, my classmates started to catch up with me in height, weight, and brain power. I was not a top student in the class anymore, but I was much happier because boys did not call me a sumo wrestler.

In my early life, I learned that girls should not be too much stronger and smarter than boys if we want to be loved by them.

Hiroko Hewlett studied English as a Second Language at NW Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.

The Story of My Life

Years ago, I never would have imagined my life as it is today. Many people would probably agree “Life is similar to a book, composed of many chapters, that tells an interesting story.” As the tale of my life keeps unfolding every day that passes, I embrace it for what it is.

I am from Haiti. I lived a quiet and modest life, in Port-au-Prince, the capital of my country. I worked for more than twenty five years for a telecommunication company. My only daughter was at a university in Florida so, the house felt a little lonely at times. I occupied my time with my hobbies like gardening, reading, watching my favorite shows and enjoying time with my family and friends.

Year after year it was pretty much the same thing, aside from occasional excitements, surprises and rare disappointments. It was

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like a routine. The year would go by, then would come summer. Every summer I would visit my daughter and other relatives in the United States.

June 2009, was different from previous vacations I had taken so many times before. This time I decided to extend my stay a little longer than usual. That's why I am still here. After more than one year, I have adjusted. I am learning English at Piper Community School. Thanks to my teacher who has been doing an amazing job, I can communicate with others. Recently, I got my driver's license and, now I can plan my days as I wish.

My daughter graduated from college three years ago, and she is working for a financial establishment and getting her Masters at the same time. We have come a very long way. I had promised myself that I would work hard to make sure that my child had everything I did not have and that she lives her dream. That is one of the things I am really proud of; having played an important role in shaping my daughter into the woman that she is today. She inspires me, and she pushes me to go for my dreams.

Being part of this class has helped me a lot. Now I can interact and meet new people. Once I am at a comfortable level, I plan on taking courses at a beauty school to get my license and open a beauty shop. I am ready to explore that adventurous side of me and, write the next chapter in my book. I continue to embrace every day.

Marie Huguette is a student in the Academic Skills class at Piper Community School. There is no doubt that she will be successful in anything she chooses to pursue.

Adult Educator

Being an adult educator is not how I expected to serve my life sentence. Arrested at seventeen years old, I was in tenth grade when I began my incarceration. Education after that was not in my future plans; seriously, what would be the point? As far as society is concerned, my future was non-existent, so why should I seek to better myself?

After six years and three different, pretty serious institutions, a proactive education administrator conscripted me, against my will, into his education department. Since you're reading this, I guess you

can see that I found something of value in helping others further their education.

One thing that I've read, that has stuck to me, is that the best way to learn, is to teach. Learning for your own self, I believe, is more important than any degree or certificate that you can earn. Teaching is challenging in a way that nothing else is. Every student, no matter what their natural abilities, is a unique challenge, that you have to embrace to be successful. Why do you have to like what you do? If you don't your student can tell, and then they will not progress. The fact that you are interested in them and their education is apparent, and students in this environment can sense deceit instantly, responding with an unproductive attitude.

Being able to relate to your student is essential to be able to teach them. Convicted criminals, especially younger ones with educational disabilities, have next to nothing in common with educators who have never walked in their shoes or been on this side of a fence. Bravado aside, I have led a prison life, when I was younger, that even a hardened inmate would respect. Being involved in education has changed the way I live my life, but also allows me the connection that most educators lack. I have literally "been there, done that," and decided to do more with my life.

Living in prison, by definition, is not very fulfilling as an existence goes, but working with others does make a difference in their lives, and mine. I do enjoy getting through to someone when no one else has been able to, or to someone that has never had someone make the effort. Yes, I have had a lot of my students earn GEDs, but that seems to be more important to other people. I find the most pleasure in the spark that happens when my students discover, "Hey, I can do this!" I'm not going to save the world from in here, but I do think that I am making a difference in the lives of society's undesirables, and learning about myself and others along the way. Not the worst way to spend one's life.

Keith Brennan, Desoto Correctional Institution, was sentenced to death in 1997 at age nineteen for a crime that occurred when he was sixteen. In 2000, his sentence was reduced to life.

I Believe in Santa Claus

I will always remember Christmas during my childhood: the city covered with snow, the lights in house windows, the smells of traditional food that my mom always made, the carols sung in the church, the Christmas tree, all the family around the table, and waiting for Santa Claus. The days before and after Christmas we met with friends and with relatives that we did not see often. We used to go to the park with a sleigh to make snowmen and angels in the snow. It felt like something magical was in the air.

One Christmas Eve before I went to bed, when I was six years old and watching the snow fall thru the window, me and my brother knew that Santa Claus was coming and he was going to bring us the presents we desired. My father started to tell us a story but he couldn't finish because we started to ask many questions about Santa. In the meantime we kept our eyes on the window.

When is he going to come? Will he give me all that I want? Does he really have a sleigh and reindeers? My father had a good and real way to narrate. He made the story come true. He told us that Santa cannot come in person to each child and that sometimes he just sends his messenger like an angel, an elf or a light. At that moment, I saw in front of the window a big light like a flash of lightning. It lasted for just a second but I will always remember the flash because I had a feeling that Santa was with us. I don't remember what presents I got that year but what I do remember is that Santa was with us. That light, that apparition impressed me much more than if I had seen a traditional red Santa suit. I felt very special because I had seen Santa in another way that others hadn't. Over the years I have heard that Santa does not exist, but I wasn't sure. And even now I don't know for sure. I still believe that he exists and he will bring me this year what I desire. But this is a secret that I will never tell anybody else.

I believe that everyone should wake up on Christmas day with the joy and the hope of a child. On Christmas day everyone should be a child.

Alexandra Ion is from Romania. She is a student at the Center for Adult Learning - Jacksonville Public Library - Southeast Branch.

Come With Me

Come with me to a place called Woodford.

What did you say? What did you say? Come with me as we walk slowly up the winding road to this beautiful place in the hills of St. Andrew: where the grass is green and lush, the fruit trees are always laden with some of the most delicious fruits you can find anywhere.

Oh! Look over there. The boys and girls are playing in the cool water that runs so peacefully in the valley.

Come with me as I look in the distance. I asked the Question, What's over there? Someone said , It's the Blue Mountain so lush and green.

I lift my thoughts and give thanks for this beautiful place on earth. So, come with me to a place called Woodford, where the hills are always green. The people are friendly and kind and the rivers flow gently by. The fruit trees are laden with the best fruits you can find anywhere.

Come with me.

My name is Agnes Burke. I presently work at New Hope Learning Center. I am a student doing my GED

I Love You

I wasn't really living until I gave you life. When I heard your first cry, everything popped to color. My happy tears were a sign of the happy years to come. You changed my outlook on my everyday trials because now, I wake up for you. You are the purpose for everything I do, every move I make, every smile I crack, every outburst of laughter. I can't imagine my life any other way without you present. My gift from God, my bundle of joy, my little boy. You are my everything and everything is you. I love you.

Kem Canady is a brilliant student in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program. She has dedicated herself to getting her GED.

The Bank

There is a bank on the corner that is not a regular bank, because it is not a bank for saving money but a place people can bank their “moods”. People can save their ‘glad’, ‘sad’, or ‘angry’. Some people save ‘happy’ because they don’t need to be happy today and want to save it for another time. Some people might bank their negative moods and never come back to retrieve them. Everyone has their own reasons for banking their mood.

The bank’s manager was very proud of himself and his bank. His bank served many people. One day the manager was taking a stroll and a woman ran across the intersection and bumped into the manager. “Hey, that’s dangerous”, said the manager. “I’m not scared”, said the woman. “I left scared at your bank” and she left. After that the manager went into a restaurant for lunch. While he was waiting for his food he heard a man call, “Hey, Boss.” “Why are you here?” the manager asked. “You should be at work at the bank.” “Oh, I asked to leave early today,” the man answered. “Why?” the manager asked. “Because my grandfather died today,” replied the man. “Oh, I’m sorry,” the manager said. The man smiled and said, “Don’t worry, I am not sad. I left my sad at the bank and took out happy and now I’m celebrating my son’s birthday!”

When the manager returned to the bank he saw the father and the boy again. The manager asks the little boy, “What kind of mood do you want to save or get?” The boy replies, “I don’t want to save or get any mood.” “Why not,” the manager inquired. “I want to be happy everyday although sometimes I’m sad or angry. I can be happy again like when my Mother takes me to eat ice cream after she has scolded me,” the boy responded.

This short story was written by Fei Li Chiu, a student at Lee County Adult Education class in Cape Coral, Florida.

What Is Thought

What is thought, but a vast sea of intellectual expression, grasping within the conscious and subconscious state of one’s mind.

Both small and powerful; however, causing little or great effect in lives around us.

Within us, the ability to change all, or less of the world’s greatest

moments, bringing and taking informational structure to new heights or devastation.

The many people who make up one or more of these proclamation, come forth with so vital importance in education and cultural differences among us, wherein time cannot sustain by within itself.

Innumerable quantities of such implicational collections of knowledge are often differed from joining within the sea of intellectual expression; therefore making it harder to produce the first fruits of our ideas, or products into an innovative motion.

Therefore, it's not often, that such great moments in history, innovation, and scientific discoveries, onset little or no interest of application purposes in the youth of today.

Robert T. Eddy is a student in the Lee County Adult Education Program at Cape Coral High School

What It Takes to Be a Good Parent

What does it take to be a good parent? To be a good parent, you have to have a home, money, and time. You will need to spend time with your children and help them with homework and cook them meals. You have to be very patient, always forgiving them when they do something wrong and explaining why it is wrong. Also, when they go to bed, give them a hug and kiss and make them go to bed on time every night. Give them a good education and always be there for them.

Saengjan Middleton lives in Pensacola, Florida and is a student of Learn to Read of Northwest Florida.

Memories

My name is Pranom and I am from Thailand. When I was little, I watched my sister go to school. I couldn't wait until my time to go. Mother said to me one day "Pranom, I want you to go to school next week. " I was so excited! One night she said, "You must go to sleep early because tomorrow you are going to school." I went to school and finished first grade.

When we moved to the countryside, school was far away about a four mile walk. I had to wake up at 5 a.m. to be at school by 8 a.m. I

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made good grades and finished the second grade. I thought to myself, I will make it. I was not alone. My younger sister went with me. The other kids teased us. They pushed us in the mud and blocked the road that they used for a bathroom. When we walked, we stepped in it and it stuck on our feet. They teased us about everything. They even spit in our food. We were very angry. "I am quitting!" I said. My sister said "Me too!"

We left school, but did not tell our parents. Every morning they sent us to school, but we never went. One day, the principal visited our parents. He asked "Why don't your children come to school?" Mother answered "Yes they do go; we sent them this morning. Every morning I packed lunch for them and my husband walked them half way down the road." The principal said "They have not been to school for three months." My parents were very angry with us.

Mother told me to help my father clear the land so we could grow crops. While working on the farm, I went into Mother's chicken pen to gather eggs for breakfast when I heard a little chick sound, cheep, cheep. I watched the mother go for food and I peeked in the nest. I saw a little beak in the egg. It was not just one or two eggs but seven! Every day I went to collect unhatched eggs. When they hatched, they were so soft and couldn't walk. I put a blanket inside a basket, put them in it, and covered them with a very light blanket. Every day I checked on them; some were out of the basket. When they saw me, they ran toward me like I was their mother. I had fifty chickens. My mother thought they would not live, but they did. They followed me everywhere I went because I fed them ground termites. When the chickens saw the termites, they ran like crazy.

I was also a cow herder. One hot day, I went in the pond to cool off. I left my clothes on the grass. When I got out, my clothes couldn't be found. The cows had eaten them! When I got home, Mother whipped me.

Those days are passed now and I live in the USA. As an adult, I am learning and working toward my GED.

Pranom Sinsang Pantell is a student at the West Area Adult School, Adult School in Lakeland. Tutor: Martha McGonagle. Teacher: Dr. Mary Virginia Peaslee.

My Name is Who?

In my childhood, I was raised on the streets. My mom was always working and never had time to teach me any man stuff. I had to teach myself how to cook and how to survive. I got tired of all of this, and I took myself away from home and started doing bad things like selling drugs, drinking alcohol and doing really bad things. I did it to survive. I even stole stuff from people I didn't even know.

One day everything was over, and it all caught up to me and I had to pay the consequences. I did four years of my life in jail. Passing through that experience made me change my mind about what I really wanted for myself.

After coming out from jail a new opportunity came to me. Now I have a great family, three steps-kids and a beautiful wife. This did a lot for me. I am going to school and studying to get my GED diploma, so I can get a good job to support my wonderful family.

Now I consider myself a better person and a great man. I love to help people out when they need it. That's how I am now. I don't steal; I don't rob and I work very hard for everything that I have. So, to all you people out there, you need to believe in yourself, nobody else. It is your word against theirs. God bless you all, and thank you for understanding my life.

Anonymous is a GED student at TLC Online at The English Center/Little Havana One Stop Center.

My Story

On April 12, 2008 I arrived at Miami airport from Honduras. I was on a sightseeing trip to clear my mind because my father had died in February and I needed some relaxation and time for meditation. It was the first time that I had decided to travel. I did not have much free time because of my work as a radio announcer in Honduras. I was born in Tegucigalpa but worked in the city of San Pedro Sula.

When I arrived in Miami, I stayed with my family in Kendall and told them that I wanted to learn English. They took me to school in Sunset, where I took some classes. I still remember the teacher-her name was Ivis. She was very nice and gave good

classes. I met many people from different nationalities. That is also where I met my friend Olga, who is also from Honduras. We have kept in touch and continue to be friends.

I found Florida to be a beautiful place but I wanted to learn about other places. I left class so that I could visit other places, but before I left, I spent the July 4th weekend on Miami Beach with friends from my ESOL class. I went to Michigan and Maryland and saw beautiful wildflowers in Washington DC. On July 27th, it was time to return to Honduras. I left from Ft. Lauderdale and from the plane I could see the spectacular lights of Miami.

The following year, I came back to Florida again. This time I came for a week but then returned to Honduras to focus on my work and to continue studying. In August of '09, I met my husband who is Cuban. When I got married, I left my country to live in the United States. Now I live in the beautiful Lee County, in the city of Cape Coral, Florida. I am a student at Cape Coral High School, where I take classes at night. I am 27 years old and I want to continue to improve my life. I am so glad that there are programs like this available to help me learn English. One of my goals is to improve my English so that I can attend the university. I know that with lots of hard work, I can make my dream a reality.

Monica Zapata is an ESL student at Lee County Adult Education at Cape Coral High School. Her teacher is Sonia Robinson.

What Life was from the 1980s to the Present

It was a fun time and life was good, and lots of things happened in the 80s like the first beeper, the cell phone, and many other things. I remember living in Hialeah as a kid, and I had lots of friends in my neighborhood. Every summer we liked going to the lake in Miami Springs. We use to swing off a rope we had made on this tree; it was fun times for us. It felt like time was never going end. To be young is something you can never forget.

All we had was a dollar in our pockets, a bike and all the time in the world. There were times we would go pool hopping or bike riding until the sun went down. I remember the first teacher that was going to the moon, but did not make it; that was a sad day for everyone. The man on the on the radio was telling everyone to turn

on their headlights to remember her. But there were good times also like the first cable TV channel. Did you know that the first cable only had one channel? A lot of people don't know that. School was fun too -- except waking up in the morning. I was very popular back then, and all the girls wanted to date me and everyone wanted to be my friend. It was happy times.

But everything comes to an end. Nothing lasts forever. As I grew up, at the age of 16, I had my first Z28 sports car -- and at the age of 17, my life felt like it came to an end. You see, my dad died and left me, my brother, and my mom in bad times. How can life be with so much happiness one minute and darkness the next -- and you're all alone in the dark with no one beside you?

After more than 15 years, I'm beginning to find my way to the light, and it all started with the women that helped me find myself and made me believe in myself. Even in these hard times, I will not let the darkness take me again. I will fight to finish what I have started and not stop even if people think that I cannot finish. I feel that God is with me and will show me the happiness that he showed me when I was a child. Because at the end of my life, finishing school and becoming someone is all I have left. Nothing more would make me happier than to make my dream come true. I know that my dad and God will be smiling upon me on that day.

Jimmy Aguiar is an online GED student with TLC Online at The English Center. He is eager to get his diploma and become the best he can be.

A Birthday Surprise for Carrie

I wanted to do something different for my wife. So, for Carrie's birthday in 2007, I bought a birthday cake from Wal-Mart. I went in two days before the party. It was cold that day and I had my big ol' red jacket. My wife was asleep on the couch so I left the cake in my truck. She woke up and went into the bedroom. I set the whole jacket around the cake box to hide it from my boys.

I opened the jacket and took it off the cake. When the boys came out of the bedroom they saw the cake sitting on the bar. They were surprised. They said, "Whose cake is that?"

My wife read the name on the cake and found out that it was hers. Her eyes lit up! She was surprised! She asked me, "How did

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you get that in without us seeing it?”

I didn't invite nobody because I didn't want them to give it away.

David Bohanan and his tutor Marie Norris have been meeting each week for several years and David has made great progress in his reading and writing skills.

My Life

The day I was taken from my adoptive mom seemed like a horrible tragedy for me. She raised me until I was seven years old. I'll never forget pulling up to my new home, not really sure what was going on. When I realized what was going on, I held on to the door screaming and crying.

My new home was a big change for me and it seemed like it went downhill from there. When I turned 13 years old, I moved out of that house. I began acting out and getting in trouble by skipping school and being very disrespectful to adults. When I turned 16, I had my first cup of liquor and started doing drugs, smoking cigarettes, as well as having sex.

I didn't quite understand why I was doing all these bad things, but I knew deep down I was hurting; hurting from being taken from my adoptive mom, as well as not knowing my biological mother. I know now that all I can do is live my life and try to better myself for me and my two daughters. Life isn't easy and I'm not perfect. I still have a long way to go. I've come to deal with the fact that I was adopted and I thank my biological mother for giving me up instead of aborting me. I'm content with where I am now in life even though I know I can and will do a lot better.

Clara Cobb is the single mother of two beautiful children. She is pursuing her GED and is involved in the Even Start Family Literacy Program.

Music

Listening to your favorite music can encourage you in so many ways. People enjoy listening to all types of music: Classical, Jazz, R&B, Hip Hop, Soul, Reggae, Rock, Country, Gospel, Blues, Pop, Latino and Mexicana. I enjoy listening to R&B music after work. It puts me in the mood to prepare for the weekend.

How does music help to encourage you? Some people listen to

music instead of using anesthesia when performing a minor surgical procedure. Music has helped patients to come out of a coma. Playing classical music during nap time in a preschool setting helps the children relax and fall asleep.

Where can music encourage you? Traveling in a car and listening to music makes time go by faster. At night, listening to soft music helps you fall asleep. If you have a recording studio, making music can be experiences of inspiration. Musical concerts are a good way to entertain you and to do something that you enjoy. Some people learn how to dance when listening; they dance to the beat of the music. Church members sing gospel music to praise God.

How does music make you feel? Music can control your moods and emotions. Music can make you feel relaxed and help you meditate. Music can make you feel happy. Why does music encourage? Musicians and music teachers help people learn how to read musical notes and play instruments. Friends and families use music at social gatherings, like birthday parties and family reunions. I think that listening to music is a mind soother and it will help people live a longer life.

Veronica Harris and her tutor Bobbie Carpenter began meeting in 2008. Veronica's goal is to improve her essay writing skills and to enter Tallahassee Community College.

My Life with Animals

I was born on July 31st, 1992. I was born with a disability, with a personality, and with a huge heart for animals. My disability is known as a mild range of Autism. I had three eye surgeries to correct both of my eyes. That doesn't slow me down. Even though I might be different, I'm still a human-being.

I am a huge animal lover. I lost one of my favorite dogs named Neptune to bone cancer. Neptune and I had a brotherly love for one another. Neptune and another dog named Shooter were at my aunt's farm at that time. My aunt noticed Neptune was limping. She took him to the vet. Then the vet's office called and asked my aunt to either let Neptune live and suffer, or to put him down. At the time, I thought my aunt made the right decision. Then I was punching walls, crying myself to sleep, and I want to end my life from there.

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When I was 5 or 6 years old, killer whales were my favorite animals. I grew fond of them in Sea World at Orlando, Florida. When I was 15 or 16 years old, one of the killer whales named Trua came to me at the underwater viewing glass. But it seemed like to me, in the future, that Trua wanted me to be his trainer.

I was a volunteer at Florida East Coast Humane Society, and became a volunteer of the month on August 2007. The Humane Society kept the Volunteer of the Month paper secretly in a different building. When the staff showed me, I flipped out while being speechless.

I can be opinionated at most times, but I will surrender to arguments really easily. I am also competitive in sports like football and dodge ball. I always scream out saying, “Let’s go and win the game!” kind of like Tom Brady and Tim Tebow.

Even though I have some issues with certain things, I will resolve the problem and get it done. My favorite saying is “Get it done or you will never accomplish your dream, or your life”.

Kyle Fulford is enrolled Adult Remedial Education at First Coast Technical College.

My Heroes

Most people who know me know that I’ve been through a lot this past year or so. I have never given up; lost some good friends and made some new ones too. I have been battling a divorce and custody since July of 2009. It didn’t break me, it actually strengthened me and my kids to go on with our lives and live the way we need too.

Yes, I needed help along the way, but who doesn’t need help to get through the tough times in one’s crazy life. That’s what I want to tell you. All but a few are not always thanked for all the wonderful and special things they do for me in my life. I don’t get to tell them this often. I love you Mom and Dad. If it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t be here today. If it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t have what I have right now; a roof over our head, a truck to drive everywhere, and countless other things.

As it appears that I have taken you for granted, I want you both to know that there aren’t a lot of people who can say that her parents go out of their way for her and her girls. I want you both to know

how very special you are to me and my girls. I love you very much with all my heart and soul and want to say thank you for all you have done and are doing for us. It took seeing what can happen in someone else's life to actually show me that I have it made. I never realized how much you care for the girls and me.

I'm wanting to change and am willing to admit that I need help some times and it's not to bring me down. It lifts me up to know that I can shine and get through the tough times with you two there for me. Mom and Dad you are my world and you mean everything to me. Thank you so much!!!!!! There are not enough words that can say about how very special you are to me.

Mom and Dad, I love you with all my heart and thank you for staying beside me through it all.

Love your Daughter,

Lisa Dee Gould-Kenny

Lisa is the single mother of three children. She is a student at Columbia's Career and Adult Education Program and active in the Even Start Family Literacy Program.

Why I Vote?

Generally, voting is very important when we are living in a community. Voting is believing in something you trust that can change a system. Voting is giving your participation to lead a good decision or to choose a good leader. I vote because it is a reflection of my freedom. It is to show respect for my country. It is to display my support to a political body, candidates who are running for important leadership positions, different issues that need to be resolved, and laws that need to be passed for the betterment of my people and my country.

I vote to complete my decision and to make a positive influence in the community. I vote because my vote counts. One more vote will help win the candidate who can help make a difference in our lives.

Webens Lauture is an ESOL student at Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Pretty Bird

One early spring morning outside was a little drizzle and the weather looked cold. Suddenly I heard my daughter's loud voice saying, "A bird is trying to come inside my window."

I saw a little blue parakeet scratching very hard at the window. I opened the window to help him, but I couldn't open the screen. I bent the screen a little bit to make an opening so I could let him inside. He was wet, but he looked very happy to come in. Fortunately, I had a decorative three story bamboo bird house, so I put him in.

The next day I looked for the bird's owner. I didn't hear anybody claim him after three days, so I decided to keep him. The former owner must have taught him how to talk. He talked all day and said, "Pretty, pretty, pretty bird."

I thought he was adorable and loved having him. I bought a nice cage for him and kept his door open all the time so he could fly out if he wanted to, but he didn't want to come out. He looked happy inside the cage.

But the strangest thing happened. One afternoon he came out from the cage and he flew over to me and perched on my foot and he didn't move. I told him, "You better go back to your cage. I wouldn't want to step on you." I put him back in the cage.

The next morning when I removed the cage cover I saw he was dead on the bottom of the cage. That moment I thought he had flown over to me to say good-bye. I felt so bad that I didn't let him out for awhile and make him comfortable somehow.

I wrapped him in a white cloth and took him to the vet and asked him to cremate the bird. I bought a small stone monument and he rests in there. He is gone but the happy memory stays with me.

K.S is a student at the Citrus County Library Adult Literacy Education Program.

Three Wishes

There are so many different things that cross my mind when it comes to “wishful thinking”. When people think of a wish; I think the first thing that comes to mind is a need or want. Wishes can also be based on “help” or “change”. If I had three wishes it would probably be to end some of the hurt and pain in the prison system, help people dying or in need in this world, and to enjoy some of “the fruits of life”.

While serving my time in prison, I’ve seen some things that people twice my age will never witness. I’ve witnessed pain and hurt at the hands of others. The world as we know it is not the same inside this cage; strong prey on the weak, and the weak get dealt with. I’ve witnessed grown men lose their manhood to rape, I’ve also seen men forced to kill at a very young age. One of my wishes would be to change some things about prison.

There are so many people in this world who can’t afford the proper medical care. Some people in the United States die because they can’t get the proper treatment and proper doctors. Money has become such an issue in today’s world. One of my wishes would be to pass a bill for all free medical treatment.

For me, being able to take care of family and friends would be a dream come true, to be able to not worry about money in any form whatsoever. To be able to show my kids a better way of life, to be able to go on vacations, and trips, some of the things that people live a lifetime and never enjoy. So yes, I guess money would be one of those wishes.

Conclusion: Ending some of the hurt and pain in the prison system, helping people in dying need and enjoying some of the fruits in life. These are only some of the many things that my heart would desire if I had three wishes in my life. I think that we as people sometime forget to think of others and not just ourselves. My three wishes would somehow; someday make this world a better place.

Kemine Poindexter is a student at Jefferson Correctional Institution.

I Want to Thank You

Hi, my name is Magdalena Sofia Pernas. I'm Chilean and I first came to the United States in 1999. I went to Boston to visit a friend of my son. She and my son met in Chile when she was studying there. My son died in 1998, and he was loved by this family very much. They knew that it was very hard for me and I was in a lot of pain because in addition to losing my son, I had lost my husband and my sister three years before that. I visited Boston, New Jersey and New York, then I returned to my country.

In 2001 I returned to the U.S. again. I visited Boston, New Jersey and Miami, where I met my husband, Vicente. I have been living in the U.S., in Cape Coral since 2002. I learned to drive here, which is great for me because I had never driven before in my country. I also became an American citizen, which was not easy! I studied alone for four months and passed the test!

I think this country has been a great help for me. It helped me get out of my depression from the death of my son. I also know that with sacrifice, I can do anything. I want to thank everyone from different countries and the many American families that have helped me and given me love and respect. Thank you!

Magdalena Sofia Pernas is from Chile and studies ESL at Lee County's Adult Education program at Cape Coral High School. Her teacher is Sonia Robinson.

Family Reunion

Hi, my name is Rigoberto Lopez. I was born in Guatemala. I lived there with my grandmother until I came to the United States six years ago. When I arrived in the United States I did not speak any English and the only thing I could say to my sisters and brothers was, "hola" when I met them. They responded with a, "hi". I did not know what they were saying. I asked my father what they had said to me and he explained that hi and hola meant the same thing.

I began working as an operator at a golf course. I am still working for the same golf course. I enjoy my job very much and I am good at what I do.

I made a decision to go back to school and learn English after my meeting, of few words, with my family. I attend the ESOL program at Tice Elementary in the evenings for two days a week. I

am now able to speak to and hold a conversation with my sisters and brothers. I hope to be able to speak English as well as I can speak Spanish.

I enjoy playing soccer and basketball. I play golf, as well, and like to think that I am good at it. It is a nice feeling to be able to hold a conversation with the people I work with in English.

My name is Rigoberto Lopez. I am 25 years old. I work hard and love to play sports. I also love to go to church.

My Life

My name is Mirta Ranero. My husband and I came to The United States from Cuba on March 24, 1994. My son invited us to spend that year's vacation here. After that, we decided to stay in Florida and get to see our grandson grow, but we had to leave our daughter and her family in Cuba. I hope they can come to this country as soon as possible.

In September 9, 2009, my dear husband passed away and I have been suffering both emotionally and physically since then. My primary doctor referred me to a Mental Health Clinic and it has helped me very much to cope with my emotions. Now, I feel like I have to go ahead and do something for myself. I need to be able to resolve my problems.

I decided to register for ESOL classes at Southwest Adult Education Center in Miami, Florida. At the beginning I was afraid because of my age. I am 78 years old, but my teacher, Mrs. Lopez made me feel welcomed and safe to come to class every day. She is a very humane and a wonderful person.

At the end of the last semester, I did my first CASAS post testing, and I got an excellent score. I was able to go up two levels. I went directly from low beginning to low intermediate level.

Right now, my goal is to write, read, and talk English very well. I hope my teacher stays with us and helps me and my classmates reach them.

Mirta Ranero is a Student at Southwest Adult Educational Center. She currently attends an ESOL multilevel class with Mrs. Lopez.

Rocky

Two years ago my friend Katty called me and she made a proposal about caring for her dog. She could pay me \$75.00 for each week. I spoke with my son about this proposal and we decided to accept our new part time job, just for two weeks.

We got very excited and it was our first time having a dog in our home. His name was Rocky, he was three years old and a Schnauzer.

Two weeks later Katty called and asked if I could take care of Rocky for another month, she had a business trip. My answer was "yes, no problem." I knew Rocky was happy and we were having a good time with him.

Every day after work I walked with Rocky for twenty minutes. He loved to ride in my car and he waited for me and for my son at the door.

After a month Katty had an emergency in her country and she had to go. We didn't have any problem caring for Rocky. We were in love with him. Every time I came back from the grocery store, Rocky knew I had a snack bag for him; his favorite flavor was pizza.

The last time I talked to Katty she asked if we could keep Rocky because she had to move to Virginia and travel more frequently. I said yes, and we fell in love with Rocky, and he is a good dog.

Now Rocky is part of our family and we are lucky to have him. Sometimes I have conflict with my son, Sebastian, because he doesn't like to take Rocky to the bathroom. So I feel Rocky is closer to me, maybe because I feed him, and I take care of him more than my son.

Yaneth Reyes is from Colombia and lives with her son and her dog. She is a student at the Center for Adult Learning - Jacksonville Public Library - Southeast Branch.

H. E. R.

Sometimes when I look at you, I hardly believe you're mine. I think about how attractive you are; how caring, interesting, sensitive and funny you are. I can hardly believe that out of all the people in this whole world, I was lucky enough to find you. Sometimes when I look at you, I remember what it was like in the beginning when we

were just getting to know each other. I'll never forget the nervous excitement I used to feel every time I saw you. I used to smile every time I relived the tenderness of our very first kiss. Sometimes when I look at you, I get lost in memories of special times we've shared in day dreams of the happiness we've yet to discover together. Every time I look at you, I realize how much I love the love we share and how very much of my life has changed since day one of us starting this unbreakable bond we've created together. I'm just thankful to the Lord to have included you in his plan of greatness for me.

We've been through a lot of ups and downs, but nothing comes close to the feelings of love that have grown for you. Just know the lock you have on me. I hope you throw away the key because I couldn't imagine life without you.

I will love you forever, H.E.R.

Terry W Modlin, Jr. is the proud father of Tyler and Gabriella Modlin. He is a student in the GED Program at DeMilly Educational Center. His Teacher is Mrs. Skaggs.

My Personal Story

Many people don't care about their words. Some people understand the importance of their words and are careful with them, but the others never think about their own words. In my case, I have just learned about the meaning and the effects of my own words. In 1997, I went to visit my mother and my stepfather, but they took a trip to Cuba and they couldn't stay with me and I felt alone and I decided not to come back to this country.

Even though my stepfather's daughter visited and showed me many places here, words were spoken to me about not coming back to Miami. They had a great effect in my life, because each time that I went to The American Embassy to apply for the student visa, they refused to give it to me many times.

In August, 2001, when my mother was very sick, everybody told me, "You need to travel to Miami to take care to your mom." I answered them, "I don't need to go there because my heavenly father didn't tell me to go on that trip." I was praying and looking for an answer from God for healing my mother, but one day, I confessed the word of God: "Love your neighbor as yourself." I

repented and waited to make sure I was doing the will of God. Doors were opened to me since I decided to do God's will.

Rosa Reategui is phenomenal online student whose dedication to her studies is inspirational.

The Perfect Storm

My oldest son, Luis Enrique Lopez Salinas, Jr. was born January 31, 1992 in Fort Myers, Florida. He attended J. Colin English Elementary. He then went to Caloosa Middle School. He went to North Fort Myers High School and graduated from there in the year 2009. My dream for him was that he graduate from high school and that was his dream, too. The night he graduated every student opened their diploma in the arena except for my son. Outside of the Germain Arena, in front of some of his friends, my son hugged me and said, "I did not want to open my diploma inside because I wanted to give it to you. You made my dream come true." He then kneeled before me and said, "This diploma is yours because you helped me to graduate." I cried at that moment. That was the happiest day of my life and I'm waiting for my other children to graduate as well.

Now my older son is attending Edison State College. He is going to be a computer programmer. Now that I see him go to college every day I feel proud of him. In the past I went through a difficult divorce and had family problems. Luis was the one that was most affected by it. As for me and my children, we surpassed. We made it through the economic abuses, from my ex-husband's abuse, and thanks to God, I was able to help myself and my children through all of it. I had to sell food to be able to support my family 100 percent.

Now we are free of all the problems that I had in the past. I'm happy with my three children. My dream for them is that they finish school and become professionals. My other dream is to learn more English. I did not have enough time, during those struggles, until now. I want to get my GED. My three children motivate me to go to school, and if I can, I will go to college. I want to be a Counselor, a Social Worker, or an Exterior Designer. I'm proud of myself and my children.

My mother, who passed away, was my inspiration. She was a

single mother of six children. Every time I did not find a way out or felt that I could not make it, I would think of her and her words would bring me back up.

Although my life has been hard, I am thankful to God for my three children. They are my strength and I hope to graduate from College one day just as I hope they will. I want them to be happy and have a better life.

My name is Briceida Salinas. I was born in Valle Hermoso Talmaulipas, Mexico. I came to the United States when I was 25 years old. My one love is to cook.

Living a Dream in Washington, DC

Amazing, incredible, historic! There are not enough adjectives to describe the feat of the Spanish Soccer Team when they won the 2010 World Cup at long last. It was a dream come true for me and my compatriots. Though the team was always good, we had never won the Cup. Hope was in our hearts for the Cup that year, since Spain was having a very successful season. Step by step, day by day and after winning the European Cup in 2008, the team began to earn the respect of the other teams.

It happened on July 11th. I was living in Silver Springs, Maryland, very close to Washington DC. I spent plenty of time in that wonderful city and lived some of the happiest days of my life. Many people were walking around Chinatown and DuPont Circle, a cosmopolitan neighborhood made up of all types of people because of its variety of restaurants and bars. All were waiting to watch the final game: Netherlands versus Spain.

The bars were really crowded, so it was an adventure just to get a place where we could follow the game comfortably! As the game went on, you could feel the growing tension in the air. None of the teams had scored and the prospect of a penalty kick lottery was not appealing to anyone.

We got more and more excited as the play wore on until the moment Iniesta scored in overtime becoming in a Spanish legend. He unleashed a great right-footed shot “La Furia Roja” or “Fury of the Red” (as the team was and is still called today). It is hard to explain how much happiness I felt. The victory was almost ours and I wished I could have been in Spain to celebrate the goal!

Personal Story

Eventually, we would get the triumph, but only after an intense and exhausting battle that led to Spain's final victory. It was a bitter ending for the Dutch. They played a fierce and brutal game, but the potential reward was worth it.

A grand celebration was held at the DuPont Circle Fountain, which was stained with red. A lot of people were proudly wearing Spain's team jersey, bouncing up and down and singing the World Cup theme and other songs. We were all celebrating and cheering our country's first ever win. Within seconds I joined them by getting into the water. We were the best team in the world and the only one worthy of lifting the World Cup, the most valuable soccer trophy. The celebration went on for hours.

I was beside myself with joy. It was the most special and important day in Spanish soccer history and I was living the dream in Washington DC!

Andrea Sanchez works as an Au-Pair in Florida. She's a student at Northwest Florida State College, taking English to improve her language skills.

Progress

I'm happy to share with you my progress in the State of Florida since coming here in 2007. First of all, I'd like to state the reasons for coming here in the first place. Luckily for me, I realized the people I was associated with in Birmingham were a burden to the development of good ethical and moral values. I also realized that there may be greater opportunities elsewhere. Lastly and most importantly, I realized that if I was to create a brighter future for myself, a change of environment was essential.

I'm a native of Birmingham Alabama and very proud to be, but living in society as a productive citizen was far above me. I spent most of my time involved in corruption and violence. Not to make any excuses - this was how I was raised and all I knew. Deep down, I always felt bad about my behavior, but to abandon this way of living would be considered abandoning the people I was associated with and that was the last thing I wanted to do. The people I was associated with were my financial support network and without them, I felt I was doomed.

There was no success for me in Birmingham. Every positive

thing I put my mind to do turned out to be a complete failure. There wasn't anyone in my life to stress the importance of schooling. I dropped out of high school in the 10th grade, which was one of the biggest mistakes I ever made. After I dropped out, I decided I wanted to work. Resources seemed hard to find and the few that I did find proved to be unhelpful.

Since I've come to Florida, things are beginning to look up. Shortly after I arrived, I began attending adult education classes and in 2010, I successfully passed the GED test and completed the CNA program. I'm presently working at St. Anthony's Hospital. I don't plan on stopping here. I'd like to go on to college and successfully complete the RN program. I'm highly fortunate to have a positive support system; good men who do provide an example of good ethical and moral values.

As well as things are going right now, I've had my share of adversity. Luckily for me, I've cleared many blocks in the road with the support of really great friends. My way of thinking has taken a 360 degree turn. I truly believe that, if I continue on this course, it will do me a great good. So, I'm looking forward to climbing the ladder of success and I plan on having a lot of fun along the way.

Donald W. Smith is a young man with goals and aspirations. He is a student of Hugh Tulloch at the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center.

Giving Thanks

Last Sunday my mom told me that my aunt, mom's older sister, got herself a cell phone. She also said that my aunt had been talking to her frequently over the phone ever since she got it, and enjoyed it a lot. It was much unexpected to hear that my aunt learned how to use a cell phone.

My aunt Gachil is 75 years old now. She spent all her life on the grassland, and never had a chance to go to school. In today's modern world, owning a cell phone would be nothing to mention, and you would get laughed at if you didn't know how to use one. But for a person like my aunt, a cell phone is a high-tech device, something she would have never imagined using, let alone owning one by herself. However, she has one,

and she's been managing with it pretty well. Isn't that amazing? For me, the most amazing part is that a small thing, like a cell phone, brought her laughter and enjoyment. In life, I always hear people complain about things or always want more instead of enjoying and being thankful for what they already have. Let's enjoy and be thankful about what we have just like my aunt. Our lives will be much brighter and fulfilled.

I can still picture my aunt pressing the numbers on her phone with her trembling fingers, and talking with a big smile on her face. How cute she looks.

Sarina is a dedicated student in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. Recently transferred from China, Sarina works hard to master the English Language

When You're Determined, Never Give Up

Just because people say you can't do something doesn't mean you can't. When I was young, I was taken from my biological parents and was placed in foster homes. In each of the homes I was abused because I was bipolar and couldn't behave. They say I wasn't smart and I wouldn't become anything. I sure proved them wrong. I was determined to become something. Through the years, I got criminal charges and made many mistakes, but I was still determined. By the age of sixteen, I worked at Expert Auto Body bringing home \$1,000 per week. I'm a certified scuba diver and I have my GED. I also have the chance to get a better job now that I have my GED. Never give up and if people talk down to you, prove them wrong.

Torlaif Solheim is a dedicated student in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program and is working hard to earn a GED.

My Life

My name is Saturnino Tarax. I am going to talk about my experiences. How very interesting it is to learn English as an ESOL student.

I will start by telling you a little bit of my life. I was born in a very far and tiny village as a cute, charming, and beautiful crying baby. That was me! My mother could not take care of me because she was not lactating. She felt I would be better off with a family

member. She gave me to my aunt Felicia. She was feeding me only water and it was not nutritional. My mother felt pity for me and she took me back. She struggled with me. She had to walk for 8 hours to go to the town to get my food. Now I am very healthy and strong. I owe my life to my mother.

Growing up in Guatemala was all I knew of life. I went to school until I was twelve years old. My father and I farmed until I was eighteen years old.

At eighteen, I got married with Elena and we had seven beautiful children. They were all born at home. One of my children, his name is Joel, is disabled. He is fifteen years old but still has the mental capacity of a small child. He cannot take care of himself. My wife worries that someday there will be no one to care for him after she is gone.

I started learning English while I still lived in Guatemala. When I came to the United States I continued to study English. Learning and being able to speak English has opened many doors for me with work. I also met many very nice American people. I liked being able to help translate for many of the guys I worked with.

I have been in the United States for about seven years now. My family is still in Guatemala. I am grateful that I am able to support them.

I now try to talk to the men I work with or meet and tell them how important it is to learn English and have a career and become self-sufficient in life.

I may not have started life with very much but now my life is rich with family and friends.

My name is Saturnino Tarax. I am from Guatemala. I like to exercise by riding my bike around town. I also like to work out to stay healthy.

To My Wife

On November 1, 1997, we married in a Catholic Church. During the past fifteen years, we have worked hard to keep our promise to God.

We have supported each other and even learned how to agree and disagree with one another. We try hard to change our behavior so that our relationship can grow through understanding and love.

Personal Story

Thank you for the opportunity to become a father of two beautiful girls. This joy expanded when they made me a grandfather to three of the most beautiful children.

Thank you again for being there in good times and bad times. I thank God everyday that at the end of each day, we have each other.

I love you.

Your husband, Felix

Felix Torres brightens the classrooms of Lehigh Senior High School's GED Program. He enjoys learning and is an attentive student and a joy to teach.

Land of Opportunity

When I came to America I was very scared. I had a nine month old baby, no job and very little money. My husband was no help. He was drinking every day. I didn't have any family or friends. I spoke very little English. I tried to find a job but that was not easy .One day I got a job; it was very hard work. I was very tired after work; I would come home and pass out. I wanted to learn English but I was so tired. I tried going to evening school but nothing would come to my mind so after 2 months I gave up.

One day I had the chance to have my own business. I had a motel business and that was the best thing that ever happened to me. It was a success but it was also very hard work. I thought maybe I could find work that was a little easier so I got into woman's fashions. I had my own store. There I learned many things and learned how to make more money.

Now I'm 55 and retired. Finally I have a chance to learn English. It's hard to learn but I like coming to school.

Yu Sun Terry is a student at Cape Coral high School Adult ESOL program.

My First Guest in America

My husband and I were buying a house in Cape Coral and because he was working in Switzerland at the time I had to close on the house alone. Everything went OK . The first day in the house I had no furniture and I was all alone in a new house in a new country. I went outside to look at my pool which had turned green due to lack of people in the house for the last 8 months. No one had

taken care of it, but as I looked closer I saw that I had company; a turtle was swimming in the water. I tried fishing her out but she moved very quickly. I couldn't catch her. So I made her steps out of wood, she came out for only a few minutes and jumped back in the pool again. It was now her home. I gave her carrots and lettuce to eat and she lived in my pool for a few days. I finally called the Pool Doctor who helped me pick her up so we could clean the pool. After 3 weeks we put her in the canal to find her own home. I miss her but now I can swim in the pool.

Irene Wehrlin is an ESOL student in Lee County Adult Education classes at Cape Coral High School in Cape Coral Florida.

I'm So Confused!!!

Hi, my name is Tuwana. I'm a 33 year young woman with 3 sons from my husband of fifteen years. I've decided to return to school for my GED. I started in January of 2011. I've come to school every day now. Before I would play hooky and maybe come in late or leave early. I was always caught up in the world, or so-called "living life", staying out late with friends, partying, talking to the guys. I just completely passed my own education by without a second glance.

Who would have thought Tuwana would have ended up married with children. Say what?!? Well, yes, it's true, it's true. I have a wonderful life with my family. We have two dogs and a cat, as if three boys weren't enough. I'm glad that I chose to get married. The way the world is going, everyone better find a good person and stick with him/her close or else they may find themselves on the wrong end of a lifeline.

School is grrrrreat! Yeah right! How can I possibly get all of this stuff in my 33 year old head? Math, reading, and writing Oh My! I'm lost in my school work. I don't remember school being so hard. I thought this was going to be a breeze. I tell my kids all the time "If you pay attention and study, it will come easy." Well, let me stop running my mouth and GET BACK TO SCHOOL!

Tuwanna Thurman is a committed student in the Lehigh Senior High School GED program. She brings such life and power into our classes.

Celebration

Today is February thirteenth, but we'll celebrate Saint Valentine's Day at our son's house. The whole family will be together. This includes my son, his wife, my grand-daughter, grandson, my husband, and me. Everybody will bring a gift to exchange.

Yesterday, I went to the store to buy an adventure book because the whole family likes to read.

I woke up in the morning to a beautiful day, sunny and a lot of fresh air. After breakfast, we'll go to the church to receive blessing and give thanks.

After church, we will enjoy lunch, that will be a typical food from our country.

We will have music at the celebration. There will be games for the children and dancing for the adults.

We celebrate on Sunday because on Monday my son and his wife will go to work and the children will go to school. All family was happy.

I like study English so I can speak very well, because it is necessary.

Caridad Alonso is an ESOL student in Lee County's Adult Education at Cape Coral High School.

My Dream Come True

When I was a child, I had a beautiful dream, and during many years of my life, I never thought it could possibly come true.

In that dream I was sailing in a boat with an American flag and the boat carried only two people- the captain and me. I had never seen that man before but he protected me throughout the journey with his love. He showed me the animals in the water and the beauty of the seascape and he taught me to navigate his ship. For a long time I was happy just to think and remember that wonderful dream, but deep inside my heart, I felt little chance of making it happen.

Many years later, I met the man I saw in the dream of my childhood. Today he is my husband, David, and American captain, sailor and eternal lover of nature, who taught me to sail in Miami.

We've been together since we met in Miami. We left on a nice sunny day, crossing the Miami River and enjoying the opening and closing of bridges. I saw the most beautiful sunsets, dolphins dancing in the water, and I can hardly describe the beauty of the sky with a full moon and thousands of stars whose lights made the water sparkle with intensity.

Each moment of the trip was better than the last. I did not sleep. I wanted to enjoy every second of this beautiful reality. We continued down the river and through the intra-coastal and entered the huge Lake Okeechobee. This was another beautiful experience to pass from the river, to the lake. I remember a moment on the lake when I saw, in the distance, a small light. I asked my husband what it was and he said that it was the lights of Fort Myers. From Lake Okeechobee we crossed into the Caloosahatchee River. That meant we were coming to the end of our lovely trip. I felt sad but also felt much happiness to see this dream come true.

Now I have a dream and I think it's the biggest dream of my life. I pray that God allows me to make it happen very soon. Today my dream is to learn English. I am proudly learning here at Cape Coral High School, listening to the instruction of my teacher Sonia Robinson, confident that soon, this important dream will become a reality.

Farides Luzney Cantillo is originally from Columbia. She is a student at the Lee County Adult ESL program at Cape Coral High School. Her teacher's name is Sonia Robinson

An Important Event in My Life

An important event in my life was when I moved back to Pensacola, Florida. I was excited to know that I was going to see my baby girl again. That made me so happy to see her and her baby girls. Coming to Pensacola meant that we could spend quality time together. It was so great to get to meet my granddaughters for the very first time.

Another reason that moving to Pensacola was important to me

Personal Story

was that I enrolled in school and began to work on earning my GED diploma. It will be so great to earn my GED. It is so important to me because it would make my daughter and granddaughters so proud of me.

Perhaps they will stay in school because they see how important getting an education is to me. It means a lot to me that my daughter and her daughters will get their diplomas, too.

So, in conclusion, my move back to Pensacola, Florida is an important event of my life. Living near my daughter and granddaughters, and getting back to school mean so much to me.

Rita Jarvis is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.

The Wonderful Dog

My granddaughter has a Shih Tzu. His name is Walee. She bought Walee two years ago, when he was eight weeks old. Walee is white and his ears black. He is friendly and slow. He follows my granddaughter, because he likes to play. He waits for the children every day at the door, when they come back from the school. When my son-in-law eats, Walee sits in front him waiting for pieces of food. Walee barks when he hears some people ring the doorbell. Unfortunately, Walee doesn't like to be alone, so when the family goes out, he goes to my room sits close me.

Rosa Alvarez is from Dominican Republic and has been in the United States for 28 years. She is a student at the West Regional Library in Jacksonville Florida. Her teacher is Barbara Simpson.

How to Make New Friends

When I meet a person I offer him or her friendship. It is difficult for some people to make new friends; for me it is very easy. Having new friends is very important for people. Friends can be like family, and good friends are always loyal. I can find new friends by joining an organization, taking courses and also doing volunteer work.

First, it was important to join an organization; because I have the opportunity to help other people and I can share everything with my new friends. In an organization I can look for friends that always

have smiles on their faces. There are many organizations that need volunteers. One is the fight against AIDS. Another is rehabilitation for drug addicts. In those groups, I am in touch with people who have the same interests and feelings as I do. I can meet and become friends with people with different personalities. I can definitely find new friends.

Another way I can make new friends is by participating in courses at a local community schools. I can study with people from different countries and become friends with them. I can take classes like English, painting, or cooking. I usually make a good paella and barbecue, but I like to learn new recipes and share them with my new friends.

In addition, in my community there are group homes and hospitals where I can serve and meet new friends as a volunteer worker. I can also do research with different groups that can help us to learn about each other.

In conclusion, I always try to find activities that give me opportunities to meet new people. Friends are an essential part of my life because I can talk to them about my feelings. I can share and enjoy time with them by joining organizations, attending school and doing volunteer work.

Rocio Correa is an online student in Language B with TLC Online at The English Center.

A Second Chance at Life!!

My name is Ashley Hasbrouck and I attend the Even Start Program in Citrus County, Florida, with my daughter, Paityn and son, Jaden. My daughter is on site with me every day.

I had dropped out of high school when I got pregnant with my son, Jaden. I started to go to WTI for my GED, but thought I had better things to do, so I stopped going there. I got a job as a dietary aide at a nursing home. I did that for about a year and a half. Then I quit.

I met my husband, David, and we got married. I found out I was pregnant with my daughter, and a week later he left for the Army.

Personal Story

At that time, I was pregnant, working at another nursing home as a dietary aide, and being an Army wife. It was so hard. About a year later, my husband and I were having marital problems, so he got an honorable discharge out of the Army.

I found out about the Even Start program and told my husband. He sounded all right about it, but then he said I needed to go out and get a job. Finally, I got the courage to call up Even Start and they got me in right away to start school.

My husband left me, and it was real hard at first. I didn't think I could go through school because I couldn't concentrate. I had so much support from the students and staff. I am still here, and they work with my children and me every day. This school is a blessing and they are my family. Thank you Even Start for giving me a second chance at life.

Ashley Hasbrouck lives in Inverness, Florida with her children Jaden and Paityn.

A Story

I would like to tell you a simple story that happened to me when I had twenty years old:

My dad and my mom took a trip with me to go to Europe to visit several countries. After four months, we went to Milan, Italy, where my brother-in-law (an Italian) and my older sister were living. A few days later, my parents decided to go to visit Venice for a few days to see the many beautiful sights. We went to Murano where we found the most beautiful crystal. Of course they bought some ornaments to bring to our home in South America.

To go to Murano we had to take a Gondola by way of the Grand Canal. We arrived on time. My mom was the first one to jump inside the Gondola, my dad was helping me to make the same jump, but when I tried to jump I slipped and I fell down into the canal water. It was cold. My Dad helped me to get inside the Gondola and we were ready to go. My clothes were completely soaked, but I was young and my parents didn't care much about that. We were happy, and we saw beautiful things in that place.

Finally, we arrived in Venice a little late. I began to feel bad and had a fever and cough. My parents were worried and they called the

hotel's doctor. He examined my chest and lungs and he didn't like the result, so he said that they had to go back with me to Milan. When we arrived in Milan they called the family doctor. He gave me the same exam as the first doctor and he was talking with my parents and said to them that I had a bad case of pneumonia. He injected me with antibiotics and gave me other medicines. After one week, I began to feel much, much better. My parents felt very happy and I, thank God, am here to tell about this.

Beatriz Jimenez is an online ESOL High Beginning student with TLC Online at The English Center.

My Personal Story

Everyone has their favorite holiday. My favorite celebration is Christmas. It is a very special feast because I can give thanks to God for all the blessings he gives me. I also love it because I have a special time with my kids.

On Christmas Eve, my fifteen-year-old daughter and I wrap presents to put under the tree while my twelve-year-old son, Jerry is sleeping. She knows that Santa is not real, but my son does not know yet.

When they are opening their gifts, I look at the joy in their faces. While we are drinking hot chocolate and they are singing, I am laughing and the only thing I can see is love.

Christmas is a good time, even though my wife is living in Haiti. But at least I am trying to make my kids happy as much as I can. Even though my English is not very good when expressing my thoughts, I am trying to do my best for them, and the most important thing is that they accept me for who I am.

Louis Lebon is a student who puts forth a big effort to improve himself.

Egypt

I'd like to travel to Egypt because there are many interesting antiques and interesting things beginning with Egyptian pyramids, gods, and most importantly the stories about the kings and the poor Hebrew people that were enslaved by the Egyptians.

First, the most important things I'd like to see in Egypt are the

hieroglyphics. I want to know how to read the ancient Egyptian writing.

Next, I'd like to take many photos of the Nile River and the places registered in history. Then I wish to know why the Egyptians worship cats and the reasons they bury people in pyramids. I'd also like to know the true story behind movies like "*The Mummy*", which refer to the books of life and death.

Other things that make me curious are the reasons why the ancient Egyptians built the pyramids, their mathematics, their way of determining the most important months for planting and growing crops, and to see all things about the stars.

These are all the things that motivate me to travel to Egypt.

Debbie Shive is an ESOL student at Lee County Adult Education at Cape Coral High School. Her teacher is Wendy Chapman.

An Adult Learner's Experience at Girl Scout Camp

The first day of camp begins on Sunday afternoons. According to their age group, girls ages 6 to 15 attend different weeks. The girls arrive with their families and check in with the nurse; Then they walk to their cabins to meet their assigned leaders. After the parents leave, they have a swim test followed by dinner, then they get ready for bed.

On the second day, they get started on activities which are planned around their ages. First they go to the flag ceremony, followed by breakfast, morning activities, craft, swimming, then lunch. In the afternoon, it's archery, canoeing , hiking or working with the horses. For most girls, being close to a horse is a new experience and learning to feed, groom, muck stalls and ride them. Up until lights out, they work as a unit on badges; this also changes according to their age group. Throughout the week, everyone works together to make this a memorable experience.

Up to Thursday evening the activities stay the same. That night they watch a movie and "dress up". Last summer, the favorite

movie was *Adult Horse*. Later we played a game called little “Sally Walker”, where you all get into a circle with one person in the middle. You do what the one in the middle does and stop when the music stop. For dress up they would do a funny acts and put on plays. Our favorite one was about the invisible bench. Everyone laughed when they tried to sit down, but there was no bench. To finished the evening, they had more fun sitting around the bonfire, singing and roasting s ‘mores.

Then on Friday afternoon when the families arrived, the girls were able to share what they learned by putting on plays rehearsed the night before, as well showing off their horses. I loved working with the kids and the adult workers. This is how I’m able to give back and feel useful. I hope I’m able to do it again this summer. Everyone attending camp had a great time and many friendships were made. The adults wanted to teach the kids that everyone can work together; which is the purpose of them doing “dress up” and a play.

Mary Wheeler is an adult learner who is still working to improve herself and her goal is to help others

Holidays

This past Thanksgiving and Christmas holiday, I worked in a kitchen. I was able to serve food to people and help them. Then I helped clean up the tables by putting trash in the garbage. At home I cooked my own food for myself. I washed clothes then I changed my sheets on my bed. I visited my sister’s house. I helped her put food away.

Sylvester Williams is a student of the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg LWR reading program at Lakewood Community School. His tutor is Lisa Foster.

Living Day by Day

This is a story about a girl named Maria and the event that changed her life.

Maria is a slim girl with black hair and big beautiful eyes that say it all. She is shy but determined. She has more confidence in herself than anyone I know.

She is very dreamy and believes that she can save the world. She wants the world to be her best friend. But one day the life that she loved so much, fell apart. She felt alone, confused, sad and full of nostalgia for her family, for her native city and for her friends.

She went one day into the darkest thoughts carrying a suitcase full of stories, joys, sorrows, achievements and failures. Those thoughts took possession of her beautiful youth. From the depths of her being, she screamed for help so that the demons of the tormented thoughts of pain and sadness would go away.

But her frail voice was not heard, and she fell asleep in a dream that she knew wouldn't end. She had never felt as much fear as she felt that day. Her body trembled and the light in her eyes was gone. Yes, that day she decided to end her young life.

But it didn't happen, because it wasn't her destiny to stop living.

She never could understand what saved her from tragedy. But today, Maria lives her life day by day and takes advantage of each day like it's the last one.

Maria Valdez is an online GED student with TLC Online at The English Center.

My New Life

My son was born in September 3, 2010. He was born at Jackson Memorial Hospital. He was 5 pounds and 18 ounces. He is the best son anyone could ever have. Now, I have to go to school and get my GED, so I can go to college and have a career. For that reason, I have to do the best for my son and me.

I didn't plan to have a baby at this moment, but now that he is here, I love him to death -- and I'll do anything for him. I'm very young to be a mom right now. I got pregnant at the age of 16. I have to be a good parent to my child and show him a good example. His name is Javien. He is 5 months old, and he is a very healthy baby; I am very happy about that. In my house everybody spoils him. He likes music, dancing, being outside, riding in the car, taking a bath and being in his stroller. His dad loves him too, and he is a good dad. He always calls to check on Javien. We are not together anymore, and this makes everything more complicated, but what really matters is that I'm doing my best to change our life to have a better future.

Javien's dad is a cook, but he is also going to school to have a career. I want my son to have everything he needs. Now, we both know what we want, and we are not going to stop until we both have a really good profession. When I start working I will have my own apartment, so my son can see I'm a successful person. And even in the distance his father will be there too.

Anonymous is an online GED student with TLC Online at The English Center.

Personal Story

I'm a mother of three little angels David, Ciara, and Dwyane. My day begins with hugs and kisses, as I prepare my kids for daycare, but my day gets sad without having a job. My life is full of challenges, however, this doesn't stop me from providing for my kids. Their joy and laughter are my daily reward.

As a young mother, I have so many thoughts about the future. Preparing for college takes forethought and initiative. I'm studying relentlessly, so I can get my GED and get into law school.

I thought I knew a lot about what was going on in my life; however, I was wrong. Fortunately, life led me in a different path as soon as I became a parent. Who would have known that I would totally be able to control my life, by only watching what I created to grow up. I guess things like watching, even a child, makes you think about what this crazy life has to offer.

I didn't have many opportunities like most people here, since I'm from Nicaragua. This also has been good because now I can speak another language. Luckily, being a mother gave me the opportunity to at least have one eye open in order to try to point myself in the right direction without any bumps or bruises. I guess that's because I'm finally maturing.

Anonymous GED Student/TLC Online at The English Center/Little Havana One Stop.

My Personal Story

My heartbreaking story starts when I was fifteen years old. At that time I was raped and left to die. The rapist beat me brutally with a stick, ripped my shirt and my underwear, and perpetrated his violent crime. It was so dark and not a soul was around. He left me there, bleeding to death. Like an angel sent out by God, an elderly woman found me and called the cops. Within minutes, I was rushed to the hospital. The “angel woman” stayed up with me the whole night. I had lost a great deal of blood. The aggressor left me with eight broken ribs and a fractured pelvis. As soon as my parents got there, I was told that it was a miracle that I was alive and that I would never be able to have children.

After a while, as my ribs began to heal I felt better physically, but, psychologically, I was sore to the touch. Therefore, I switched to a crazy life style at the immature age of fifteen. I drank and did drugs; I was uncontrollable. I did not care about anything or anyone. I went out with quite a lot of guys because I thought nobody would love me after all that I went through. Thanks to God, little by little, I started slowing down and changing my way of life.

In spite of everything I went through, I have achieved a lot of things. I have to give thanks to God everyday for getting me out of the wrong life style I was living and blessing me again with another miracle. Against doctors’ predictions, I have two beautiful daughters that have changed my life all over. I am clean now and back to school to get my GED diploma first and go to college after. My girls are attending daycare and an after-school program. On weekends, I take them to the park and Chuck E Cheese. We enjoy going out to eat together. I love my children; if it were not for them, I do not know where I would be today. God’s gift has helped me to mend my broken heart. This is my personal story.

Anonymous is a young lady who is respectful, cooperative, and focused on her goals. She plans to take her GED in a month or two in Homestead.

Fatal Violence Among Black Men

There is an increasing epidemic affecting urban communities and it's called black on black violence. Statistics show that eight in ten murders since 2006 were blacks. Seven of every ten slayings reportedly involved black men around the age of 25. Three reasons cited that contribute to such violence is the breakdown of black families, crumbling moral values, and the introduction of crack cocaine.

The breakdown of black families is a major contributing factor to the violence among black men. Some young black men lack a positive male presence in the home so they are left with no guidance. A lack of structure will lead some black men astray and to have a hostile attitude which can lead to violence.

Crumbling moral values also plays a part in the reason so much violence is taking place in urban life. Most young black males don't have anyone there to instill morals and values that will help them in life and possible deter them from becoming victims of violence. With the lack of moral values, young black men are likely to be involved in some type of violence.

Furthermore, the infiltration of crack cocaine is another major factor in the equation of black on black violence. Crack changed the urban communities by stripping young blacks of once responsible parents and reducing them to drug addicts. Crack was introduced in the 80's as a way to destroy the black community but wasn't considered an epidemic until it hit the suburbs and affected white Americans.

In conclusion, the breakdown of black families, crumbling moral values, and crack are the reasons that spark violence among black men. These three things play a major role in why so many mothers bury their kids on a regular basis. Now that we have realized the problem the next step is to take action to prevent further violence from taking place.

Dwight English is from Tallahassee, Florida. A student in the Jefferson Correctional Institution G.E.D. program, teacher is Mrs. Henderson.

Shawn

On January 29th, 2009 I sat at home listening to music. Everything seemed just fine, but everything was not. It was about 8:30pm when my mom got a call from my Aunt Carlyon. I suddenly heard my mom scream and cry. I came out of my room to see what was going on. I wish I hadn't.

My cousin Shawn had been in a horrible car crash, which was all I knew. We quickly left our house and risked the hour drive through ice and snow to get to Columbia. As soon as we got there we found my aunt and her family at the hospital. It had only been five minutes since we had all arrived and they put us in a small room. I knew for some reason, as soon as they put us in that room, that he was gone.

My family and I still don't know exactly what happened. Was it his fault? Was it the other driver's fault? We didn't know, all we know is how much we miss him. He had so much going for him. He was only 17 years old.

A car crash can happen to anybody. It can be your fault or it can be someone else's. I know that when Shawn had his accident, he was not drinking or doing drugs, but I know a lot of teenagers do both things and then drive. You don't think that it affects your driving but it does. You should never text and drive or even talk on the phone while you drive. Everybody does it, but that doesn't mean it's a good thing to do.

There are many things we do when we drive that we shouldn't, but we do them any way. We mess with the radio or we look for gum, things like that. We get so use to doing these things that we don't even notice we are doing them. Try to do things that are safe when driving.

What I want you to do is to think about the family you're leaving behind if you have an accident. What if it is your fault, and you kill someone? Think about the family that they would leave behind.

I have learned to live life to the fullest. I am living my life not only myself, but for Shawn too. I want to be around to see my grandchildren go to school and do all the things that Shawn and

many other kids just like him will never get the chance to do. Shawn may be gone from this world, but he is not gone from my life or my heart.

Jennifer Gibson is in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. It is her goal to become an elementary school teacher.

Family Feelings

Family feelings are about things they feel the most.

I feel the most because my brother is fixing to move up north. It hurts me the most because he is the brother I love the most. I may not get to see him as much as I want to, but I will get to see him every other month. His wife has family down here so he can come and see me from time to time.

My brother asked me if I could move up there with him. I said “no” because I have a sister here and all my friends. Florida is where I was born. It is my life and I will not move. I will visit up north to see my Mom and Dad and my little brother, but I will not stay up there for a very long time.

I am loyal to my friends because they are loyal to me. I was raised with them and they were raised with me. We did everything together so I would do anything for them. They are family.

Richard Hill meets with his tutor, Pat Ward, at the Coastal Region Library as part of the Citrus County Library System's Adult Literacy Education Program. Richard enjoys Harry Potter books.

The Trials of Life

Sometimes life can get you down. Make you so depressed and sad. It wears you out and even makes your body sick. Over the years I've come to learn that life is a trial, everyday you're challenged to face at least one or more, so I guess you could say every day is a test, either you pass it or you fail miserably.

Just getting out of bed each day is a test. You make the choice to either stay in bed or get out of bed. So it's a test. If someone drops money in front of you, it is a test. Should you put it in your pocket or be honest and pick it up and hand it to them. Personally I would give it back because I feel how you make decisions in this life is how you're treated in this life.

Personal Story

I feel if you try, make good choices and do right, then your life won't be so stressful and chaotic. It will be kind of peaceful and manageable. It's true what they say "the choices you make build your future." There are many choices I should have made differently and I would probably have it easier, but that's only my opinion. I'm only one small individual in this really huge world, but I feel there are many who feel the same as I do...that life is a trial and we need to look out for and be cautious of our choices.

Kimberly Roberts is currently pursuing her GED at the Columbia County Adult Education Center and plans to enroll in college.

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