

Going Places

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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



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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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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 the editing of submissions and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they were received. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or any other affiliated organizations.

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

Table of Contents

My Experience in Adult Education

One Step Closer to My Professional Goals	V. Basile	1
Learning Something Every Day	R. Saenz	2
New Life, New Experiences & New Friends	G. Marrero	3
It's Never Too Late	M. Vancleve	3
A Big Step in My Life	M. Diaz	5
My School Time	K. Li	5
Friendship Never Ends	T. Lam	6
The Schools in My Life	A. Molnar	7
My Experience in Adult and Literacy Education	M. Corriolan	8
My Experience in Adult and Literacy Education	S. An	9
It's Never Too Late to Learn	E. Ciara	10
Be Patient to Reach Your Goal	A. Vilfrant	11

A Turning Point in My Life

A Life Changing Event	H. Beers	13
Changing My Life	J. Gonzalez	14
Precious Moments	S. Fowler	15
My Working Life	M. Kelly	16
A Conversation with Me!	F. Hernandez	17
Something that Changed My Life	A. Lemon	17
Life is Tough but I'm Tougher	T. Oliva	19
My Turning Point	S. Smithson	19
A Turning Point in My Life	Anonymous	21
Miguel Alejandro	M. Armando	22
Cowboy Up!!	C. Hislop	23
Coming to America	S. Stewart	24
Climbing the Stairway in the Journey to Success	D. Zajac	25
The Miracle of Life	D. Jankowski	26
There is no Limit	K. Roney	27
Haiting Carnival: Puzzling Folkways	C. Bazile	28
Controlling My Destiny	L. Snyder	29
The Most Difficult Decision of My Life	M. Gonzalez	30

A Little About Me	M. Rivera	31
My Hero is Real	S. Melendez	32
My Turning Point	A. Martinez	33
My Most Recent Turning Point	N. Vazquez	34
How it All Began	E. Bertrand	35
A Turning Point in My Life	D. Groberio	36
A Turning Point in My Life	D. Moore	37
I've Learned A Lot	M. Desouvre	38
My Life Changed When I Came to the U.S.	J. Joseph	39
The Courage to Start Over	K. Vernet	40

My Goals and Ambitions

The Importance of Setting Goals	M. Fuentes	42
Be Happy	N. Martinez	42
What I Would Like to Be	S. Joseph	43
My Goals and Ambitions	T. Olade	44
You Can Reach Your Big Dream	J. Robles	45
Knowledge is Power	S. Rodriguez	45
Time for Action!	A. Vawny	46
My Dreams Come True	M. Accime	47
Opening a Door in My Life	S. Alfaro	48
My Dream in Life	S. Andre	48
Reaching My Goal	J. Benjamin	49
One Day I Will...	I. Bernal	50
Don't Let Go	R. Cordoba	51
Ask, Seek, Knock	R. Desroches	52
My Life and Goals	R. Dorius	52
That Others May Live	D. Frieze	53
The American Dream	D. Johnson	54
GED: My Dream	K. Patterson	55
My GED	L. Levatte-Church	56
Education is Important	K. Land	57
I Will Achieve	S. Luc	58
My Three Goals	M. Perez	58
My Three Golden Goals	R. Rene	59
Sweet Goals	G. Rivera	59
My Goals and Ambitions	O. Servius	60
My Green Vocational Academy	M. White	61
My Future	R. Alexander	62
My Goal	D. Thacker	63
My Goals and Ambitions	L. Lopes	64
Don't You Feel Successful?	C. Rincon	65
The Challenge to Succeed	C. Mena	66

My Favorite Place

The Ocean and Me	A. Castellanos	68
My Powerful Garden	S. Byrnes	69
The Country I Love	O. Goldsmith	70
Grandma's House	M. Crespo	71
My Journey Out West	I. Orozco	71
Peace and Tranquility	A. Navaez	73
My Favorite Place	N. Rivera	73
Watch Them Grow	H. Benitez	74
My Favorite Place	P. Jiang	74
The Florida Keys	Anonymous	75
300 Days of Sun and Shine	K. Kitagawa	76
Night of the Little Candles	L. Mendoza	78
Music School	L. Echevarria	78
Houston, Texas	L. Santiago	79
Big City	R. Pierre	80
Untitled	L. Tarantino	80
A House Outside the City	E. Garcia	81
Priceless but Free!	E. Magalhaes	82
Cape Cod	A. Eldridge	83
The Pearl of the Caribbean	J. Persaud	84
Welcome to Coco Keys	S. Nelson	85
My Favorite Place	T. Weller	86
Washington D.C.	V. Unpierre	87
Jamaica, My Favorite Place	V. Cole	89
Belize: Precious and Beautiful	L. Pech	90

Why Voting is Important to Me

Why is Voting Important to Me	M. Joharchi	91
I Will Be a Voter	M. McNaughton	92
You Decide	A. Colon	93
Why Voting is Important to Me	G. Saraceni	93
Each Vote Counts	N. Damis	94
A Good Candidate Inspires	J. Laguerre	94

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

A Different Life	T. Francis	96
Colombia: The Happiest Country in the World	C. Gomez	97
Holidays in Haiti	W. Joseph	98
A Different Country	A. Joseph	99
Going Through Change	D. Dominique	100

Two Different Lives	N. Osorio	101
How Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in the U.S.	S. Pelenci	102
My Life Vs. My Son's Life	R. Ron	103
How Life in My Hone Country Differs from Life in the U.S.	A. Macha	104
Not Afraid of the Uncertainty	S. Trampuz	105
How Life in My Country Differs from Life in the U.S.	N. Pena	106
No Perfect Place	O. Chavarria	107
How Life in My Homes Country Differs from Life in the U.S.	B. Sebastian S.	108

Someone or Something I Admire

Press Toward the Mark	T. Lockley	110
Priscilla of Corquin	K. Romero	111
My Mom	K. Louis-Juste	112
A Parent's Strength	C. Rendon	113
Someone Who Inspires Me	J. Lanham	115
My Amazing Sister	M. Rodriguez	116
Women in Science	H. Loretto	116
One Main Lady	T. Chatman	118
One of a Kind	W. Tranquille	119
Basketball	F. Romero	119
Someone I Admire	V. Kogan	120
The Person I Admire the Most	S. Grams	121
She's Number One in My Eyes	B. Beckham	123
Omila Jecroix	S. Valeus	123
My Only Savior	M. Cineus	124
My Mother: A Warrior	R. Vega	124
Her Name is Love	R. Marquez	125
My Lovely Wife	R. Tajiani	126
My Mentor Who Inspires Me	R. Chonay	127
Jose Ramon Lopez: The Most Inspirational Person in My Life	N. Martinez Lopez	127
My Father: My Role-Model	A. Lara	129
My Exceptional Role Model	A. May	130
My Dad	M. Rodriguez	131
Luck Supports the Brave	T. Ahmar	132
My Role Model: Bruce Lee	B. Jewell	133
Someone I Admire	K. Johnson	134
Love Can Do That	T. Lima	135
My Dad	A. Coello	136

Someone I Admire	S. Bennett	136
My Son Stevenson	E. Pascal	137

What the American Dream Means to Me

My Great American Dream	S. Barcenas	138
The American Dream	K. Archibald	138
My Life Dreams in America	J. Hyacinthe	139
A Dream Come True	I. Lipkey	140
The American Dream: My Life in the U.S.	I. Villalobos	142
The Beauty of a Dream	C. Arencibia	142
The Peoples' American Dream: Thousands of Opportunities in the Land of the Free	K. Bryant	143
Sis Louis Restaurant	M. Louis	144

Personal Story

Special Kid has a Special Mom	A. Mendoza	145
Life Changing Experience	C. Louis	146
Going to the Special Olympics	K. Rouse	147
My Nightmare	L. Garou	147
My Difficult Obstacles	C. Martinez	148
Soulmate	C. Matarazzo	149
My Arrival in the USA	V. Crespo	150
Fight for My Dream	C. Tzarax	150
Cooking Brings the Best Out of Me	L. Ervin-Sturgis	151
American Dream	J. Belem	152
The True Meaning of Thanksgiving	A. Alegre	153
The Way of Life on My Grandparents' Farm	J. Bernal	155
Thanks to Life, Which has Given Me so Much	H. Bernuy	156
A Changing Dream	M. Constant	157
A Difficult First Year in the U.S.	S. Guevara	158
Change of Life	M. Islas	160
Anxiety is not a Joke	J. Howell	161
Realization of Love	L. Montejo	161
Growing Up Without My Mom	M. Mora	162
Music in My Life	G. Solarte	163
Sports and the Outdoors	L. Miranda	165
People, Gestures, Food, and Animals in America	M. Fernandez	165

My Life in the U.S.	M. Pierre	166
Life has its Challenges	M. Bowman	167
I Never Give Up	H. Arias	169
Growing Up in Polk County	C. Carrington	169
Love Story	R. Guevara	170
Dancing in the Dark	H. Dia	172
Never Give Up	J. Edwards	173
This is Me	J. Monteagudo	174
My Lovely Grandsons	G. Villar	175
Never Give Up	H. Karimzadeh	176
My Decision	M. Montiel	176
Surprise	R. Marc	177
Slowly but Surely	R. Desrosches	178
Just Quincy and Me	P. Sherrod	178
Everyday Life	M. Anderson	179
Enjoying Every Moment	A. Orellana	180
My Personal Story	F. Oliveira	181
My Family	F. Espinoza	181
My Family	M. Moise	183
My Personal Story	S. Castrejon	183
About My Life	R. Fortunato	184
I Won't Complain	R. Gabriel	185
The Day My Life Changed...	S. Sanchez	186
I Am Blessed	B. Moreno	187
Our Love Story	A. Trejo	188
Ideas that Guided My Life	R. Ortiz	189
Looking for a Better Future	E.G.M.	190
Going Through Change	D. Dominique	191
My Short Story	E. Baten Tum	191
My Story, My Son	E. Almaguer	192
My Personal Story	T. Taylor	193
You Not Like English, Go to D.R.	L. Gomez	194
She	K. Sawiki-Cruise	196
A Smaller World Through Language	G. Williams	197

Original Poetry

Life	J. Clark	199
For You, My Mom	M. Solene	199
Who Am I?	D. Mitchell	200
How to Fly	K. Cruz	201
A Mother's Love	M. Brady	202
Floating	J. Fain	204

Our Love Is...	A. Frierson	205
Secret Place	R. Hyppie	209
Don't Doubt Me	J. Piang	210
Broken Pictures	L. Velazquez	211
Love Lost and Found	J. Davis	212
Reading	J. Holland	213
Time for Change	N. Horne	213
Time	D. McMillan	215
Build Me	N. Shaw	216
You Don't Know	J. Satchell	217
The New Me	S. Bailey	218
Look at Me in Five Years	S. Spence	219
It's Hard to Imagine	B. Dudley-Newson	220
An Encounter that Changed My Life		
Life Lesson	B. Arnett	222
Maria's Prayer	M. Espino	223
Nothing Happens by Chance	T. Freire	225
The True Love	A. Guarin	226
An Encounter that Changed My Life	R. De Leon	226
When My Family Moved to the U.S.	R. Manriquez	227
An Unforgettable Day	J. Oriental	228
Forced American Dream	F. Intriago	229
An Encounter that Changed My Life	D. Broomfield	230
A Bridge from Miami to Cuba	H. Lopez	232
My Favorite Day		
Tet, Vietnamese New Year	D. Huyhn-Hoa	234
Sunday Tradition	M. Avila	235
My Favorite Days are Saturday and Thanksgiving Day	M. Vazquez	235
Life After Death	L. Martinez	236
The Day My Life Changed	K. Trompiz	237
My Favorite Day	W. Dubon	238
Monday	J. de la Cruz	239
My Favorite Day	M. Nopal	240
Sunday! A Great Day!	G. Jeune	241
My Precious Gift	J. Marisol	242
The One that Got Away	C. Hagen	242
The Day that Cash Changed My Life	B. Dello Buono	243
Sundays	U. Suiphonoi	244

My Experience in Adult Education

One Step Closer to My Professional Goals

My stairway to success began on January 14th, 2015 at my first job in the United States. It was in this moment that my professional journey was going to begin. I never thought that my first job was going to be in my field, Human Resources; however I always believed in myself in a humble way and in my capabilities in Spanish and in English. Others believed that I was not able to do certain jobs at that time, because they thought that my English was not good enough, but I impressed even myself.

Since I was a little girl, English has been part of my life: at school, at the movies, in music, or on the TV. I was exposed to English, but in my country, Venezuela, I never had the need to speak in English. I always spoke in Spanish, and for this reason I truly felt I needed a class where I could speak English with others.

The fact that I already knew some English allowed me to find an administrator job in a good office, even though everybody said that this was something very hard to find, even for U.S Citizens. Studying English as a second Language at Palm Harbor Library has been incredibly important to me, because it has opened doors for many opportunities in life.

I had to do everything in English at work on a daily basis. For example, I had to pick up the phone and at the same time assist the walk-in applicants. I also had to input personal data into the computer and invite applicants over the phone for our interview process, among other things. This is why the conversational class at the library has been so helpful for me, because “Practice makes perfect”.

I am very thankful to the library for this program, to my two supportive tutors Bernadette; to Noreen for being Miss Congeniality all the time; to Mary Anne for being so patient and friendly with her students; as well as to all the people that I have met in this class, because they are my new friends now.

My first professional journey was a wonderful experience. I learned a lot of things, and I will never forget my work team: Ina and Tanya who gave me this opportunity without any guarantee of my work ethic and abilities at the beginning; Christina who is like me- friendly and easy-going with people all the time; Patty who was always available for me when I needed help, and of course Leah, my mentor, who taught me almost everything.

I felt like Sofia Vergara when I was speaking English at work (HAHA!), but at least I could express myself. People always understood me, and I could send the message. I am very proud of myself, for everything that I did and learned. I am in a new job search right now, because the administrator job was only temporary. Today, I feel more fluent, confident and less nervous in my job interviews.

In conclusion, English as a second language has been an excellent tool in my professional journey, and it's the key for a better future and the stairway to success.

Viviana Basile is a student of the Literacy Council of Palm Harbor.

Learning Something Every Day

My name is Ramiro Saenz. I am from Nicaragua. I like to attend the English class because I need help with this language. Some of the things I enjoy about the class is learning vocabulary and using various learning tools such as Burlington English, Flocabulary, Hello Channel, YouTube and Freerice.com.

I also like the presence of different students from various countries. It feels like a whole new world to me. My teacher is surely a big help to all the students. She tries very hard to teach reading, pronunciation, writing, and listening skills every day to so many multilevel students without failure. Even on rainy or cold days, I still go the class because I do not want to miss what my teacher would be teaching on that day.

Ramiro Saenz is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

New life, New Experiences & New Friends

My name is Gormarie. I am from Puerto Rico. I moved to the United States on July 28, 2015 with my older sister Yaisha. My greatest motivation for moving was to learn English. Why is that? It is because I have a Bachelor's Degree in Elementary Education and I have always wanted to be an educator in the United States. Although I understand the language, it is a little complicated for me to speak it. This is what encouraged me to search for a school to help me learn English as my second language. I found West Area Adult School by searching the internet.

On the first day of classes all the students gathered for an orientation to find our respective classrooms and to meet our teachers. On our way to the lounge I was nervous, but when I saw my teacher I felt security and love because that is what she reflects. It was also very nice to meet colleagues from different countries, ages, and backgrounds. I have met two compatriots from Puerto Rico who join me in this challenge of learning English. My group has so much fun in class, learning that my teacher calls us the "party." I love my friends Alice, Carmen and Marie K., and I am very happy to have known them as we help each other in this very important process of learning English.

Without a doubt, I give thanks to God for the excellent teacher whom he put in my path, because she really puts in the effort to ensure that I learn new things. I'll be forever grateful for her help. Although I am just starting on my new journey in the United States, I feel my new experiences are the beginning of an exciting future.

Gormarie Marrero is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

It's Never Too Late

My name is Minnie. In school, I only ever learned what I had to in order to survive—mostly basic reading and writing skills. As such, I never fully grasped the concept of proper English which is something I always regretted. So at 51 years of age, I went back to school to further my education and to

improve myself. One thing I can say is that I have come a long way from where I was before.

My early education experiences were discouraging. My community considered my family hillbillies because we didn't fit into their ideal social standard. In primary and secondary school, everyone picked on me because of the way I spoke and wrote. I was constantly criticized by my teachers and certain students because of all of my grammar errors. I would freeze up on tests because they were largely based on grammar which was not something I could understand.

In addition, I was slow at my school work because I was easily distracted. I did not like that I had difficulty focusing, but I couldn't help the way my brain worked. When I wrote, I either couldn't think of anything to say or I repeated myself. Most of the time, I did not know what was expected of me. When I was 16, I did not continue with school because I didn't think I could.

At the age of forty-nine, I put myself in an Adult Basic Education Level II course at Gadsden Correctional Facility for Women. At my age, finishing my education wasn't something I thought I would be doing; I'm glad I did because I am enriched with knowledge and my life is more fulfilling. The class has helped me to improve my grammar, spelling, and math skills. I have learned how to read and write proper sentences and paragraphs, as well as how to solve math problems. The class has also helped me to communicate better with others and to comprehend what I am reading.

By putting myself in Adult Basic Education courses, I now have some knowledge of how to write more smoothly and more efficiently. I am able to retain what I've been taught. I have a clearer perception of my learning processes. I have the tools to not only increase my knowledge, but to improve my self confidence. In conclusion, now that I am a lot older, I am really proud of myself for finally sticking with something that is very important and that I can use everyday...an education.

Minnie Vancleve is an aspiring writer and is currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correction Facility, Quincy, FL. She hopes to write young adult novels. She enjoys reading and writing in her spare time.

A Big Step in My Life

I arrived in the United States with many goals in my mind. The main one was to study in order to have better opportunities. However, I had a problem like a majority of the immigrants do. I didn't speak English.

So, the first step to reach my goals was to study the language. My husband found the best place for me, an ESOL Program at Jupiter High School. I started in October 2014. I had a mix of emotions; I was nervous, happy and hopeful. The most difficult thing for me has been the pronunciation, but I know it's not impossible: "Practice makes perfect." I have found very nice people along the way, like my teachers and some classmates. They help and motivate me a lot. Meeting people from different countries is something that I like because I can see beyond any border. I am proud and happy because when I started my English classes, it was so hard for me to understand what the teacher said, but now I feel very comfortable and I understand almost everything.

I'm a very lucky person. I have had the opportunity to overcome difficulties and the most important thing is a family that supports and loves me.

Maria Isabel Diaz is from Mexico. She is a very conscientious student in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School (ACE).

My School Time

Everyone has a good memory about school. I am happy to share with you my school time. In my school, you can make really good friends, it is so fun. Now, let's go.

First, I want to say something about the middle and high school. I went to the school which is the best in the city, which has more than 100 years history, and everyone in our city is proud to become a student of it. I met a lot of new friends. The teachers were very nice, professional, and patient. That time we were so young, and sometimes we went to play and become interested in new things. The teachers helped us to know what is right. The teachers taught us that knowledge can give us a

good future. That was very important to us. I still remember one of the teachers say, “If you don’t study hard now, you will have to do hard work after.” Now I am in the USA, I want to tell something about what I study now.

Now, I continue to study at AEC. When I came to USA, I felt a new life come to me. It was difficult to me. I couldn’t hear and speak; just like a baby, I felt so helpless. I needed education to give me knowledge to let me have power. I hope through study I will be able to communicate with others. That will let me feel like I’m one of the Americans. I will have more chance to find different jobs that I like.

In the future, I hope can talk to others clearly and fluently to have a job that I want. I can get more money and have more time. I can go travel with my family.

In a word, education is very important to everyone. Maybe some people succeed, who didn’t have good education. But I believe education can give you more chances to change your life. Education can make your life better and better.

Kent Li is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Friendship Never Ends

Moving to a new country sometimes is easy or sometimes not. When you are in a new country and you know the people and you speak the language that would be easy. All the things would be great because wherever you go, all the people can understand you and getting a job would be easy.

I moved to the US about three years ago. I have a lot of new things in my life to achieve, as well as learning to speak English very well, then get my GED to get into college. I’m already chasing all these goals. I know it isn’t easy, but it’s not impossible.

I have been studying English about two and a half years. I have met a lot of people from school. All of them are from different countries and different cultures. Some of them are

my great friends now, even though some of them went back to their home countries or went to other countries, but I have had a great time with them, and we still keep in touch.

I have spent my time with my friends from Colombia and Guatemala. I don't remember when I met them, but all of them are honest and smart people, and we have shared wonderful times such as going to the beach, eating different types of food, playing some games and practicing our English. We aren't in the same level of English class, but we try to understand each other and explain when someone doesn't understand it.

I just want to say thanks to all these friends for sharing with me. It was a pleasure to meet those amazing friends. I believe our friendships will never end.

Tuan Lam was a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Schools in My Life

The first day in school was, for me, very important. It was the day when I first got to know life on a team, to be free from my parents, to have my own bench. First of all, I remember very well the specific class aroma and the aroma of the whole school building. My first teacher's name I forgot, but her face I have all the time in my mind. My jump to school life was positive and optimistic. I was so happy.

Education in the next years was different. High school gave us the most knowledge. We learned a lot of mathematics, physics, literature, history, geography, chemistry, etc. High school had a new quality. The discussions with the teachers about life and about their experiences pleasantly enriched us. We got a lot of important advice for life, so we were for the next life well prepared. All of the teachers I remember with great love.

Every five years a "class reunion" takes place at my school. These two days are only for us. Only we understand our slang, our humor, and stories. My best friend Julius, the girls Karolina and Kristina, the dark corners in the school where

we secretly smoked, and many more can be themes for lots of essays.

Now, again there is the same class and the school building aroma daily. My new school at my age, 74! This is the Adult Education Center. The teachers here are wonderful. They have to teach so many different people with different educational backgrounds from different countries. They are so calm, patient, and committed. For all this I appreciate them.

Why do I study English at the Adult Education Center? This question is easy to answer. I now live permanently in the USA, and I don't want to live closed in a small community where only my language is spoken. I feel that I should speak English. Besides this, maybe I can find a job in the future.

In the end, I would like to add a short note. The years in my schools were not only studying, but much more. Student life is eventful and rich with experiences. The first loves are unforgettable, and they still live in us. The most mistakes, most amusing stories, the biggest failures, and the best friendships live in my soul. When I am not looking in the mirror, I always feel like a young student.

Arpad Molnar is a student in the Level 7 class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Experience in Adult and Literacy Education

My name is Makenson. I'm 29 years old and continuing my education in an adult community school. My experience in adult education and literacy, taught me a lot over the years; the staff in the school is very encouraging, and very interested in helping the students. In my school, students are challenged to expand their learning and are helped to pass the G.E.D test. Students are also helped to set goals and consider different career path choices.

As I continue to get my education in my school, I encounter people from different cultures and different ages. They too, want to continue their education. That's inspiring me. I can further my education, believe in myself and dream of a better way of living; for example, getting a good paying

job, or going for a career.

My school is a place and a path to continue my education and a second chance or opportunity in life, to better myself. I encourage anyone and everyone who is determined to furthering their learning, to give it an adult education school, a try!

As for me, my experience at my adult education school, is teaching me a lot!

Makenson Corriolan studies with Gabriela Pesantes in Lee County.

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

I found Brewster Technical College on the Internet a couple of years ago but started classes in August 2015. The reason to seek a language school or a course was obvious: my English badly needed improvement. Living in the US without fluency in the language, I felt like a fish out of water. While I studied English at school and university 35-40 years ago in my home country, it appeared to be insufficient to express my thoughts fully and precisely. My goal is to speak without pausing in the middle of a conversation trying to dredge up from my brain the correct articles and verb tenses and to stop terrifying a listener with my strong Russian accent and poor vocabulary.

Since I signed up for ESOL classes, I have been busy writing assignments, practicing on line, reading text books, and learning new words. The studying process proved to be extremely exciting, causing a high production of endorphins in my body. My attitude to education is more conscientious than ever. On most days, I devote several hours at home to fulfill school tasks, so my husband feels almost abandoned. I feel that my memory is improving—although making a verbal summary of a newspaper articles is still a torture for me. Oh, Ms. Niedbalec (my instructor), please, don't ask me today to make a presentation to the class! I promise that my next goal will be taking a public speaking course to improve my delivery.

Being a full-time student has been an interesting

transformation for me, a female of 57 years of age. In my past, I was a teacher of physics in Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Russia for fifteen years. Later, I held the position of chief accountant at several foreign companies in Uzbekistan. Every job was mentally challenging and also required a high level of communication skills with coworkers or students. I would like to be able to achieve the same high level of communication in English as I have in Russian.

From my current experience, it is better to study English in an English-speaking country. I am happy to study at a well-organized school, and I admire our instructor teaching us not only grammar but also the tenets of the American life and culture.

Russians say, "It's never too late to learn." I would like to transform it a bit: "It is never too late to enjoy studying."

Svetlana An is currently a student at Brewster Technical College in Tampa, Florida.

It Is Never Too Late To Learn

My name is Elzbieta, I was born and raised in Leba Poland. Leba is a small town next to the Baltic Sea in the northern part of Poland. It is never too late to learn something new. This has not been easy for me, as I am not a very young person and learning a new language is very difficult. When I was growing up in Poland under the communist government my life was controlled by what the government wanted. They tried to break your free will by denying you the chance to expand your horizons. The poor and those living in rural areas or small towns had no chance of attending a university. The school programs had Russian as the second compulsory language. Closed borders did not allow free travel. There were limited possibilities in higher education and people of my generation were discouraged from learning a foreign language such as English.

In 1989 Poland went through a political transformation and has become a democratic system. Polish people continually learned what democratic is every day. Democracy opened the door for us Poles and a world of possibilities

became self-realized. I had this opportunity when I came to the United States. I did not speak English, but with the help of my husband and English Classes such as this I am learning the English language and slowly overcoming the difficulties associated with it.

I am like a small child who utters their first words. Learning new rules of living in another country as I am adapting to this beautiful country. Not only learning the language, but also by setting small and large goals for myself. Their implementation allows me to create new plans for the future. My next goal is to study, take and pass the GED exam.

My home is here now, where I will continue to grow. I am sharing my experiences with my family in Poland and encouraging them to learn English. It is never too late to learn.

My name is Elzbieta Ciara; I am from Poland. I am a student at Dunbar Community School. I am in ESOL class Level 6. My instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Be Patient To Reach Your Goal

I'm so excited to talk about my experience in Adult Education. I decided to come to school on January 10, 2015 to learn English. This has been a dream of mine since I was young. Now, my dream is coming true. Even though this was an obstacle for me, I'm overcoming it with perseverance.

English was so difficult for me because I did not know how to express myself in English. When I first came to adult school I wanted to give up because of the language they are teaching me. It is very different from the two languages that I speak, which are French and Haitian Creole. I've been determined to stay in school and I kept on persisting to learn it, I hoped. Someday, it's going to be easy for me if I do not give up studying. They are many reasons that I want to learn English. First of all, I live in the US. I'm supposed to go to school every day to study their language and to take advantage to also learn their culture. I really despise having someone translate for me. For instance, if I have a doctor's appointment, I don't want anyone to know what kind of disease I suffer from, that's a reason I come to school. Secondly, I would like to have a better

job. As the saying goes, the more you go to school and the more you learn, the better life you will have, and your future will be secure.

Thanks to God, I had a good teacher. I consider her my mentor because she always motivated me to read more English books to get better skills. She organized games to make me understand clearly. After four months I knew how to read and how to speak. Now I feel my English is on the right track. Adult school is a good place to be because they treat me as if I was in high school. The teachers are very pleasant with me and they make me feel delightful to learn English. To tell the truth, the benefits I gained in English are leading me to reach my goals.

To conclude, I would like to advise other immigrants like me to go to school. Even if it doesn't seem possible, you can make a sacrifice. Never say that "I'm too old, I can't learn English. It's too hard". If I do it, you can do it too!

Andry Vilfrant is from Haiti. He is a student at Immokalee Technical College. His teacher's name is Katherine Mominee.

A Turning Point in My Life

A Life-Changing Event

The stage of growing up hit me when I was very young. My mom and dad split up the year of 2009, a few short weeks before Christmas. At the age of eleven I learned how to cook, wash dishes, do laundry, and take care of my two baby brothers and little sister.

Sometimes I feel I grew up sooner than I should have, but growing up also taught me to never depend on anyone other than myself. My mom and I grew closer to each other after everything. My dad and I slowly drifted apart.

He got remarried in 2012 with a lady that had four kids. When he took me to meet his new family, his wife and I didn't click. I didn't care for her kids all that much either. Ever since then my dad and I haven't had much to do with each other.

At the end of 2014, I started at Santa Rosa Adult School. My brother told my dad about it, and eventually I got a phone call from him for the first time in over 8 months. We talked about my schooling for just a few minutes and then ended the phone call. He didn't have much to say, as usual, but I was used to that.

When I started at Santa Rosa, it taught me a lot and made me wake up a bit more. I'm now with the graduating class of 2015 at the age of 16. I work, go to school, and I'm starting college in mid-June. I've got goals I've yet to reach and dreams that are slowly coming to reality. The turning point in my life has taught me a lot, and has made me the strong, independent, young person I am today.

Haylee Beers is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

Changing My Life

When I look in the mirror, I'm not sure who is looking back at me. I see, but I avoid looking at the beautiful wrinkles that appear around my eyes because they are my life's book. I talk about them, but they do not reflect my real soul.

I think we all have a mission determined before birth. Yet at the same time, everybody has great expectations of you. In most cases, you do many things to make them (husband, wife, parents, children, etc.) happy, and you don't necessarily make yourself happy.

I became a mom when I was fifteen years old, living in a traditional society and family. I cannot describe all the things that happened at that time, but it was terrible. I had not even started a real life when my father said that I had no future and that I was a loser. I decided to prove to everyone that I wasn't and that I could do anything. So for 20 years I worked very hard and finished high school and college. I bought a house, a car, had a great job and, the most important thing, my son is a great boy. I am proud of him. I think I have the "stuff" that many people dream about. But all my life, I fulfilled all the expectations that the world had.

Now, I want to live my life. I know it is weird to say that, but now I am thirty-five years old and I want to stop my old life and start again with my rules. I want to feel free to make mistakes and do what I want to do in my time. I want to reconnect with my ultimate mission.

Nine months ago, I arrived in the USA, an unknown country for me, and my first step in this new opportunity is to rediscover myself. I have begun to study English and open my heart to love. My plans have been renewed and revised.

I hope that at the end of my days, all the wrinkles in my face are there because I wanted them there.

What do you want to see one day when you look in the mirror?

Johanna Gonzalez is a psychologist from Colombia. She is a student in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.

Precious Moments

My story is about having my first baby being born. I was excited when I found out I was pregnant. I will be 18 weeks pregnant by Thursday, February 4, 2016. I have been getting morning sickness and other symptoms. Ya'll don't know how it feels to be so tired and so sleepy. You don't know what I'm going through.

I will not buy canned soup to eat. I was influenced to make my own soup, because canned soup will make me sick. If I make my own soup, it will make my body feel better. I drink 7-Up or Sprite to settle my stomach, but I do not put it in the refrigerator. I let it sit out overnight, because my doctor and nurses said the bubbles can hurt the baby.

My support is a team that cares about me and my baby's health. These are the people on my team: Melissa, Stacy, my brother Tony, my mother and father, Tenay, Tracy, Dan, Britney, Betty, Ella, and my doctors and nurses. This is just the beginning, so I will continue praying for the best.

I love to learn how to read so that I can read to my baby when he or she gets here. I have been doing very well with the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. I have been with them since 2009 and have learned a lot. Learning to read is teaching me to understand what is coming in life.

One of the books I want to read to my baby that was read to me when I was a child is called Mother Goose. The Women's Health book from the Florida Literacy Coalition is teaching me to stay healthy while I am pregnant. I am learning about having a healthy pregnancy and baby's nutrition.

My precious moments will be when I'm holding my baby and reading a story to him or her.

Shaquonna Fowler is working very hard with her tutor Lori. She is making great strides in learning how to put her thoughts down on paper.

My Working Life

My name is Mark and I have been in the roofing field most of my life. When I was eighteen, I worked at a supply company, delivering shingles to job sites. I worked there for about three years and had gotten to know a lot of roofing company owners.

The company I worked for closed for 1 week for Christmas. Once, my Christmas bonus was 1 week's pay. I was sitting on a tree stand in the deer woods making \$5.50 per hour.

One day, the owners called the workers in to let us know they were going to close the company. They helped their employees get jobs with one of the roofing companies. This was how I got into the roofing field. I worked nailing shingles for almost 8 years.

I quit roofing to get into driving an 18-wheeler over the road. I have been from Juarez, Mexico to Canada, driving all over the USA. I worked as a truck driver for almost one and a half years. I drove over the road, making eighteen cents per mile. I had to keep the truck moving to make a pay check. I was fired for driving too fast on one trip.

When I arrived back home, I called up my old boss to see if I could get my old roofing job back. I started back with him as a roofing sub. I had to find and hire some men to help with the jobs. I worked as a subcontractor until 2004, when my wife and I opened up our own roofing company.

My roofing company is well known in the Escambia and Santa Rosa counties. We do roofing jobs for 7-8 builders in the counties. If it were not for my wife helping to open our company, I would still be working for someone else. That is not what I wanted do the rest of my life.

Mark Kelly is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructors are Renee Goodson and Beth King.

A Conversation with Me!

Hello, my name is Francina Marcella Hernandez. I have decided it is time to make a difference in my life, not only for myself, but for those around me, including our little girl Malesha. I realized that it is never too late to start over, make changes, or to be reborn.

Let me tell you what made me want to start over. It was a day just like all other days. I knew that I didn't want my days to be the same, making the same mistakes, making excuses, and not being true to myself. I was a big procrastinator. I started to question why I was intimidated with myself. Finally, I opened my eyes and looked around and thank God that I was able to see what I was doing.

I then decided it was time to change, a time to make a change not only for myself but also for those around me. I stopped my bad habits. I started giving Malesha the attention and affection she was yearning for. I have started a garden and I am watching my diet.

I am now enrolled at Dunbar Community School. Malesha and I, along with some family members, are going to church. I was baptized. I have seen a difference in Malesha's grades and her attitude. I have also noticed that my courage, my self-discipline, and my strength have skyrocketed.

In conclusion, one should never give up on his or her beliefs and always remember there are many chances in life. Also, one should try to look at the big picture, life is too short not to. Always remember you are not alone.

Francina Hernandez, at 29 years old, has returned to get her GED after leaving the GED program at Dunbar Community School three years ago. She wants a fresh start on life. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher.

Something that Changed My Life

In 1978, I went to a church meeting and repented of my sins and received Jesus Christ as my personal savior. That was the best thing I ever did in my life up until that time. I wish

I could say everything was a smooth ride after that, but no, it was not.

But I had someone to lean on, someone to go to, and someone to put his arms around me when the battle was raging. He gave me hope. No one could help me but him. I had six children with no help from their fathers, and I was living with a man who was not their father. He worked and made good money, but it was not ours. He gambled and drank and it went as fast as it came. The only good time we had was when he did not have money.

In the weeks after I gave Jesus my life, I kept hearing a voice inside me saying, “whatever you give up for my sake and the gospel, I will give it back to you both in this life and the one to come, eternal life.” Being a new Christian, I did not know that was in the Bible. So, I was sharing this with my niece. She is a Christian and knows the Bible. She told me how to find the scripture. So, one night when my man and I were on good terms, I asked him to leave me. I told him I love him, but I didn’t have any children for him and there was nothing to keep us together. He said, “I thought you would say let us get married.” I said, “No, you go and find a good woman and marry her.”

I think that was what he wanted to hear. The house we were living in was mine. I built it. The furniture was his and he took everything. He didn’t leave me a chair to sit on. That was five years of my life serving him, but he left, praise God.

Then, I had a son who was always in trouble with the law. The police killed him. Through it all, my faith kept me going. Friends backed away from me and some families too. But God never left me. Nearly five months after, a son that any mother would love to have, went fishing and drowned. But God kept me as only he could. About two years after all that, the Lord opened the way for me to come to the United States from Jamaica. I brought the two youngest children with me in 1986, then sent for the others after. They are all married and doing very well.

Since I came to the United States, I took the CNA exam and passed. I also passed the home health care exam. I studied for my citizenship test and passed that, but I did not continue learning. I would like to be able to speak to people and use

proper English and I think this class will help me do that. I have been getting some understanding of words and that is a good thing. I still would like to learn to use the computer.

To God be all the glory.

Avis Lemon is a student with the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. She is working with her tutor, Terana, to get a better understanding of the English language.

Life is Tough but I'm Tougher

In life there are turning points that mark a complete course. A turning point in my life was when I came to United States in 2015 from Cuba. I brought with me my teenage son and daughter. It was a difficult time because I anticipated many changes for me and my children.

On the other hand I know that when they are here, their future will be better. Both of them would like to be doctors and what an excellent opportunity for them to be in U.S. to achieve their goals. As for me, I am struggling to learn English. This is my priority. It is not easy but I will keep trying. Also, I am studying to become a nurse at the same time. I have learned that life could be tough, but I am tougher.

Tania Oliva is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Turning Point

The turning point in my life was when I had to quit high school to take care of my Grandma. I quit high school my 10th grade year. My Grandma developed a blood clot in her leg. She had received many surgeries and was on a lot of medications to solve this problem, but nothing worked.

Both my parents worked to provide and I was the only one able to take care of her during the day. So, I started home-schooling. I had to do school work from 9 am to 2 pm each day while still replacing her I.V.s and giving her medicine. I was still too preoccupied with school, so I had to do the best thing

for my family and drop out. It was hard dropping out since I was so close to finishing. I only had two years left till graduation, but I wanted to help my family.

I took care of my grandma for about a year before she got worse and my parents a home nurse had to take over. It was so difficult to watch my grandma and my families go through that. I felt like a letdown because I was a drop-out, but my family seemed proud of me for stepping up and helping take care of her.

A few months later, my Grandma got worse. The blood clot moved to her brain and she had to have emergency brain surgery. She recovered from the surgery very well and quickly at that. We all thought everything was fine but then she got an infection from the surgery and she was rapidly getting worse.

It was a scary time in my life. I practically lived with my Grandma, so it was hard seeing her like that. She had to get a second brain surgery. This one was even more terrifying than the first one.

After the second surgery, she was moved to a rehabilitation center to get help recovering. It broke my heart. She could barely talk and most of the time she couldn't remember who I was. She wasn't getting any better at the rehabilitation center. They said she was still getting worse and they gave her only a few weeks to live. A little while after that, she was moved to a hospice center to be as comfortable as possible.

Just five days later, my dad got a call in the middle of the night saying that she passed in her sleep.

So, this is why I'm getting my GED® diploma. I'm doing this for her and my family. I'm sure she would be proud of me for trying my best. I've never been the best in school, but she is my motivation to work harder.

Savannah Smithson is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructors are Beth King and Renee Goodson.

A Turning Point in My Life

I am a married woman, I have four children, and their ages are fourteen, ten, six and three years old. But now I want to share the turning point in my life. It is about my youngest daughter.

When I was pregnant with her I really wished for a boy, but it was a girl. I was upset but I accepted. She was born in October of 2012. She was a beautiful and healthy baby girl, I was delighted with her. She started growing normally; she sat down, crawled, walked, and even spoke. Also she liked to play and dance with her sisters. But when she turned twenty months, she changed her behavior, she lost her speech and she did not respond to her name, she was totally different.

One visit to her pediatrician could be the answer to my concerns. He referred her to get an evaluation to see if she needed speech therapy. I felt very happy, I thought probably this is the solution. The evaluation day came, I took my little girl to attend her appointment. While I responded to many questions about her development with the therapist and psychologist, another psychologist played with my daughter. At the end of evaluation they said that she qualified for speech therapy. Perfect this is what she needs, I thought.

Suddenly I heard one word that would change my life. The word was AUTISM, the psychologist told me that an Autism test was necessary, because my little one showed many signs associated with Autism Spectrum Disorder. (ASD) I felt petrified My feelings were horrible, I could not understand why this was happening. Then they scheduled another appointment for them to do the test, I accepted. I left the clinic and my heart was broken, when I got in my car I cried a lot.

When I arrived home, I researched information about Autism and sadly it was exactly what my little girl had.

I hugged my daughter strongly; I loved her more than before. I was depressed before she started therapy. She had therapy for one year. The therapist helped a lot for communication and many things.

She is three years old now and she only says GO and OPEN. She has Autism, she is so cute, lovely, adorable and

also my little angel. She is attending Palm Beach School for Autism. Every day I am teaching her everything to be an independent person. My dream is to hear from her calling me MOM. When this happens I will be the happiest woman. Now I am learning how to be a better mother for all my children.

This author has chosen to remain anonymous.

Miguel Alejandro

It was a cold morning on that May 13, 2011 when my wife woke me up. I still remember that morning. It was around 2:00 a.m. when she told me that the baby was coming.

As you can imagine, keep in mind that this is my first baby, I didn't know what to do next or how to help my wife without hurting her or the baby. I soon figured it out and after a couple of minutes we were riding to the hospital.

Once we were there, I filled out all the paperwork and the nurse took her to the suite. The doctor showed up at 7:15 a.m. Soon, I met this beautiful little baby that brought an immediate calm to that moment when I was so stressed but now excited all at the same time. That little baby was Miguel Alejandro, the most gorgeous baby ever. That same day, my life changed completely, I changed from just being another man to becoming a father. A father that now had a new meaning for love and for life.

From that moment on, I stopped thinking about just me and started to think about him. I started to figure out how simple life is and it's all because of him. He taught me, and even still does today, that things that are important in your life are worth fighting for.

Miguel Alejandro is a kid that always has a smile for you and always, if something goes wrong, will say, "Papi, don't worry, that don't matter." He then follows that up with one of the best hugs you could ever imagine.

I can sit here and tell you for hours how Miguel Alejandro changed my life and continues changing it every day since that May 13, 2011, because there are so many ways in which life

is different. One of the things that I can mention is that even then, I loved my wife at that point, but now I love her today more than ever. I knew the immediate feeling of being a father for the first time and I understood that life wasn't just about me anymore and that the world now was modified to US.

Before completing this essay, I want to clarify why I mentioned that the hugs that Miguel Alejandro gives to me every day are just one of the best ever and not the best ever. The reason for this is that because Miguel Alejandro now has a baby brother, Mauro Andres, and he also gives me the other best hugs ever.

Miguel Armando is a student at ACE Jupiter High School where he studies under Michelle Jeffrey.

Cowboy Up!!

The day I came out to my family and friends was a huge turning point in my life. The three reasons it was a major turning point in my life is Wyoming, being raised in a Mormon family, and life after coming out.

Wyoming with all its majestic beauty, made it extremely difficult as a teenager to live my life normal. When I was 15 years old in the small town of Worland, I realized I was unique compared to than anyone else my age there. I realized I was gay! Upon realizing this, I wanted to tell friends and family but then something terrible happened that made me fear for my life. Matthew Shepard had been beaten to death for being gay, thus leaving me to fear for my life. I thought if I told anybody, this may have happen to me. So I had to keep it secret from all.

Secondly, growing up in a Mormon/Military family, it was not acceptable to be gay. The Mormon religion is a very harsh religion with strict rules. Once I came out, the Mormon Church decided to send me to camp to heal me medically, and made me feel like as if something was wrong with me, when in reality there wasn't. I was then excommunicated from the church for being who I am, and my father still doesn't talk to me. My mother loves me no matter what I am. She made me feel good when she told me I was the daughter she never had.

Life after coming out was a rocky road at first. Not having anybody to lean on to for support or talk to, I had to Cowboy Up! And toughen up. So I packed my bags and all my belongings and moved to multiple states before setting roots in Florida. It was a tough emotional rollercoaster. I have managed to come out on top and have found the love of my life.

In conclusion, the major turning point in my life was coming out. The major reasons this was the turning point of my life was living in Wyoming, which to this day doesn't support the LGBT community. Mormons now accepts the LGBT community and it was the first major religion to side with gay marriage. Life after coming out had to be the hardest up to a few years ago. But I came out on top and told myself to Cowboy UP! Lastly, I would like to say to anyone afraid to be themselves, stand up and be PROUD! Don't let anyone tell you differently. There is a quote I live by every day of my life by Rupaul. "If you can't love yourself, how the hell you going to love somebody else."

Chris Hislop is an outstanding human being. He won the baking competition at the fair and starting his own cheese-cake company called, "Christopher's Chaotic Confections". I am very proud of him for a multitude of reasons! Sandra Gozzo is his teacher

Coming to America

As a young man growing up in Jamaica, life had its challenges. Our financial situation wasn't the best but we were happy. My mother made sure of that.

At a very young age I got the opportunity to come to America. We jumped at the opportunity as it was a way to open doors for myself and the rest of my family.

Coming to America wasn't as easy as I thought. I had to grow up fast. I no longer had the backing of my family, so I had to make decisions for myself and by myself, and for the most part not all good ones including not finishing high school because I had to provide for my family back in Jamaica. Fortunately, I had a higher power watching over me and I was able to accomplish what I was sent here to do.

Now that I am able to come back and finish high school, once again new opportunities have been opened for me and I am grateful to be at another turning point in my life.

Sequinea Stewart is a student at Palm Beach Central Adult Education. He is originally from Jamaica.

Climbing the Stairway in the Journey to Success

When you are thinking about being open to everything that surrounds you, about being a little part of something global, do not be afraid of learning. Learn and transform. Learn and understand. Learn and share. When you are thinking about all these things, one word can easily come to mind—literacy.

What did literacy give to me? I can tell you without any doubts that for me it is an absolute stairway to success. A long and steep stairway, because when you find yourself part of a strange environment, it is very hard to change everything. You need to be not afraid of learning and asking. Do you know how difficult it is just to admit that here in a foreign country with different language history and traditions; you have to start all from the beginning? You find yourself in a school again and you finally understand that there are no limits to the process of recognizing this life and world.

So there I started. A new journey where literacy is a very important part. It is such a great happiness to be able to find information in books, being able to process it and share. And it is getting more and more exciting everyday. There, success is to be truly involved in this life. Literacy is a part of education and education is a connection between me and the whole world around.

So we know that to climb up somewhere you need to make little steps day by day and just keep moving no matter how difficult it can be sometimes.

Do not be afraid to challenge yourself. Even if it looks too much for today it could be not enough for tomorrow. Life is learning. Literacy is a way to learn. Books are the great helpers and a very important tool in an educational process.

And just the ability to read, write and speak is a great treasure that makes you feel truly part of entire life.

I opened an absolutely new world for me so far away from the place where I was born and used to be. And this new wonderful world does not seem to be so easy sometimes. But I found a great support here in a library, climbing these stairways to success with all of you. That's why I can say that literacy is much more than just a word or it is much more than just even a stairway. It is a whole journey and I can feel that the best part is still to come.

Donata Zajac is a student with the Literacy Council of Palm Harbor Library. Her teacher is Mary Ann Janssen.

The Miracle of Life

You see a little bump grow and get larger and larger. You wait nine months to see him. I often got a glimpse of a small something moving and wanted to put my hand on my wife's skin.

You see the ultrasound image of a little person, but you can't really see everything. The day comes when you run to the hospital in happiness. They put you in a room and they say, "We check on you." Time goes by slowly. At that time you are scared. Then the time is right and her body is ready. Then she goes into labor. Several hours go by, then a little person is coming out to say, "Hi!" You're happy, scared and your heart is racing. Then you see him for the first time. He has the best of both of you. The child does not come with instructions. You look at the doc; he says, "The child is healthy and have a good day, bye-bye now." He is healthy—that is all a parent wishes for. At that time you need help, guidance, and more than ever—sleep.

Fast forward: I would say to see him grow in the last three and half years has to be amazing. To see his weight grow from seven pounds to thirty eight pounds; from 12" to three and a half feet. To hear him say, "I love you mommy and daddy!"

And you forever his little cheerleader for the whole world to see, and to be always in his corner.

By the way: my miracle's name is Jacob.

Danny Jankowski is the proud father of Jacob. He is a student of the L.E.A.D. Adult Literacy Program in Miami-Dade County, Miami. His teacher is Ana Pasztor.

There is No Limit

Sometimes I forget just how far I've come, focusing on how much further I want to get. Closing my eyes, I take a step back to three years ago. I am so perfectly remembering a lonely, young girl with no motivation of having an achievement in life. "A mind is a terrible thing to waste," Arthur Fletcher once said. Those eight words were all it took for me to look in the mirror and want more for myself and my undecided future.

At this point in my life, the biggest goal that I can achieve is getting my GED. With that I can do and be anything in this world, especially happy. Knowing that I have fulfilled such an accomplishment will open up so many opportunities I never thought I would have. I have taught myself that if I continue to think that I am good, I will strive for greatness, and if I want to be better, I will strive to be the best. It all leads down to mind set.

To have a positive mindset is the first thing to have in achieving any goal. It reassures the good feelings of believing in myself that I can pass the GED test. To have this, means so much for my future. It gives me the opportunity to have more options for many different jobs. There is no limit.

Once I achieve my GED, I will enroll in Cosmetology College to become a licensed make-up artist and barber. The beauty industry has been calling my name since before I could memorize multiplication. I have such a passion for this form of art, I just cannot let it go to waste. I am constantly studying the work of professionals only to notice how each one works differently but yet so similar. I can only hope to work as well as them.

Eventually I will build my clientele and open my very own salon in five years. I have such an eager desire of achieving this success, nothing can stop me. They told me I couldn't, and I

always seemed to believe it. That was before I started believing in myself. To get everything on my own means more to me than having it handed to me. I am my own motivation. If I can achieve this by just believing in myself then I can achieve anything.

Kim Roney is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at The Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Haitian Carnival: Puzzling Folkways

The Haitian people know, every year, a long period of folkway celebrations made of cultural folkdances, folksongs, local color, allegorical floats, and disguises is coming. These attract foreign visitors and Haitians by the thousands. These are mingled in a spicy feast of insight and excitement, full of scenes of voodoo, very often getting drunk, elated, particularly through Port-au-Prince, in the "Champs de Mars" Park.

The trial period begins on the last Sunday of January and continues each Sunday, for two months. The government and the businessmen provide about fifteen floats and pay the musical groups. Each musical group has its own music (meringue). It is breathtaking, hot, enchanting, and sometimes sarcastic. The businessmen take advantage of this captivating carnival, as a good way to promote their business.

One month before the festival, the government rents to the dealers and foreigners a portion of ground on the way of the carnival to build platforms (almost one hundred) where their families and friends attend the parade, by regaling and dancing. For this feast of fool pleasure, Haiti also gets lots of money, helping its economy.

The carnival supports the Haitian African voodoo traditions which include the dances of Incas of Peru and Aztecs of Mexico, embellished by the exposition of Haitian agricultural products. Many beautiful girls, disguised as Indian women of the former Indian race of Haiti, buccaneers and filibusters, with their fairy costumes and headdresses from pre-slavery period, adorn these floats. They present some epics of slave insurrections, leading to the battle of Vertieres, in Cap-Haitien, on November 18, 1803, and their independence on

January 1st, 1804.

On Sunday, Monday and Tuesday, the musical floats cross and carry away this human tide; singing, dancing, enjoying carnival, making them completely unconscious of all their concerns. Tuesday, the last day called “shove Tuesday” (Mardi Gras) is the closing of the festivities with fireworks late into the night, ending with the fantastic ceremony of “bwlé bwa” (burning wood).

For the tourists, the Haitian Carnival unrolls in an overexcited ambience, where the Rhum Barbancourt warms up their heart, and the on-foot folklore groups with their dancers, wonderfully disguised, enchant and ravish them.

Participating in this great event constitutes a support to the Haitian culture and a proof of solidarity. The patriotism and the courage of all Haitians remain their determination in their fight for always staying strong and confident, because Haiti represents a wonderland, full of hope. So, when we participate in this popular marriage of colors, music, dances, floats, and races, we are really happy and proud of our country.

Charles Bazile is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Controlling My Destiny

It all started with a major health problem beginning of 2013. I was suffering from left knee pain for over 4 months and realized I had to have it looked at. The earliest appointment I was given would be four to six months. So being a bear of a man, I endured the pain until May.

The x-rays were done for my left knee and since no inflammation showed, they recommended new x-rays to be taken of my left hip.

A hip replacement was scheduled for January of 2014. The doctors told me I needed to have a physical for the upcoming hip replacement surgery. I was told that I had an oral infection and that all my teeth had to be pulled and the infection would have to be cleared from my system before I could be scheduled

for hip surgery and they would inform the surgeon.

After enduring well over a year of discomfort, the turning point came when I realized that there was a failure of communication between doctors. I controlled my destiny and fate. By being in control, persistent and following through I could change an impossible problem to a positive one. The relief I was seeking for so long was about to end. Faith and determination in myself, to see solutions to problems in everyday life that was the lesson I learned. That became my turning point.

Leonard Snyder is a Veteran, who came to the ABE program at Manatee Reads! And is being tutored by Verna Urbanski.

The Most Difficult Decision of My Life

In 1980, the USA opened the immigration gates from Cuba; more than 250,000 refugees were taking part in a massive exodus. They were admitted on the south coast of Florida. These events changed my life and the rest of my family as well.

It's difficult to explain how this decision affected our lives, because we never thought of leaving in these circumstances. It was a surprise, and in a few days we lost our jobs, my children couldn't go school, and our friends couldn't visit us and ended all any relationships with us.

My sister-in-law had been living in West Palm Beach for several years. When Cuba's government accepted that hundreds of ships and boats could arrive on the coast of Cuba, she rented a ship with the idea that all our family could come to the USA. She was forced to bring some prisoners with her on the ship, but my husband and I couldn't come. When the police went to my house with the official order to leave my country, somebody from my town called my son's school and told the principal and explained to her that we were leaving for the USA.

Everything was very confusing. We traveled to the school that was in chaos. My son was very nervous and we understood he was afraid about this situation. The security state came and at this moment, if we let my son leave, my husband and I would go in prison, so we decided to stay in Cuba.

When we came back home, many people were waiting to attack us.

After 8 months, we were able to leave from Cuba to Costa Rica. In this country we lived for 3 years and the communication with my family was very scarce. I received only two letters and two calls at that time. I cried every single day. I missed my family, my friends, my job, and sometimes I asked myself, “Why did I make this decision?”

For years, I wasn’t sure if my decision was correct or not, but later, when I went back to Cuba, I understood that it was the best decision in all my life. Today, my children say “Thank you very much for taking this way.”

When I am watching the news on TV about the refugees in Central and South America, Cuba, the Middle East, and Asia, I remember all the difficulties we had 30 years ago.

Then I understood how they are feeling and I’m praying for them. To live in freedom is the best decision that a person should make.

Miriam Gonzalez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

A Little Bit of Me

This is a bit of my history. In 1999, I came to this country through a program that recruited people from Puerto Rico with papers to work in a town called Liberal, Kansas. I started work in a factory that processed meat for three months and in that place I met my husband (Jose Tellez), who is from Mexico. At first, it was only friendship but after a while we fell in love.

We went to work in another town called Guymon, OK where we worked for a year. For me, the most important thing was the money. I didn’t care about learning English. After a while, we decided to move to Florida. It was very difficult at first we neither knew anyone nor did we have work. We lived in a room so small that we could barely walk.

I remember the first Christmas it was very sad for both without family, friends and little food but always with our dreams of the future. After a while, we started work and life began to change. In 2002, I had my first child- a girl (Kareline X. Tellez) and we bought a mobile home. Everything was well and we continued to work and in 2005, I had my second child- a boy (Abdiel Y. Tellez). In that moment, we decided to find a better place for our children in that same year so we bought a house in Mulberry, FL.

Everything was fine and we worked without stopping for two years consecutive and we bought another property where my mom and grandparents live. At that time everything was working and we had moneywe took vacation once a year.

The years passed and we bought another property and all my family was proud of us, but for me it was not enough. Do not get me wrong, it was something I needed. For anyone that could be a success in life but in my case it was not. I did not feel satisfied. I wondered what happened inside me but I knew that in my whole life what I wanted was to learn English and have a career that I enjoy.

Although at first that learning English was not important but inside me I knew I was wrong. So what happened one day I woke up and I quit my job of 12 years working with a good salary and good benefits but I didn't think twice- I just left. It is where my life took a change and I decided to pursue a career and learn better English. I think of all that I had in life this decision was what more has filled me with joy. In this time in my life I don't want to change anything. I am quite happy spending time with my family and learning new things.

Madeline Rivera is a student at West Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.

My Hero Is Real

I admire my hero for a lot of reasons. I admire my hero because he is smart. My hero has made me so different and He believes that I will have a great future one day. I have improved my studies and looking forward to a new future. I see the world differently, and now I believe in myself and will work hard to

achieve all my goals.

Now, I have good job, thanks to my hero. He taught me the meaning of how to excel. He is one of my greatest living examples. My hero, who started from the bottom with humility and watched his dream come true.

Now he is a great businessman, boss and owner of many properties in the city where I live. Because my hero had faith and confidence in me, I have become the manager all of his properties.

Sonia Melendez is a student at Dunbar Community School. She is in level 6. Her Instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Turning Point

In my nearly 46 years, I always said, “I’d only leave my island, Puerto Rico, if I stayed out of work.” This happened in December 2014. For over 22 years, I was a full time professor of business education and information systems at the university level.

In May 2013, my boss told me that I had to become employed part-time because they only had two classes that I could teach. It was a hard summer. After spending nine years working for this university, they converted me to a part time employee. That scenario was repeated for a year and a half. I looked for work at other universities, but there wasn’t much enrollment for courses in the major of office administration. Amazingly, my profession was extinguished. In this way, the companies forget that every office needs a secretary with formal studies to manage it successfully.

The economy forced me to eliminate expenses and focus on basic needs. I no longer went out to the movies, or ate out. My health plan was the government health plan. My purchases were made with only the basics to eat; there were no special meals. The family watched movies at home, as it was more economical to rent a movie to watch all together in the living room of our house.

My husband, who is a professor of automotive technology,

worked from 7:30 am to 10:30 pm Monday through Friday. He left home at 5:50 am and returned home at 11:30 pm; it was an hourly job. That is, if there was break from classes, he did not receive his salary. This situation caused him to reflect on what was happening to us as a family. His eldest daughter had a part time job in a bookstore, because in her profession of criminal justice, there weren't many jobs. She lived with us as his second daughter did. The second one decided to enlist in the Navy, and in October 2014, went to receive her basic training. At present, she is in Japan. My son enlisted in the Army in May 2012 and lives in Texas. My youngest daughter is in Puerto Rico with her father to finish high school, and in college she will come to study here in Florida.

We each sat down to talk with God. My husband applied for a job in Florida. He was interviewed by webcam, and on October 30, 2014, he moved first. I stayed to pack our bags in Puerto Rico with our daughter who lived with us. On December 18, 2014, I closed a chapter in my life to start writing another. I cut my hair, from waist-long to neck-long. I want my new life in Florida to be completely different and full of new experiences. I love my island, I miss my daughter and my parents, but we must fight for family welfare any place in the world.

Ayleen Martinez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Most Recent Turning Point

As everyone knows, life is full of ups and downs. Some mornings you may wake up feeling like you rule the world, like nothing is impossible. Some other days you just don't want to get up at all.

Life as a single mom is both the most wonderful and the most arduous job in the world. On the bright side you feel the need to be even more available for your kids, you need to know about what moms but also dads would need to know about. That constant necessity translates into being present in each one of their activities and adventures. However you, as a person get slowly torn into pieces. You are constantly filled with

your child's love but lacking love for yourself. Whether you know it or not, you don't get to fool your kids. They can see through your loneliness and your sadness and it affects them more than you could ever imagine.

This happened to me, I drifted away. I became a person I couldn't recognize until one very special day. On this day my daughter talked me into getting out into the world once again. After much convincing on her part I agreed, I wanted a change. Not soon after I met a great guy who likes to travel as much as I do and who offered to help me become who and what I wanted to be. The transition was incredibly hard but after many good times, much work and great commitment I began feeling like myself again. I eventually decided to give myself a chance to keep loving my kids as I always have but also giving myself the care and attention I deserved.

I decided to move out of the only home I've ever known, Puerto Rico. I left my family and painfully I managed to separate myself from my daughter who studies at the University of Puerto Rico. This was the hardest thing I ever had to do but we both agreed it was necessary. As she told me one day "Mom, I'm all grown up. When I leave I want to know you're happy with your life." My youngest son came with me which comforts me even when I have my heart divided. I'm still in the process of adapting to my new surroundings but the calm I feel most of the time tells me I made the right choice and greater things are in store for me.

Nitza Vazquez is a student at ACE Jupiter High School. Her teacher's name is Michelle Jeffrey.

How It All Began

Before I was born, I lived in a place that looked a bit like the Earth. There was absolutely everything: units of production, processing, and storage. There was also a network of exchange as well as a defense system to ensure the safety of that environment. It was so well organized that even today I find my inspiration from it to create, innovate, and succeed. However, that place although highly organized, was not able to support my evolution. Therefore, I was entrusted to the Earth. The trip to the Earth was difficult, but I arrived to the

destination. Since my arrival, I quickly realized that another trip would be necessary because I was greeted with a slap on the buttocks. That day, I cried as much as I could even when everyone was laughing at me.

Being a boy, an unknown person from my neighborhood told me that even if I was very young, I could reach the top of any mountain and collect stars. Wow! I admired the stars. He added that there was a bridge, short as a wink, where I could expect to arrive as fast as time. However, tradition had it that we had to discover that bridge on our own.

In my teens, I was very concerned about locating that bridge. I looked everywhere and I never saw a bridge as the one that was described to me. One day I wondered why try at all costs to find the bridge if my goal was to pick the stars? Why do I have to be on the top of a mountain to collect stars? Why not attract the stars instead? And, it was already my first step on the bridge. From then on, I realized one thing that would change my life and my way of seeing things.

After that, I succeeded in reaching the top of the mountain. As fast I could, I picked thousands of stars. Wow! I admire stars because each of my readers is a star. I located the bridge thanks to this short story, and I have made this wonderful trip with you.

Elize Bertrand is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

A Turning Point in my Life

My life hasn't been so good but it hasn't been so bad. The good thing is that I'm still young and the best parts are yet to come. However, in the past few years I've had to mark the biggest changes and these changes were people, places, and my actions.

At 15 my life flipped from the most happy and best to the hardest and worst in a matter of days. My parents got divorced, I lost my grandparents, and I lost myself. Then I was sent to a juvenile lockdown facility for 23 months.

The grandparent's situation is what sent me off. They were my foundation and my parents. For months I let the anger take the best of me. I started fighting, dropped out of school, drugs came into the picture, then the arrests.

What hurt me most are my grandparents. I got caught up in a drug deal gone wrong. Two friends got shot and only one survived. What followed was lock up.

As a juvenile I learned a lot. I realized I had to choose either the fast life or the real life. Now, here I am in school to get my G.E.D. and getting my E.M.T. license is next!

Danny Groberio is a student at Dunbar Community Adult School in Ft. Myers.

A Turning Point in My Life

August 7, 1997 was a turning point in my life because it is the day I gave birth to my oldest son, Marcus Davis Jr.

From that day on, my life had changed. At the time, I didn't know if it was better or worse, but I had to deal with it. It really didn't matter because I had someone to love me and for me to love back, a child of my own, at the age of 17. I wasn't giving up on finishing high school, playing sports, and do what I had to do as a mother.

Then, on October 26, 1998 I was blessed with my second child, another boy who I named Moses Walker. Life became more complicated; however, I was grateful to have a wonderful support team that was and continues to be there for my kids and me. It was a struggle sometimes, being a young mother of two; but I didn't let that stop me. I started school again and continued to go to same school but then needed to change to a new school; once enrolled, the school didn't want me there so I had to make a decision that I didn't want to make. I thought about it and made a decision to get a job because I had two kids that I had to take care of. They were my priority!

I got my first job at a retirement home in Downtown, Fort Myers; the name Caloosa Harbour. I work there for a couple of years as a server, sometimes working six days a week and

sometimes 12 hour shifts. I needed to make sure that my kids and I had the things that we needed.

On February 3, 2000, I gave birth to my third child, Dewayne Walker; the next year on December 23, 2001, I gave birth to my fourth child Jassidy Moore. As I gave birth and laid my eyes on her, I thought for a while about my life as a young mother of four. I have been working hard to make sure my kids were taking care of and were growing up in a good environment. I tried my best to keep them on a positive path and teach them the value of life. As I look back and look at my kids, truth be told, they are my motivation; the things I do in life, they are the ones that witness them. The day I gave birth to each of them, the focus wasn't on me anymore; it was about them!

Through it all, I decided to return back to school just so that my children can see that it's never too late. I wanted to be a good example for them, to show them that we can accomplish things we want to do in life and that we can be anything we want to be. Giving up is never an option. My two oldest, are graduating from high school next year and my baby girl, is entering high school next year.

Becoming a mom was the turning point in my life; I was young and had no idea of what I was getting into because I was young at the time. My children made me the woman I am today. I'm grateful to have them in my life.

Dewanda Moore is a student at Dunbar Community Adult School in Lee county.

I've Learned a Lot...

A turning point in my life was when I went to prison. Since living in America, I've learned not to take my freedom for granted. I've changed my attitude; I'm not the same person and I'm no longer scared to express my love.

First and foremost, since coming to America, I've learned to never take my freedom for granted. Normally when a person thinks of the word freedom, slavery comes to mind. However in my case, I think of the free world. I guess it's true when they

say “ain’t no feeling like being”. Because of my prison experience, having my independence is no longer taken for granted.

Next, prison has changed my attitude in a very positive way. I watch what I say to others. When a police officer, for example, speaks to me in an unseemly way, I make sure to give my point of view in a respectable manner. Also, my frame of mind now is to be more understanding. Whereas before, it was always “I don’t care”.

Last but not least, I’ve learned to express my love. Before prison, I was scared to express my love. Because of my time in prison, I’ve learned to express my love for people, because I have no fear of being hurt. Now, because of prison time, I got love all over me. I’ve also learned that you can express your love for another person by something as simple as giving service to anyone in need.

In conclusion, I’ve explained the turning point in my life came when I went to prison. I’ve learned not to take my freedom for granted. I’ve changed my attitude and I’m no longer scared to express my love to everyone.

Marc Desouvre is a student at the Dunbar Community Adult School in Ft. Myers.

My Life Changed When I Came to the U.S.

My name is Julie Saintil Joseph. I have been two years in the United States. I’m so blessed to be in the U.S.A. because I came here to go to school to study and learn English. My experience is very good. I come to school because I want to go to college to study childcare or nursing. My goal is to be a good nurse and with that I will have a better life. I can buy a big house and my children can have a good future.

My favorite place is my country, Haiti, because there are so many beautiful beaches and museums. I would like to return to my country to help my friends and my country. I bless the Lord for saving me and my family. And I ask God to bless America too for giving me an opportunity to come here. I can realize my goals here and I couldn’t do that in my country.

Julie Saintil Joseph was a student in Vicki McDonald's Levels 4 and 5 class at Dunbar Community School in Lee County, Florida. Julie is originally from Haiti and is very happy to be in the U.S.A.

The Courage to Start Over

More than a year has passed since I was looking for myself, my person. When I was in Haiti, my thoughts were different than the idea I had for the USA. Indeed, many things I have done were very successful because I have the ability and the skills that my profession required. Life can be disrupted when you have to make a big move or make a big decision.

I can say, this is what I've been experiencing for almost two years; I packed up my belongings and opted for traveling to seek a better life and build my own family. This is not an easy thing I assure you. There were many things which came from that move, that decision, like suffering and bullying. Some of the reasons were simple. I didn't speak the language well, and I had a bad accent and it's not even perfect today, but I can survive with it. I didn't have access to work everywhere because all the places asked for Spanish and English speakers. After setting out for a new home, I had to try to blend in that country by speaking the language and working hard to scrape by. That is something very difficult for someone who doesn't speak English and has to take his or her own responsibility.

I did not give up. Then I decided to pursue my goal further, and I got in my mind to go to the AEC, because I thought that was the most relevant thing to do to start with any goal for a person like me. Then I prioritized school, study every day and be conscious and get ready to adapt with some situations.

Certainly, it was so fortunate for me to have the ability to go to my first job interview when I only had five months in this land. That was amazing. No matter what, I was so proud of myself, even though I still don't understand the whole word in English. That's not bad, because I keep studying English and I'm not going to capitulate, to abandon school until I finish college and get a better position at my job.

Today, I am a student of the College and Career Readiness

class at Adult Education Center. This is an amazing thing to me when I realize I'm not so far away to be accepted in a college in the U.S. Better late than never, there's no age to stop learning, and believe in your potential. Trust your gut to accomplish your fate and always have courage to start over when things go bad. You'll be profoundly relieved.

Kettely Vernet is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Goals and Ambitions

The Importance of Setting Goals

It is important to have goals and ambitions to strive for in life. One of my goals is to achieve my GED. Getting my GED has always been my goal since I was a little girl. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity, as many do, to attend high school. I lived in a small town, named El Armadillo, México, where there was no high school. The closest high school was in a city that was very far away. I had to cross hilly mountains to get to the city where the high school was. There wasn't any way for me to go because my family did not have a car to transport me to the high school.

It will be such an accomplishment for me to reach my life goal to get my GED. No one in my family has a degree and I would like to be the first in my family to receive a degree. My family is very happy for me taking GED classes, especially my mom. My family and I were very proud when I passed the ESOL class in the first semester. I am now taking the Adult Basic Education Classes or ABE class. I have two daughters and my oldest daughter has been a great help to me. She helps me with things I don't understand in ABE class.

When I reach this goal, my next goal will be to receive my bachelor's degree. I would like to become a nurse and help the elderly. I am a strong believer in having goals and ambitions and am looking forward to receiving my GED.

Matilde Fuentes is from Mexico. She attends ESOL and ABE classes at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville, Florida. Her teachers are Brian Jones (ESOL) and Art Bellen (ABE).

Be Happy

My name is Nancy. I am from Bogota, Colombia. I love my life with my children and my mother. My goals and ambitions are to be happy, physically healthy, have a healthy mind, have a lot of love, and be able to have more money and travel a lot.

To be happy is the most important goal in my life. I thank God for allowing everybody who has entered my life. I also try to enjoy every moment, even the smallest ones.

I have always tried to live a healthy life and be physically healthy. I like taking care of my body and it has always been an important part of my life. This is not vanity in any way. I think that my body is a machine that needs a lot of care. This is the reason why I eat healthy food and exercise daily. I want to continue taking care of myself and my body. In my country we have a saying, “healthy body and healthy mind,” which means that it is very important to not only take care of our body but also our mind.

Reading, breathing and studying are some things that I do and I would like to keep doing for a very long time. I believe that keeping my mind busy by reading and studying will enable me to have a healthier and happier life.

I hope that someday somebody will come along my way to become my partner. I would like that special someone to accompany me in things I will want to do, have fun, and enjoy those things together.

Nancy Martínez is a Colombian student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus, School of Continuing Education and Professional Development, ESOL Program ELCATE C, Prof. Rebeca Prado, M.Ed.

What I Would Like to Be

My name is Sabrina Joseph. I was born in Haiti. I came to America in the year 2011. The reason why I came to the United States is to advance and make a better life for myself.

I aspire to be an educator/teacher. I believe that the key to a successful life is proper thinking. The more we learn the better we can understand ourselves, our community and our world.

I would like to teach elementary school kids, because this where it all begins. Kids, that fall behind early in their curriculum careers usually become unable to learn properly. I would

like to explore different methods of teaching so I can structure a technique that all children can learn and grow from.

I would also like to study medicine and one day become a doctor. I will study medicine to help the under privileged get quality affordable medical attention. If you're not part of the solution then you are part of the problem. I aspire to be the answer to the equation.

Sabrina Joseph is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. She is in ESOL Class Level 6. Her Instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Teresa Olade and I am from Mexico. When I came to the United States my goals and ambitions were to learn English and to get a good job. However, it has not been easy for me. My first language is Spanish. Learning another language is difficult but I will continue to try. I want to learn English so I can help my family in Mexico, my children, and my husband.

I am now in ESOL class because I want to learn English to help my family in Mexico, because Mexico is a very difficult place to live. Every day I think of my parents and brother. Another reason for me to learn English is that I have two children and I need to be able to help them with their homework. I also need to understand their teachers, especially at conferences.

My last reason to learn English is because I want to live a better life with my husband and children. When I learn more English I will be able to get a job to help my husband pay for a new home. I know I will overcome the difficulties of learning English. I am trying and know that nothing is impossible.

Teresa Olade is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

You Can Reach Your Big Dream

My name is Jaquelin Robles. I'm from Mexico and I am 21 years old. My big dream is be a nurse. However, I first have to finish my ESOL classes. Then I need to go to ABE classes and get my GED.

After I finish my GED, I will choose a college to major in nursing. Once I finish nursing school, I will look for a job.

I want to help poor people and older people who don't have insurance. I also want to help people in my family who are at risk for diabetes. When I become a nurse I will be able to give my son a better life, good home, provide for his education, and make my family proud of me.

Although it's difficult studying English, taking care of my child, and being a house wife, my goal is almost done. I can do it if I keep trying. If you are reading this don't give up, but keep trying. I am sure you can reach your big dream.

Silvia Jaquelin Robles is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Knowledge is Power

My name is Sanjuana. I am from Mexico. I came to the United States. My goals are to improve my English because I want to understand, speak, write and read better in English so I can help my children with their homework and to get my GED.

I want to speak with other people and maybe look for a part-time job to save money, because I want to care for my family. Finally, I want to show or prove to my family that it is never is too late to achieve our goals because knowledge is power.

Sanjuana Rodriguez attends ESOL classes with Adult & Community Education Family Impact Program at Pahokee Elementary in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Rosa Vazquez.

Time for Action!

Nowadays, it is extremely hard to make a living in life, find work or a career without a G.E.D. My three explicit reasons to get my G.E.D. are to have a career, live comfortably, and invest in my son's future. Time is running out. It is time to take action now!

A General Equivalency Diploma is the key foundation to a bright future. A G.E.D. will open many doors. It is my belief that I must further my education. I want to go to college in the Fall of 2015 to earn a degree in the medical field. Education is everything. The wisdom and knowledge one has will set free the mind and the spirit. Knowledge is power and it is my freedom! I want to be the woman that inspires others by being a leader, by setting a good example and by showing people that you don't always have to be a product of your environment.

In order to live independently, I will need to find a career where I can make a salary of forty grand or more annually; this will put my son and I on stable ground. It takes dedication and hard work to have a career in the healthcare field; nevertheless, because of my love for helping others, this will not be a problem. The medical field is challenging and I will do anything it takes to be physically and mentally prepared for the work I am yet to face. Once I am in the healthcare field, I will be able to save lives! I just want happiness and I can have that by making a difference in someone's life.

To live comfortably, I need to be prosperous. By obtaining a G.E.D., my son and I can live comfortably without the worry of being kicked out on the streets. To make a living in America, I need my G.E.D. to survive. A G.E.D. will be my lifeline. With it, I can invest in my son's future.

I have a little boy named Isaiah Luke Vanwy. His life has just begun and he deserves a role-model, someone to look up to. I must give him a healthy start and a safe home. Therefore, when it's time for him to go off on his own, he will be ready to make the right decisions and live a good life. It is my intention to set a good example and to lead my son in the right direction.

We must teach our children that having an education is the key to success. By obtaining a formal G.E.D. and finding a suitable career, I can make it happen for the both of us.

Amber Vanwy passed the GED Test at Dunbar Community School and is now enrolled at a technical school. Ms. Hicks-Wiley was her teacher.

My Dreams Come True

My name is Marie Sonia Accime. I'm from Haiti. I've been in Florida for seven months. I study at ITECH College. I live with my parents and two sisters; I'm the oldest. I came to this country with many dreams and goals to accomplish. Although I love my country, I want to fulfill my dreams. I remember when I was a little girl; I used to think that someday I was going to be a nurse. My other goals are educational, emotional, physical, and familial.

The first of my goals is to finish my English class and be a nurse. I need to be able to communicate with people in this country in English and have a good accent as a native English speaker. English is not an easy language to learn, but I'm planning to try harder, keep coming to school, read and practice more. I'm going to cut down on watching TV and I've decided to quit sleeping so much. I have an excellent teacher who is dedicated to all the students. When I finish my English class, I will go to a college to continue studying my profession as a nurse. I'm planning to live a happy life. I'm thinking about starting a family and finding a better job. In the future, I would also like to help my kids to have a better life in society. I've decided to save money, buy a beautiful house and travel to another country.

Another goal that I have is to keep exercising every day, have fun, focus on beauty, and be young. I've decided to quit eating fast food at night. I want to be healthier and live a long time. My ambitions are to work hard, earn a lot of money to help my family and take care of myself. I want my family to live comfortably in their life. Thanks to God, I am happy and following my goals.

To sum everything up, I have been very ambitious with my goals. It may be a long road, but a very exciting one at the same time. It's been challenging, but I'm a very persistent person and I am looking forward to achieving my goals. In the end, my goals in my life will come true.

Marie Sonia Accime is an English student at Immokalee Technical Center. She has been studying English for five months. Her teacher is Katie Mominee. She lives with her parents and two sisters.

Opening a Door in My Life

I am originally from Mexico and my native language is Spanish. I have been married for 20 years and I have three girls. When I arrived in Canal Point in 2005 I didn't speak any English. It was so hard for me to enroll my children in school. My sister-in-law told me about the program, Family Impact ESOL for adults. Now I'm here. I'm not perfect but I take care of myself and my family. My goals are to learn English, become a citizen and get a good job.

I have achieved one of my goals. I became a US Citizen. The process of becoming a citizen was very hard for me because I don't understand or speak much English. Now I continue going to school to learn English and get a better job. Before my appointment, I studied everyday about the history of the United States.

On the day of my appointment I felt very nervous and scared. I did not know if I would understand the person who interviewed me. When the person who interviewed me told me that I had passed the citizenship test I felt very happy. This goal that I have met has opened many doors to jobs that I can get. I continue to go to school to learn English because the job I like requires two things, to be a citizen and speak good English. When I feel comfortable with my English I will apply for this job.

Sara Alfaro attends ESOL classes with Adult & Community Education Family Impact Program at Pahokee Elementary in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Rosa Vazquez.

My Dream in Life

I have set a lofty goal for my life. I plan to work very hard on achieving my goal. It may take a little time, but I will reach

my dream. Once I get the experience I need, I will gather information about the LPN and RN programs. This will help me make a decision to reach my goal. My ultimate goal is to become a Registered Nurse.

I have many skills. I am good at helping people. I am very patient, humanitarian, passionate and compassionate. I am a responsible mother, wife, and a CNA. Working at Imperial Health Care, I am always available to help residents in the Nursing Home. However, I need to develop better technology skills, especially on the computer.

In order to reach my goal, I have a lot of tasks to accomplish. First, I need to transfer my High School Diploma from Haiti. Now, I am taking English classes at Lorenzo Walker in the ELCATE program. I need to pass the TABE, Reading, Language and Math. I need to improve my oral and written communication skills. I must pass the entrance exam (PAX). Then enroll at LWTC for the LPN classes.

I am already working at a nursing Home as a CNA. My main goal is to work as a Nurse with the purpose of helping people that are ill. When I graduate as a LPN, I will get a full time job in the Hospital. There, my skills will improve more and I will get used to all types of diseases. I think this work experience and gained knowledge will make it be easier for me to reach my ultimate goal to become a Registered Nurse.

I can say having a better education will allow me to get a professional career. This will lead me on the road to success with the ability to take care of my family.

Sandra Andre is from Haiti. She studies in the ELCATE program at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. She is the mother of two children, works as a CNA part-time and attends school full time.

Reaching My Goal

Since my childhood, my dream has been to become a lawyer. My father used to take me to the court every Friday, and I was happy when he let me attend the trial. When I finished with high school in Haiti, I went to college and I started to

study law. Sometimes in life, the barriers and obstacles you encounter can prevent you from achieving your goal.

I came to the U.S for a better life. In spite of this good opportunity, I can't continue with my study of legal science because of two reasons. The first reason is that the U.S and Haiti don't have the same legal system. In Haiti they use the "Roman Germanic system" because we were colonized by the French. The second set of reasons is that studying in the U.S is too expensive and I don't have someone to guide me, and I have no contact with any firm in the U.S.

As a new step in my life, I dropped my childhood dream to embrace another. Now I have a new objective in mind. It's a new goal. It's to study computer science and become a computer engineer. I did not choose computer science because I have no other choice. I chose it because I like it. I remember when I was a child I used to repair, or tinker with things that did not work at home; for example, the iron, the toaster, etc. I'm passionate about technology. I spend hours at my computer. But to achieve this goal, I have to overcome some barriers, for example mathematics. Math is the pillar of this science, but I have some deficiency in math. That's why I take math courses, to fill the gaps.

I want to achieve that goal, to become someone important in my society. People respect people who have a lot of knowledge and who are educated, especially when you are black. I also want my mom to be proud of me. Before she leaves, I would like her to see what I will become in the future. I want to watch her smile and go around telling everybody "You see this guy that is dressed well and speaks very well? He's my son."

Joas Benjamin is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

One Day I Will...

When I was fifteen years old, I had to make a big decision in my life. I needed to choose whether to continue my regular studies or play baseball. I believe 100% today, that I made the best decision in my life. I'm determined to follow my dream

and ambitions. I know that I need to work hard every day to accomplish my goals and I will do whatever I need to make it happen.

First, I wanted to sign with a professional baseball team. It was a lot of pressure because my dad and my brother were professional baseball players. At the age of seventeen, on January 14, 2014, an unforgettable day, I reached my first goal. I signed with the Houston Astros. I know that it wasn't enough though. I had to work harder. That same year I played my first professional season, wishing that I could obtain good results and thank God I did. In my second year, thanks to hard work and dedication, I traveled to the United States seeking to do better and setting firm goals. When I finished my second season, one of the coaches called me to his office to congratulate me and told me that I was going to my first Spring Training. I am in my third season now with a lot of enthusiasm and waiting for the season to start so I can be successful and continue to fulfill my dreams and ambitions.

Like any professional baseball player, his dream is to become a big league player and that's my dream too. But that's not all. Since I was fifteen I always wanted to win a World Series, a Gold Glove and play in an All-Star game and I know I will make it because I am determined. Also, in the future when I retire in Panama, I will open a foundation like Mariano Rivera to help poor people and also establish academies to help children get off of the street. I don't just want to be a big league player. I want to be a role model for my society and for my younger brothers and teach them to work hard. It all comes with dedication and sacrifice.

“I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me”
Philippians 4:13

Ihan Bernal is a prospect from Panama signed with the Houston Astros. He is a student in their language and literacy program. His teacher is Doris Gonzalez.

Don't Let Go

My name is Rita Cordoba. I have been here in the United States for 13 years. My goals are to finish ESOL at West Area

Adult School, complete the nursing program, and work in the hospital. I will buy a house and a car.

I will finish school because I want to explain to my daughter her homework and speak more English with her. I will study nursing because I want to help and heal people. I want to help translate for people who don't speak English. I will work at a general hospital in the emergency room.

I will buy a new house and a new car. I will rent out my house to save money for my family's future. Always try and never look back. All things that you have, hold on to them and don't let go.

Rita Cordoba is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Ask, Seek, Knock

I left Haiti on January 16, 2015 for the United States to join my family in Key West, Florida. I knew from the very beginning that it is not going to be easy here because I do not have a profession. Therefore momentarily, I have to grab a simple job to take care of my family. My short term goal is to learn English well so that I can communicate fluently.

I want to be able to go to college to study culinary arts. My ambition is to be a chef because there are many restaurants in this city. I know I would make it because I have a good teacher who always motivates me to keep working hard towards my goals. She says, "There is always help available. You just need to go and look for it. Ask, and it shall be given *you*; seek, and ye *shall find*; knock, and it shall be opened unto *you*."

Ricardo Desrosches is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Life and Goals

I am Robertson Dorius. I'm from Haiti. I'm married. I have lived in United States for 6 months. I want to be a contractor.

I go to school at Immokalee Technical College to learn English. I have decided to buy a new computer to study English at home. I borrow some books in the library to read. I practice English every day with my family and my neighbors because I need to speak English very quickly.

Now I am working. I'm planning to try harder in English. I practice more with my friends at work because English is the first priority for me. I intend to live a healthier life and eat lots of fruits and vegetables. Sometimes I go to play soccer with my friends at the Immokalee Park. I go to the gym to do exercise. Every Sunday I go to the church to thank God. Now I am trying to open my own business in Fort Myers with my wife. My ambitions are to give my family a comfortable life.

Now I'm so happy because I'm on the way of success. I know with Jesus Christ everything possible!

Robertson Dorius is a student at Immokalee Technical College. His teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee. He likes to study English every day.

That Others May Live

Ever since before I was able to walk, I always had the dream of entering into the military. At first I wanted to follow in the steps of my father and join the United States Marines. Looking into it more, I realized that he wasn't home a whole lot, and I don't want that for my family. Soon after I realized this, I started looking into branches that may be a little bit more family oriented. After a few months of searching and asking questions, I finally came to, as Scripture says, "A strait betwixt two." I had the choice of the Coast Guard or Air Force. I was interested in looking more into these two fields, and I found many interesting jobs (ratings as they are called in the Navy), but none of them seemed to stand out to me.

One day, desiring for more professional answers to my many questions, I decided to stop into the local recruiter's office and ask a few questions. As I walked into the office I saw a big poster which read, "That Others May Live", and immediately I knew that this was the job for me. I asked what the poster depicted, and the kind woman at the front desk was

eager to educate me. She told me that it was of a Pararescue Specialist. A Pararescue Specialist is tested to his limits, and then some. “You have to be strong mentally and physically to succeed in the Air Force Special Ops.,” she said. I was never one to turn down a challenge, so I finally decided that this is what I want to do.

I am currently too young to take the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), but I will soon take it after my 17th birthday this coming August. So while I wait, I will prepare myself for the rigorous training ahead. I know that I will succeed in this field. I will live up to the standard set by the others before me and strive for that motto: “That Others May Live.”

Dakota Frieze is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Rhonda Currier.

The American Dream

The American Dream is seen as accomplishing wealth, finding opportunities and building a better life for yourself. Everyone has different meanings in life.

The first thing one does is open his/her eyes. I opened my eyes to a bright and sunny day. I realized I am getting older not younger and that I have to do things to improve myself. This means coming to class on time, cleaning the house, watching my siblings and studying. Each and every one of these play a role in my definition of the American Dream.

Before now, I used to tell myself I can have fun and I can be young which is true. However, when you're the oldest of three children or seven children, you have to set a good example. I have to go through mistakes to learn from them. This is a start to life, achieving goals, and success. It may not be fun, but it is life.

Our lives are set out to be something special. We are here to make a difference and impact others. One of the main goals for me being here is to do something. I have to find out what it is I need to accomplish. Sometimes, I may get stuck in a situation; however, I will keep my eyes opened to realize the true

meaning to my life.

What really matters is that I am able to wake up, get ready for school or work. Before, I was held back by certain situations. I am now determined to stay focused. What I've come to realize is that fear or not being sure about things can only slow me down. To achieve the American Dream, I have to overcome any obstacle and be willing to knock it down.

The American Dream is to open my eyes to the potentials that surround me. I can live the American Dream by becoming a better man and human being through education. I am only 17 and looking for better ways to make it in America. Surviving is the ultimate test in my book and adapting is a test. It all comes down to: am I ready?

Dekerontae Johnson is 17 years old and enrolled at Dunbar Community School to get his GED Diploma. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is his teacher.

GED: My Dream

There are multiple reasons why I want my G.E.D. I would love to get my GED so I can attend college, become a pediatrician and pursue my dream of traveling.

After high school, I imagine going to the next level in life, college. I did complete high school, walked the stage and all, but I accepted a certificate of completion because I fell short on my FCAT by one point. That really tore me; I wanted to give up but I decided to come back to school so I can pursue my dreams. Later on down the line once I get my G.E.D., I plan on going to medical school to become a pediatrician.

Trying to get accepted into college is very hard without a diploma or G.E.D. In high school, I applied to different colleges. I got accepted into a few; this was great for me. After finding out I missed FCAT, I called a few of the schools to see if I could take a test or even remedial classes but I got turned down. They wanted me in their schools; however, I needed my diploma or G.E.D. That's what really pushed me to come back to school.

I love life and I see great things in life; however, without an education, it's really hard to pursue my dream for life. On paperwork, people ask if you have a diploma or G.E.D., most of the time if you don't have one, you get turned down on the spot. They don't want people with no education or little education sitting on a job and working under them. I mean, I wouldn't feel right on a job not knowing how to do anything. You need an education point blank, period if you want to go far in life.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me Phil 4:13 is my favorite Bible verse. I live by it; I know God doesn't put you through anything he knows you can't handle. I look at this as a learning experience. When I fell short on FCAT I picked my head up and now I'm here to finish the job. Positive vibes only, keep faith, study, and pass these tests, is my motto to get through this G.E.D. course.

Kardasha Patterson is enrolled in GED at Dunbar Community School. Ms. Hicks-Wiley was her teacher.

My GED

I finished high school fifteen years ago with a Certificate of Completion. Today, it is important for me to get a diploma in order to go to college, become an elementary school teacher and to become a better mother.

I want to go to college. It has always been my goal to go to college but things didn't work out for me. I had to do something fast because I had a daughter to take care of. Now that my daughter is in school, I can work on getting my GED which would allow me to go to college.

I want to become an elementary school teacher. It has always been my passion to work with kids. My daughter and I play school. I just love to see the smile on her face while she is learning new things. I want to teach kids to achieve their goal no matter what!

In all honesty, I want to become a better mother. My daughter, Aaliyah, she is my pride and joy. She is my motivation. When I look at my daughter, I want to cry sometimes be-

cause I think that I have failed her as a mother. She knows I'm a good mother; so, I have to stay strong for her. I want to show my daughter that I can finish school by getting my GED and go to college to make a better living for us. I want to teach my daughter to achieve her goals and not to ever give up on life!

I want to get my GED, go to college, and study to become an elementary school teacher. It is my passion be a better mother and to show my daughter she can achieve her goals.

Latoya Levatte-Church is a very dedicated student enrolled at Dunbar Community School. Ms. Hicks-Wiley and Ms. Anna Franta are her teachers.

Education Is Important!

I'm doing it big for my family and me. Do not give up!
Education is important!

I'm Kristen; I'm 25 years old. I was 16 when I dropped out of school to go to work. Being young and hating school, you think dropping out and going to work is the answer. My parents have always owned businesses my whole life. Over the years I have always worked for them to earn money to pay for what I wanted. I have never really thought about the importance of an education until now.

I have two kids, a five year old and a one year old. I also have a husband who has his education. I don't want to struggle my whole life trying to help provide for my family. I want to better myself. Not only for me, but for my kids, and my husband.

My goal is to get my GED diploma and then continue my education by going to a technical school to earn a degree as a Medical Administrative Assistant. I want to be able to show my kids that their Mom worked hard to give them a better life and never gave up. When they are grown up I want them to look back and say, "Mom worked hard for us."

When you put your mind to it, anything is possible.

Kristen Land is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Mil-

ton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

I Will Achieve

My name is Socrates Luc. I am single, Haitian, and I have been in the United States since 2013. I study at west Area Adult School.

Praising God is good for my sprint and is my first goal every day. I enjoy going to school and learning English. After I finish my ESOL classes, I will go to college to be an engineer and find a good job. I want a nice car, a nice wife, a big house, and a large yard. It would be nice to have a pool and basketball court.

I would like to have three children, two girls and one boy, in my family. I will help people. I will make my home business, and continue my desire to be a good person. I know with God's help I will achieve my goals and ambitions.

Socrates Luc is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

My Three Goals

My name is Marta Perez and I'm from Mexico. Now, I live in the United States. I am going to Adult Ed to learn English. I have three goals this year. My first goal is to learn more English because I want to help my children with their homework. It is not easy for me because I have a lot of work every day in my home.

I have a big family and not enough time to study at home. I want to study more English because, in this country, it's important. My second goal is to learn reading, writing, listening, and speaking English because I want to prepare to take GED classes. My third goal is to get a part-time job so I can buy a new house for my family. I am working hard in my English class because I want to get the US citizenship. I want to bring my parents and my sisters from Mexico to the United States. My ambition is to work hard and to have a better life. I hope to

achieve my goals.

Marta Perez attends ESOL classes with Adult & Community Education Family Impact Program at Pahokee Elementary in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Rosa Vazquez.

My Three Golden Goals

My name is Robenson Rene. I am from Haiti. I have three main goals in my life. My first goal is to make progress in everything I do. I would like this for my mother and for me one day. My second goal is to have a job, save money, buy my first car and a house. This sounds like a tall order. My third goal is to have a wife, children and share what I have with my family.

I hope all my goals will be accomplished in the future.

Robenson Rene is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Sweet Goals

My name is Gabriela Rivera and I came From Mexico. I have been in the U.S. since 1998. I like it here because I have a lot of opportunities. I am a mother of one child. His name is Alexis Aguilera and he is four years old. When I first came to America, I was living in my brother's house for ten years. I was working in different places, like the fields. I was picking all kinds of vegetables for a long time. I had many goals and ambitions, but at the time I didn't have a choice. Now I am married and I am studying English in the elementary school in Pahokee FL, because my first goal is to learn English to help my son in school. My second goal is to take GED classes so I can go to college and study culinary arts. My other goal is to find a good job, which will help me earn money to achieve my main goal.

My last goal is to have my own business, my own bakery. My dream is to design my bakery myself and sell all kind of desserts and cakes for all occasions: artistic gelatins, flans, cupcakes, pop cakes, cookies, etc. I also have ambitions like

having a big house and living happily with my family. I hope that I can soon reach my goals and ambitions. Then I will have better opportunities in my life with my family.

Gabriela Rivera attends ESOL classes with Adult & Community Education Family Impact Program at Pahokee Elementary in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Rosa Vazquez.

My Goals and Ambitions

My name is Odia, I was born in a beautiful country named Haiti. I came to U.S.A to follow my goals and my ambitions. Now, I am enrolled at Dunbar Community School. I'm currently taking ESOL classes. I have many goals stored in my mind about what I want to do with my life. I have three goals that are really important to me. First of all, I want to complete my English course, my second goal is to go to college, and become a pediatrician. Third, I would like to fund a center for children.

I want to complete my English course because I want to be able to converse with others. I know the language will help me achieve and move forward in accomplishing my goals and ambitions. The knowledge and skills that I'm learning will prepare me to move forward to college.

Once I complete my English course, I will continue my education in the medical field. I will enroll in Miami University. My intention is to take classes to become a Pediatrician. Education is a better way to be successful, so I have to work hard and stay focused and I know I can do it.

After completing my personal goal, I will be able to return to my country and open a center for children who do not have any families to depend on. There, I will tell them about the importance of education. I will also, tell them about setting their goals and always strive for a better life.

In conclusion, my goals and ambitions are the most important things in my life. I believe in God and I pray every day for help in accomplishing my goals. After completing my English course, attending college and becoming a pediatrician I will be successful. I want to make my God, my family and

myself proud.

Odia Chimeldine Servius is a student at Dunbar Community School in ESOL Level 6. Her instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Green Vocational Academy

My biggest goal and ambition is to start my own vocational high school. The school will prepare students for careers in sustainable energy, food and water production. The U.S. population is growing larger and we need to educate our children about the importance of supplying the needs of that growing population. My school will teach students new ways to supply these needs.

The U.S. is running out of energy to supply the needs of its growing population. We are using up all of our oil and gas and we need to find other sources of energy. My school will teach students how to get energy from the sun, wind and ocean currents. Students will use solar panels to get energy from the sun. They will use wind generators to get energy from the wind and they will use turbines to get energy from ocean currents.

This country needs to find more food sources to feed its growing population. We are becoming more and more dependent on other countries to supply our food needs. We need to develop ways to produce food more quickly and efficiently. My school will teach students how to do this using aquaponics. Aquaponics is a highly efficient way of growing edible plants and fish at the same time and using the same recycled water.

Clean water sources are in short supply for our growing population. We need to develop ways to produce clean water more quickly and efficiently. My school will teach students how to effectively catch water from the rain and store it in containers for use. Students will also learn how to get usable water from the ocean using reverse osmosis systems.

The U.S. is running out of energy, food and water to supply the needs of its growing population. We need sustainable solutions for today and the future. My school will teach students about these solutions and hopefully help solve our

country's current and future energy, food and water problems.

Marilyn White is the mother of two wonderful young men. She is a learner in the Adult ESOL Program at Jupiter Community High School. Susan Mitchell is her teacher.

My Future

I am Rose, and I am from Haiti. I came in the USA to achieve my objective. I want to be transformed into an important woman in my community. My intention is to have success in my life. That's why I would like progress daily in order to reach my goal. My goals are to improve my English, become a nurse, and get a better job.

First, I will improve my English. For my dreams to come true, I have to work hard, focus, be determined, make sacrifices, and not give up when it gets hard. I will continue to practice and learn, even if people laugh and make fun of me. Even if I fail, I will learn from my mistakes. Most of all, I will try my best to stay positive regardless of the situation.

Second, I want to go to school for nursing to help people and to be able to make my dreams come true by becoming a nurse. I will follow instructions from the doctor, but at the same time be the mouth of the patient. Also, I will be able to see what's an important skill for me to acquire, teamwork with my coworkers, and prioritizing. I genuinely want to help people and will love it. I want to be a nurse because I want to really help people when they are most vulnerable.

Lastly, I want to get a better job. My dreams are to make good choices in life and not to have too many regrets. I want to become a nurse to get a better job and to provide and take care of myself and my family. Also, I want to be happy and not be in poverty.

I hope everything will go well for me in my goal. The only thing I can do is pray that I have made the right choice, be happy with my family, and help to achieve their dreams to also be happy in life.

Rose Alexander has three brothers and five sisters: Ocinique,

Techelet, Louichard, Monique, Clemene, Carline, Venite and Kettia. They all live in Haiti. She is the only one who lives USA. Her teacher's name is Katie.

My Goal

My personal goal in life is to become a dog trainer, preferably a German Shepherd Dog trainer. My favorite dog breed is the German shepherd; I've always thought it would be fun to train one. The reason I chose to become a dog trainer is because I've been attached to dogs since I was a child; I want to train them to help the military, and also the disabled. I've been thinking about this for a while and I think it's the best profession, for me.

I have had multiple passions in the past; but this one caught my eye. I believe that most dogs are misunderstood and forgotten. Dogs are a really big part of the military and a big part in human safety. Dogs can be trained in multiple ways such as, finding bombs, drugs, etc. That's why dogs are helpful to the military.

I plan to train dogs that protect people, find weapons, drugs, and help the disabled. Many people are now trying to get well trained dogs, mainly to protect their families. One way dogs can help the disabled is by leading the blind. They are also therapeutic for children with autism. I believe that anyone can train dogs if they try as hard as possible. That's why I plan on training dogs.

German Shepherds are one of the smartest breeds of dogs. Training German Shepherds can be both difficult and easy. They are all different in their own ways. There are dominant, aggressive, and playful. They need our time and attention because they're high-energy-driving dogs and need to vent their energy. If you leave German Shepherds by alone, they can become bored, agitated, and snappy. They expect strong leadership from their owners. This is why German shepherds are my favorite breed of dog!

There are many steps to training a dog. Training begins with play. Play is important because behavioral issues arrive out of sheer boredom. Issues can include disobedience,

barking, and aggression, to get a person's attention. Crate training helps teach dogs to be potty trained. There are many commands in dog training, such as, sit, come, down, etc. Long walks, playing in the park, and wrestling with a chew toy, are all great ways to give a dog, attention.

In conclusion, I love dogs and it's always been my passion to train them, for many reasons: I've been attached to dogs since I was a child. I want to train them to help the military, and also the disabled. When I am stressed or upset my dog, Bella, always makes my day better.

Dawson Thacker is a student of Dunbar Community School. He lives in Ft. Myers.

My Goals and Ambitions

I have been planning my professional future since 1998, when I finished the mechanical technician course and high school. In fact, my father always encouraged me to study as much as I could. He always said; "only by studying and showing competence, you are able to guarantee your professional life". I have always recalled these words; they help me to keep committed with my studies, even despite of some big challenges.

After I finished high school, I went to University of Campinas, located in Campinas, Brazil and began my college studies. I learned about engineering and the medical devices area. Although I like these areas, I did not know what exactly to do in the university. A year later, I finally decided that I would study Biomedical Engineering at the University of Sao Paulo. This field was exactly what I was looking for because this major combined the following subjects: Math, Physics, Biology and Chemistry. Since finishing the university, I have been working in the Medical Devices area.

I faced huge challenges when I decided to relocate to the US to work in an American company located in Fort Myers, FL. Nowadays, I *revamped my goals and plan* to start my Masters of Science (MS), degree in the US. In order to match the US regulatory requirements for an MS in Biomedical Engineering, I should have sufficient knowledge and skills in the

subject. I took steps focusing on improving my English while in ESL English classes. I also enrolled in the GED course and I will take the GRE and TOELF exams in the future. I completed the ESL course that increases my skills in English, improving my vocabulary, grammar, listening, writing and reading.

After that, I started the GED course that seemed to be essential for my plans; I learned through the teacher skills and students' interaction. The GED test consists of five different test sections: Social Studies, Science, Reading, Mathematics, and Writing. During my study in the GED course, I always did the exercises and took some pre-tests in order to evaluate my scores. I am one subject away from achieving my diploma.

I still need to take the Reading/Language Arts test to finish the GED credential. Once I finished with the GED diploma, I look forward to begin studying for the GRE. I will use the highly recommended book, GRE Kaplan Premier Book 2016 and some guidelines and YouTube tips. After the GRE, I will get ready to take and pass the TOEFL exam.

Now, I am quite confident about my ability to reach my goals and ambitions. We always need to setup new goals in our lives, to keep us motivated and alive!

Luis Lopes is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers, Florida.

Don't You Feel Successful?

Do we need to go to college to be a successful person? I think most of us have had this question in our minds and the pressure on our shoulders because it is what society sees as the correct way. However, what would you say if I told you that it is not necessary to go to these institutions to still have a good chance of being a successful person? I know it sounds kind of complex, so let me talk about my own education.

Well, I had a regular education like every single child in my country, Colombia. I went to primary school and then to secondary with only one exception, I did an extra course to become an accountant because that was a requirement to get my high school diploma.

After I accomplished these goals, I started a new adventure in America, and with this, a new way to think and see the things around me. After just three weeks in this new territory, I began to improve my English skills and got a new job as well. Then somewhere at this point, I changed my mind because I realized that it is not mandatory to go to college in order to learn something new.

Don't get confused... I want to go to college, learn as many things as I can, do the normal things that people do when they are in an institution like this. I can even imagine getting my degree which could be an experience more than amazing, but I don't feel the pressure that I used to feel because I am still learning new things.

If you don't have the chance to go to college or don't have enough money to do that, don't feel bad. It could be faster, but if you have enough passion and courage you can use alternative ways to learn like by practicing or empirically. The secret is to never give up.

Cristian Rincon is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Challenge to Succeed

We all have goals and ambitions in life leading to success, and for that there are some challenges. My goal and ambition is to get my GED diploma. It is my key to success, and it is just the first step of what I plan to accomplish. The GED will allow me to go further with my education, and I will feel satisfaction. Putting all my effort into this, and getting my GED diploma with honorable scores will open doors to excellent universities, and therefore, a better education. I want to prosper in life and become a successful systems engineer. Not only is the career quite interesting, but I also enjoy managing systems. It is amazing how every day technology is rapidly evolving. Therefore, I will never finish learning new skills and OS and that makes me feel wonderful.

Becoming a systems engineer is my dream. No matter if it takes more than 5 years of my life, I will face that challenge

and take the necessary time to get a specialization to become a successful engineer. There are some qualities and abilities you must have in order to be the best professional. You must be patient and persistent in order to create a complicated system. An engineer must possess an analytical brain, creativity and perseverance. Recognizing a task needs to be accomplished, a good engineer wants his project to be flawlessly done. Knowledge of systems engineering tools and strong organizational skills are required in order to handle the amount of information that a systems engineer must deal with. Oral and written communication are also needed to be able to communicate well with non-engineers. The ability to lead, adapt and work in a team is essential, a good engineer knows how to do all three well.

My friends and family always turn to me when they encounter technical problems because they know they can trust the technology guru (genius) in their midst. It is a pleasure to assist them because I like to challenge myself solving those problems. I also teach them how to use some programs and tools. It is a way to put my skills into practice and improve them with the passing time.

Carlos Mena, from Mexico, is an ELCATE student at LWTC in Naples, FL. His teacher is Graciela Somoza. He will continue his studies in computer science at the university.

My Favorite Place

The Ocean and Me

I have three favorite places that I enjoy and relax when I'm there. I would like to write about one of them: the beach.

Sometimes I ask myself why I like the beach. It is so hard for me to explain. Sometimes I think it's because it's a place where I go to relax, recharge energy, cry and laugh. It is the place where I feel all emotions, and I find myself. It is to be beyond the horizon and breathe fresh air.

I love to see the ocean as my confidant. He knows all about me: my happiest day, my saddest day and my secrets. He is always there to listen to me quietly and answer me in a delicate way with the sound of waves.

When I talk to the ocean, the waves take my words and bring me new ones, and my brain begins to think about new things. It is incredible to see the ocean and get lost in the infinite. When I watch the sunrise and sunset at the beach, it is a gift from God. It is an incredible picture in my head when I see them. The sunrise is a new day full of energy. When I feel the sun, my body starts to fill with everything that it needs. When I see the sunset, I always say thanks to God for everything and for a wonderful day.

The sea, the blue, the fresh waters are the most beautiful and magnificent sights in nature. I can stay in the water for hours, relaxing. I like to feel my toes in the soft sand; it is very calming. The sand is a natural exfoliant. When I go to the beach, I like to exfoliate my feet and my body with the sand: it is rejuvenating for my skin.

One reason my husband chose to live in West Palm Beach was the beaches, and we are close to the sea. I love go to the beach with my husband and my daughter. It's special with her, because she really enjoys making sand castles and playing in the water.

It is a moment where we enjoy, relax, share and recharge our energy. I don't know why, but I remember feeling that

way since I was a girl, maybe because my dad also liked and enjoyed being near the sea.

My husband tells me when we retire, we will live in front of the sea, and every day we can see the sunrise and sunset.

Alicia Castellanos is a student in the College Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Powerful Garden

My favorite place is spending time in my garden. I love being in my garden, because it helps me relax and I enjoy being one with nature.

My garden is like my best friend. For me, it's a wonderful place to relax. It is here I feel safe to be whatever I feel like being at that moment because the plants, the wind, and the soil don't judge me. Being in a relaxed state helps me find inspiration in myself. My garden of relaxation helps me see the beauty in my mistakes. Relaxing connects me to my heart and soul in a way that opens me up to forgive and let go. It brings me so much peace and happiness.

The best thing I love about my garden is that I learned that I am one with nature. Nature is reality of realness of self-awareness. Therefore nature holds enlightenment and truth. Nature never lies. I learn more from nature by experiencing it, then from anyone who could ever explain it to me. Nature takes me inside myself and helps me to be a better person. Nature helps me be my own best friend. Nature has amazing beauty and I love taking time to hear its sweet calls. It's very calming and relaxing. Nature teaches me to be creative and give back to earth by nurturing the garden.

Relaxing and being in nature makes me see the beauty inside and outside of myself. It lets me know I am whole, I am safe, and I am loved. I am at one with everything around me and nature is guiding me through life. That's why my powerful garden is my favorite place.

Sharon Byrnes is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Country I Love

Do you know that Ukraine is the biggest country in Europe? Ukraine has a plethora of traditions and customs. Traditions are like the heart of a nation's culture. They determine the way people live, the language they speak, the religion they follow, the relationships they keep, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, the houses they have made and much more.

Ukrainians are very family oriented people. It is common for parents or even grandparents to live together with their children and grandchildren and help them to raise their kids. There is a very popular saying, "Your real children are your grandchildren."

In the Ukraine, people tend to eat fatty food such as whole milk, sour cream, butter. It is because of the cold climate. They like to cook and practically don't eat junk food. But Ukrainian cuisine would be incomplete without pork fat called salo. Ukrainians joke, "Salo is our national pride."

Ukrainians are mostly bilingual. They can speak Russian and Ukrainian. In Western Ukraine the Ukrainian language is more common, whereas of Eastern Ukraine, the Russian language is more useful.

Ukrainian music is very sonorous and melodic. Most of songs are sad because of Ukrainian history that is full of tragedies and injustice. It made an influence on the culture.

If only you could visit the Ukraine, you would be surprised and amazed at the amount of beautiful women and girls everywhere. You would marvel at Kyiv, our capital that is more than 1,500 years old, with its historical landmarks. But there is something that would impress you even more: it is Ukrainian hospitality. For welcoming guests, Ukrainians put the best food on the table, and in special ceremonial cases, we use a loaf of bread and salt on the top. This is very symbolic in Slavic culture that means: "Welcome to our home. Our home is your home."

Olena Goldsmith is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Grandma's House

My favorite place has always been Grandma's house. My Grandma's house has and always will have a very special place in my heart. I spent many summers with my grandmother when I was younger throughout my early teen years. Her house seemed to have something special about it that set it apart from all the rest. It is just the little things that make Grandma's house so special to me.

My Grandma's house is a place for all family gatherings. On holidays, it is always full of laughter and cheers. Uncle Oscar can be heard from miles around with his deep, signature laugh. Aunt Beth never passes the opportunity to joke about his laughter. Everyone sitting down at the holiday dinner can be seen making jokes about one another or telling the newest jokes heard.

My grandma can always be seen sitting in her living room next to the door gazing out of her window. This is where she reads her daily newspaper and drinks her hot coffee with no sugar and no cream, the old fashion way she calls it. She sometimes sits in her living room, for hours upon end, watching the birds swoop down to the feeder placed next to the window. This is why it's my favorite place. Grandma's House.

Maria Crespo is from Mexico, she is a student in ESOL Class Level 6 at Dunbar Community School, and her instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Journey Out West

Hello, my name is Irma Orozco and this is my journey out west.

My husband, kids and I love when we can go to Carson City, Nevada to see my uncle in the summer. He is my dad's brother. My uncle and his family are very lovely and fantastic. This time, I saw my parents who flew in from Zacatecas, Mexico. It had been three years since I last saw my parents. My dad hadn't seen his siblings for a long time. He saw a lot of his extended family this year too.

The trip is very tiring, because it's a long drive. It feels

like it takes weeks to travel from Florida to Nevada. Regardless, I love to spend that time on the road with my immediate family. We see many states like Georgia, Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, Missouri, Kansas and South Dakota. We also pass through Montana, Idaho and Washington.

We travel with my cousin and her family from Washington to Nevada. This year we stopped to see the Mount Rushmore National Memorial. We saw the four faces of presidents carved in the granite. It's an awesome place!

When we got to my uncle's house, my aunts, uncles and cousins arrived too. We prepared to go camping and some of the family went shopping. Then we were ready for the adventure to begin. Here we go.... Together, the entire family searched the campground to find the best campsite. The men began to assemble the tents, while the women and children unloaded supplies like food, drinks, lamps, blankets and pillows.

When all of the supplies and the tents were ready, we took a break. Then, we went hiking into the mountains and nature. My uncle made a campfire at night and we talked about childhood memories. For example, we reminisced about the bad and the good times and we remembered when my grandparents were alive.

When the scary stories began, my daughter and I went to sleep because we were very fearful. After everyone was in their tents, I listened to the sounds of the night. I couldn't sleep because the ground is hard and my body hurt. This made the night very long for me. When day breaks, we made breakfast and went hiking again.

Sometimes the rain comes and we have to go back to my uncle's house. That little time spent with my family is wonderful. I would not change it for anything!

When the vacation is almost done, the saddest part is when we have to come back to Florida. Again, it takes a long time to drive back to our house. We never forget the new

memories we make each time we travel.

Irma Orozco is a student at Immokalee Technical College. Her teacher is Ms. Katie. Irma is a wife and a mother of three children.

Peace and Tranquility

Where can you find peace and tranquility? I find mine in my room. This is my favorite place. I feel so relaxed here and I have all that I need. After work, I love to be on my bed to take a two-hour nap before going to my evening class. The nap gives me a boost of energy. Also in my room I can watch TV, use my computer, study, listen to music, and speak on the phone privately. Sometimes, my room is my secret place. When I am sad I can cry without anyone knowing it. I do not like to share my room with anyone unless it is an emergency.

Alison Navaez is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place has always been my country, Honduras, the place where I was born and raised. This place where I was born and raised has always been and will always be a very special place in my heart. This is the country where I spent all my childhood. There I met my first friends and my first love. These are some of the little things that make my country my favorite place in the whole world.

Honduras is a country that is filled with traditions. During holidays, Honduras is always filled with laughter and cheers. My family and I had a very special tradition. During every holiday we would meet at my grandmother's house. These were times of union and family bonding. One of my special memories is when my aunts and my mother would be in the kitchen cooking the holiday meal. We definitely had a lovely time.

In Honduras, we used to go out with our friends all the time. We really cherished our time together. We would talk about how our day had been and we would share our experiences. We were always laughing. We used to make fun of

ourselves and share a lot of jokes.

During the summer we enjoyed going to the beach with our family and friends. We had fun nights by a bonfire. We would joke around and tell all sorts of stories. I enjoyed these nights so much. We used to stay late having great conversations and oversleeping the following day. After a fun night we loved going fishing.

I love Honduras because it is the country where I was born and where I lived for twenty one years. Someday I hope I can go back and show my son the place where his mother was born and lived so many beautiful experiences.

Nuria Rivera, from Honduras, student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus, School of Continuing Education and Professional Development, ESOL Program ELCATE C, Prof. Rebeca Prado, M.Ed.

Watch Them Grow

My favorite place is where I can see plants, flowers, and vegetables growing freely outside. I like to work in my garden every time I can find time. I enjoy watching my plants growing taller and stronger every day.

The colors from the flowers bring happiness to my life. They also make my yard look beautiful. If you look closely at the fruit, leaves, petals, stems, branches, and roots they all look so incredibly unique. Being able to see all this natural growth makes me appreciate nature and the creator of this world.

Hermis Benitez is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Favorite Place

I have been to many places in my life. One of my favorite places is Kangaroo Island in Australia. It makes me forget about the noise of the city. All I felt while I was there was the harmony between humans and nature. There is a feeling of peacefulness as well.

On the Kangaroo Island, you can see the Kangaroos jump around you all the time. They are friendly just like the goats you see in a farm. I found it amazing how kangaroos find food to eat all by themselves. An interesting fact I learned is that they also enjoy people feeding them. It was such fun.

If you walk to the beach on Kangaroo Island, you can see millions of seals and sea lions lying down all over the place enjoying themselves and sunbathing. They sleep like babies, because no one bothers them. While we were there some mothers were playing with their kids while the waves came and went. You can imagine how nice it was.

The lovely koala bears were also so cute. They jump from tree to tree to get fresh gum tree leaves to eat. They also can climb sky high like the squirrels. You may ask about how they can do that with their huge heavy bodies. That's an interesting question I don't know how to answer. It's better if you go visit Kangaroo Island and find out.

Of course this is not all. There are still many wonderful things I didn't tell you yet. I wish in the future it will be one place you would want to visit and it is on your travel list.

Ping Jiang, student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus, School of Continuing Education and Professional Development, ESOL Program ELCATE C, Prof. Rebeca Prado, M.Ed

The Florida Keys

The Florida Keys have always been my favorite place to visit because of the natural beauty and the Caribbean atmosphere. As a child and as an adult I would visit frequently; as if they're calling me to return.

The beauty of each key is unique and has a different atmosphere, and a variety of activities to offer. Each key island is connected by bridges. The water surrounds each key. There are many restaurants and lots of activities and attractions. There is so much to see and do. The waters are clear blue and have many living coral reefs and all types of different marine life to see. Many people like to go snorkeling or diving to get a

better view. To the east you have the Atlantic Ocean and to the west you have the Gulf of Mexico, so you can see the sunrise and the sunset on both sides. They have beautiful beaches where you can sun bathe and fish right on the beach. You can rent a boat or rent jet skis and go on either side through channels that go between each key. The water creates a very tranquil atmosphere. There are many things to see and do throughout all of the Florida Keys. Some of my favorite are, “Swim with the Dolphins”, “The Southernmost Point,” in Key West, a landmark where you can get your picture taken, “Mallory Square” where there is a Sun down celebration each night or even “Ripley’s Believe it or Not.” Your choices of activities are endless.

If you enjoy eating, take your choice at dozens of eateries of all kinds and all prices, from the most popular like “Sloppy Joes” and Jimmy Buffets “Margaritaville”, and “Garden of Eden,” to the unknown dive bars. You can also eat a fresh catch of the day while people watching on Duval St. A famous steak house, “Duffy’s,” is intimate and usually a wait to get seated. Then you can walk across the street to an establishment that opens at 8:00 am and only serves desserts.

So if you are looking for a quick, educational and eye opening get away where you can forget about the everyday life get on a plane because Key West has its own international airport or a direct scenic unforgettable drive down US 1.

This author has chosen to remain anonymous.

300 Days of Sun and Shine

Have you heard the expression, “seeking a place under the sun,” before? This expression can have many different meanings. You can be seeking for success, recognition, a peaceful retirement, a better quality life or in other words, a fresh start. Everyone seeks a place where you can reach success, where you can enjoy your family, where you can spend the good time of your retirement. There is a place that shines 300 days a year. It sounds like an eternity vacation. Welcome to Florida.

Geographically favored by the nature, Florida overflows with beauty. The tropical climate promotes a positive perspec-

tive of life and lacks of sedentary lifestyle. Built on an immense sheet of water, with dozens of natural lakes, Florida is recognized as the largest boating state in America. It has beautiful beaches to practice different sports such as fishing, kayaking, and many other sports. Despite the seasons of hurricanes, the weather makes you very welcome.

In fact some cities have 90% of its residents retired. If you look further into the statistics, most of those people came from other states or other countries. They chose the sunny and exotic state of Florida to enjoy the rest of their life. In the other aspect, the Floridian population is constituted by numerous immigrants that left their countries seeking opportunity and resulting in a colossal diversity of culture. If you go to a restaurant, you will listen to at least three different languages. Sometimes you will not understand what they say, and they will not understand what you are saying. Either way, you will feel frustrated just like everybody else does.

The Citrus industry supplies the other states and is one of the principal sources of funds. Miami Beach, is internationally recognized by its beautiful beach postcards. Palm Beach Island, in particular has fancy mansions inhabited by millionaires, politicians, industrialists and their sophisticated life style. Key West makes its favorite Americans road trip due to the 100 miles overseas highway, enjoying a fantastic crystal water scenario. Orlando, sought all year by tourists, hosts the most famous and biggest thematic park in the world, Walt Disney World.

All things considered, the Sunshine State has peculiar features such as unique landscape, tropical weather a distinctive population culturally diverse that discovered a new life style exploring Florida. After spending numerous vacations, people have decided to move to Florida. Some folks have found their “place under the sun,” have you found yours?

Karine Kitagawa is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Night of the Little Candles

Every person has a special place, day or season that makes them feel really excited, something so special that reminds us of a unique moment. In my case there is a big tradition in my country, Colombia, called the night of the little candles or in Spanish 'El día de las velitas'. So if you want to live a magical night without spending too much and want to create some good memories as well, you need to know about this.

This day is one of the biggest holidays in the entire country that takes place every 7th of December. Although it began as a religious Catholic tradition celebrating Mary and the Immaculate Conception, over the years it became a day to join together the Colombian families. It also marks formally the welcome for Christmas. Of course being a great celebration, decorations begin in late November or the beginning December. This night consists of lighting millions of candles and paper lanterns in every house and street across the country and making a wish, but most of all getting together with your family, friends and neighbors. Another thing that you cannot miss is to share the traditional food and drinks of this time. Traditional snacks or dishes such as, natilla, buñuelos, hot chocolate, rice with milk and canelazo (a hot drink made with the typical liquor of Colombia, the aguardiente). Another thing that begins with this night is a big parade with cultural activities in each city, doing this in order to see every Christmas light and decoration.

So if you are in Colombia, or you're planning to spend Christmas out of your country, I recommend you go to Colombia where you will find great food, beautiful landscapes, music that will make you want to dance and of course it's warm and friendly people.

Lina Mendoza is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Music School

My favorite place is the music school. I had many happy moments there. The only time I had tension was when I had to take the tests. At other times I enjoy learning about music and

making new friends in the class. This school molded me into a lover of music. Where there is music, there I am and vice versa. I cannot imagine my life without music. It would be such a boring place to live.

Lyane Echevarria is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Houston, Texas

I visited Houston, Texas in the year of 2014. I loved it there so much that I ended up living in Houston for about 2 years. During the time I was there, I went to school, visited a lot of places, and had my first daughter there.

In Houston, I attended Furr High School. It was about 15 minutes ride in a car from where I lived; however, walking to school took me about 45 minutes. I loved it there; the teachers were great. I learned a lot during my time there. They had a court yard in the middle of the school where most students sat to have lunch.

On the weekends when I wasn't in school, I visited the mall in Houston. It was so big and beautiful; I loved it. I got to see many of the flea markets; these flea markets are nothing compared to the ones in Florida.

I went to a lot of restaurants where the foods were just awesome. I also got see downtown Houston; I was there every chance I got. It is beautiful at night. Houston has an ice skating rink outside during winter.

Houston is where I had my beautiful daughter, my first born. She was born in December, a very cold month in Houston. Being there in Houston, it couldn't have been any better; it was the perfect time to cuddle with my baby.

Houston has a special place in my heart because of the school, the different places and my daughter. I will forever remember Houston.

Ms. Hicks-Wiley is Lorinda Santiago teacher at Dunbar Community School.

Big City

I enjoy living in a small town. I have three reasons why I enjoy life in a small town rather than a big city: a small town is like a family, the air is less polluted, and it has more space for gardening.

Living in a small town is like living with your family. Usually, there are a few people. Everyone knows everyone. If you have some troubles, you are not alone. You can count on neighbors for support. We assist each other. Everything is near.

The air is less polluted in a small town. It's very important to breathe pure air. It's unfortunate that the air in a big city is polluted. It is polluted because of automobile traffic, a lot of industries, etc. Usually, in a small town, it's not like that. We absorb less toxins. The fresh air purifies our organism of wastes, renews our oxygen level throughout our body. The result is that we can stay healthy and keep the diseases away. Staying healthy is very important for me.

The icing on the cake is the opportunity to do some gardening in my spare time—it's a blessing. I can plant what I want, flowers or vegetables for example. It's a real pleasure to take care of them like I take care of a baby. What satisfaction it is to observe them growing. At the harvest, I can give some crops to my neighbors. They can do the same for me. Doing some gardening is another way to preserve my health.

I would rather live in a small town than in a big city because of the population, the air is pure and fresh and it gives me an opportunity to garden. For me, life is real living in a small town.

Ruth Pierre is a student in Mrs. Hicks- Wiley's class at Dunbar Community School. She hopes to get her GED.

Untitled

There is a place where people are happy; they hold each other's hands and fly together into the blue. Love is in the air, you can smell it, sniff it, and also produce it. I know, you

probably don't believe it, and you are thinking that I'm crazy. Yes I am, but before you judge me, let me introduce you to my favorite place. Welcome to my mind!

The introduction that you have just read was one of the thoughts that crossed my mind last night. I assure you that every day there is something new. Through work, exercises, mental meditation, and mind training you will be capable of having control over your thoughts in order to create and share energy with everything you are surrounded by.

My conception is that everybody's mind is the greatest and powerful place, where no limits are accepted. The definition of the word imagine in the English vocabulary is to form a mental image of (something not present). That's the point; something not present? Yes, of course it is, it's in your mind. Make your own creation, see what you want to see, feel what you want to feel, and design your own world. Someone said, "If you can imagine it, you can create it". All the best artists, the best scientists, people that lead others teach and maintain a positive attitude. They all suffer of what I like to call "The positive disease". It's something that needs to be cultivated day by day. Anyone can have this power, and everything we own right now is because we have attracted it. The quality and creativity of our thoughts makes a substantial difference in our lives. How many times have you felt, or been in a place, in a situation, and thought that it was not the first time but actually it was. That's because you attracted it and you created it in your mind before it happened.

Your mind is a fantastic place to be, but be careful because the "Law of Attraction" works in the same frequency and weight with negative thoughts. So from now on, try to think bigger, better, and especially happier.

Luca Tarantino is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

A House outside the City

My favorite place in my country was a farm that belonged to my parents. We lived in a town called Juticalpa; it is located in the center of the country. My parents had a grocery store on

the main boulevard of the town. Usually it was crowded with a lot of noise. Going to the house that was on the farm was very relaxing. Usually we went there on Easter. I enjoyed that place for many reasons. First, I had a week off from school. Second, all the family met there, and that was a party!

That place was beautiful. There were people that were very friendly. On my parents' farm there was a variety of fruit trees: mangos, avocados, oranges, guavas, above all, in that season there were sweet watermelons. Also on the farm there were cows, horses, and chickens. The weather in that season is excellent. I enjoyed nature when the trees are strong and green.

The best part is the river that runs beside the mountain. That river has clear water, with soft white sand. In that river I learned to swim with my siblings. We spent many hours of the day swimming in the river. I did many activities that in the city I could not do. Also, we went horseback riding, but I wasn't good at riding horses. I remember my beautiful mom cooked delicious dishes for us. She loved that place too. At night, we played around a campfire. My uncle Enrique told us funny stories; his job was to make us laugh. That was a week with the most fun of all year. I have visited many beautiful places from my country. The coasts of my country are beautiful. However, for me the house outside of the city, is the most beautiful place I have ever been. These lands are the legacy of my parents and we try to keep them. I feel blessed to have enjoyed with my beautiful family, those moments that I will never forget.

Ercilia Garcia is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Priceless but Free!

I love the beach. It is my favorite place. There are a lot of reasons I love it but the top three are the ocean, the sand, and the open space.

The ocean is so relaxing to me. I can sit for hours and watch the waves. It gives me time to think about my life when I was young and how my parents would always take my sister and me to the beach in Portugal, and the rest of my life and my blessings. I like to swim in the cold, blue water. I love the smell

of sea salt and I like to hear the sound of birds flying over the beach. This gives me a feeling of peace.

Secondly, I love the feeling of sand beneath my feet. It is how I get a free massage. I love hiking and feel relaxed after exercise at the water's edge.

And lastly, the open space on the beach is great for many activities with children. I love to play ball with my daughter. We can run at will. When I play with her, she pretends always fall and then laughs at the falls themselves. See how much fun we have? It makes me very happy and I already miss these playful times because time goes fast and one day she will be too big for these fun times. Therefore, I enjoy every day with her and treasure this time.

So in conclusion, I love the beach for many reasons but the three most important ones to me are the ocean, the sand, and the open space. I feel free when I'm on the beach. The moments spent on the beach with my daughter are worth millions and the best thing is? IT IS FREE!

Elisabete Magalhaes is a student at Palm Beach Gardens Community High School.

Cape Cod

My favorite place is my home town, Cape Cod. I love it so much for several different reasons but mainly because of the beautiful outdoors, all of my friends there, and because of the old fashioned style.

The outdoors in Cape Cod is beautiful! The crisp, cold air is so refreshing and the trees and nature are so wonderful. I love to go on walks around town.

I know almost everyone in town, having grown up there. The people are much friendlier and down to earth. There's also less drama.

Finally, there are many old fashioned details about Cape Cod. There are lots of old buildings and interesting architecture, all of which I find so interesting.

In conclusion, I love Cape Cod for lots of reasons but the main reasons are the outdoors, knowing people, and the old fashioned taste it carries!

Alaina Eldridge is a student at Palm Beach Gardens Community High School.

The Pearl of the Caribbean

“Sun is shining, weather it’s sweet.” These are some words taken from Bob Marley’s song, “Smile Jamaica.” Jamaica, my native land, is paradise to me and will always be because of the reggae music, delicious food, the smiling faces of my people, and I could go on and on.

As a child, my parents used to take us kids to the beach every Sunday afternoon and my favorite part of that day was dancing on the sand. It was so much fun watching my parents dancing and singing to our island music. Reggae music is also one of the main reasons our visitors go to Jamaica. Though Bob Marley, the most recognized reggae artist in the world passed away over thirty years ago, there are still many excellent local bands who are carrying his legacy to the four corners of the world. You can never get enough of it.

Our national dish is ackee and salt fish. This meal is made from a fruit, which is grown in my country and here in Florida. It is blended with cod fish and cooked as a delicious meal. Most locals enjoy cooking this at home. Our visitors enjoy eating this somewhat strange meal but enjoy it to the fullest. Jerk chicken is a favorite of all visitors. It is prepared with all the spices and is baked on wooden planks. When it’s served, it is irresistible!

Wherever you go in Jamaica, as a tourist or a local, our natives are always willing to give a helping hand to anyone at any time and always with a smile. Jamaicans are happy and fun loving people by nature. Jamaican schools are mostly government owned and children are required to wear uniforms. It’s always a pleasure seeing our little kids walking to and from school. These kids are always happy, frolicking along the way-side, and a joy to watch. Sometimes tourists even stop and beg to take their photographs and it pleases them immensely.

In conclusion, my number one spot in the world is my homeland of Jamaica for many reasons whether it's to stay with family, or in a hotel, I'm always surrounded by some of my favorite reasons. These are my music, my food, and of course my people. So, tell me, are you ready to take a vacation? If you are, choose my pearl, Jamaica. It's my spot and you can make it yours! Yeh mon!

Juliette Persaud is a student at Palm Beach Gardens Community High School.

Welcome to Coco Keys

Any time I hear the words “Coco Keys”, I automatically get excited! This is my favorite place to visit. This water resort is located in Orlando, Florida. There is a hotel included. My first time visiting there, I didn't expect to have as much fun as I did. This is now my favorite place because the water park is much fun; they have an awesome game room, a mini restaurant, and the hotel service is great.

To begin with, the water park is very fun and I didn't think it would be because it seems like a place for younger children. It actually separates the toddler side from the adult side with a gate and different life guards are provided for each section. The adult side includes 3 different extremely fun slides, a water dunk bucket connected to 3 other slides, and a pool with a slide connected to it. They have slides that take you up in the air, slides that swirl you, and slides that take you on a cool ride. The toddler side has plenty of lifeguards on duty, waterfalls, a small pool area, and mini slides for toddlers. On top of all this, the whole water park is covered by a canopy.

Secondly, Coco Keys has an awesome game room and restaurant included. The game rooms have a mini bowling area, basketball hoop games, and a variety of other games inside. You have to purchase a game card to play the games and they give you great deals. You can also save credit on your game card so you don't have to use it all in one visit. Connected to the game room, is a mini restaurant that sells food and snacks and allows you to eat there, take them back to your room, or can be eaten outside at the water park. There is a walking area between the game room and water park where

the resort lets their mascot which is a parrot, come out and dance and take pictures with everyone.

Last but not least, the hotel service there is great! Every time I stay in the hotel, the room was very clean and relaxing. They bedroom included a nice flat screen television, the beds were comfortable and clean, and the bathroom was a reasonable size. They also have great room service and will answer any questions you have. Unlike most hotels you visit, Coco Keys has a laundry room where you can wash your own clothes. The water park is currently rated 3.5 out 5 stars. The staff at the hotel is also very friendly and makes you feel welcomed.

To summarize, Coco Keys Water Resort is my favorite place. The water park is made for everyone of all ages which makes it a very fun place to visit. The game room and restaurant gives you something else to do besides relaxing and enjoying the room and the water park. The hotel service at the resort is great in aspects. I suggest this water park to anyone that's looking to have some real fun!

Sharnesha Nelson is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is Ft. Lauderdale, Florida; it has the most beautiful beaches ever, clean white sand, beautiful clear, blue ocean, so clear you can see the bottom of the ocean floor. It is the perfect place for me to sit back, relax and forget about all my worries. My boyfriend and I take our beach chairs, blanket, umbrella, towels, suntan oil, radio, and cooler, fix us a nice drink and we feel like we're in another world. I lay out and get a nice suntan and we take walks on the beach, find nice shells, take pictures and make wonderful memories.

There are several restaurants, bars, hotels, and stores for shopping and getting souvenirs. I think we had one of the biggest margaritas in Ft. Lauderdale that I have ever seen in my life; there was no need to order another one after that because we both felt quite the buzz after drinking them. My boyfriend and I usually go there every year around Christmas time and

enjoy their annual boat parade as well. Everyone decorates their boats with Christmas lights, ornaments, and music as they sail through the waterways.

The International Swimming Hall Of Fame is also located there. One year when we were there, they had these huge sculptures of fish that were made of recycled water bottles along the sidewalk. There are also a lot of friendly people in that area, an older gentleman approached my boyfriend and started talking to him. He had lived there for several years and showed us a collection of many different coins that he found on the beach, some of them looked quite valuable.

Our first trip to Ft. Lauderdale happened because we were traveling to Miami to see Rhianna in concert, which, by the way, was amazing! After the concert we headed back to our hotel room in Ft. Lauderdale, So thanks to Rhianna, we discovered one of the most beautiful place in Florida.

Our Sixth year anniversary is coming up soon and this would be the perfect way to spend it and make more amazing memories. I would like to take my four year-old grandson, Brayden there as well one day. I think he would really enjoy himself there, He loves swimming, playing with all his beach toys in the sand, finding shells, and hanging out with my boyfriend and I. However, we may have to have his mommy, who is my daughter (Ciara), and his daddy (Shane), to join us as well. It will be hard to relax with a little one around. Brayden's parents have never really taken a vacation before especially with my boyfriend and I, but then again maybe we'll just make it a little more special and bring my Son Dustin, and his girlfriend Ashleigh along, too.

Tammy Weller is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers.

Washington DC

In this essay I will be talking about my favorite place. I will discuss what I admire from Washington DC and why it's my favorite place. I will also talk about what was important to me when I went to DC. Fun fact: Did you know that Abraham Lincoln was carried across the street from Ford's theater where

he was put in a coma for nine hours before dying the following morning. You will learn more about my trip to Washington DC.

First and foremost, Washington DC is one of the few beautiful places I've been to. I've never really travelled before, so when I went to DC with my safety patrol class I admired it. The weather was chilly, it wasn't snowing which was a bummer for me.

It did rain though, but honestly it's my favorite place because of the historical places you can visit. I don't know about you but I'm all for history and just learning.

One reason DC is important to me, The Arlington National Cemetery also known as The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. The back of the tomb has an inscription that says "Here rests in honored glory an American Soldier known but to God." The changing of the guard is amazing; the sentinel takes twenty-one steps to allude the twenty-one gun salute it is also the highest honor given for any military. The guards stop on the 21st step then turns and faces the tomb for twenty-one seconds.

The second reason DC is important to me, the Holocaust museum is the United States official memorial to the Holocaust. I remember walking into the Holocaust museum and just being excited to learn about how it was like to live during those times and being sad afterwards.

Anne Frank hid in a house with her family from Nazi persecution in central Amsterdam. Anne kept a diary that provides a vivid glimpse into the world of being Jewish and living in Nazi territory. Her father Otto Frank was the last of the family to survive. There were all these work camps and gas chambers that they sent everyone to.

As you can see, my favorite place is Washington DC. The weather was fantastic and there is also a lot to learn. If you visit DC, please check out the Arlington National Cemetery. You would be blown away about the process and facts. Also, the Holocaust museum will more than likely bring you to tears.

Actually visit every single museum and cemetery you can find. I loved spending time with my friends on this delightful trip to Washington DC; even though I lost all the pictures I

took. There is this one picture I found and it was a group photo of everyone who went to DC from my school.

Venus Unpierre is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Sandra Caruso is her teacher.

Jamaica, My Favorite Place

Jamaica, the land of my birth is my favorite Because of its captivating culture of hardworking individuals, variety of foods, and a lifestyle of fun.

Jamaicans are hardworking individuals, who believe in the value of honest labor. They utilize various trades to make a living. Whether it is through agriculture, civil service, or handcrafting.

Jamaica lifestyle is that the average women loves to cook, and the average man love to eat a good home cooked meal. There are certain staples that are never missing as these add authenticity to the Jamaicans' kitchen: flour to make dumplings and fritters, cornmeal for porridge, red peas for rice and beans or soup. These are just a few things that you will find in any Jamaican kitchen. In addition, Jamaicans love spicy food and are famous for its jerk chicken.

In their spare time, Jamaicans love to have fun. They group together every evening on the beach to play dominos and listen to music while they barbecue. They also love to play soccer on the Sundays. Family and friends are an important part of having fun, as we are a family orientated group of individuals.

Our culture, vivacity and overall lifestyle have led Jamaicans in which we take it easy, strike tot the greatest. One love.

Voilet Cole is a student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Sandra Caruso.

Belize: Precious and Beautiful

Life in my home country differs from life in the U.S. Belize is a very precious and beautiful country that I will never forget and forever cherish. I loved it; everything is so natural: food, environment and farm animals. Belize is such a small and third world country, yet it is surrounded by a peaceful environment.

Belize is an amazing and very pretty country to be in. It is known to have the second largest barrier reef in the world and of course, it has a vast variety of awesome tourist places to visit. Oh, I remember my days there; I loved it because for me it was the most flawless nation I have ever been in!

Belize is so different from the United States; the reason being, everything in Belize is natural. We enjoyed growing our chickens, pigs, cows, and plants. We even enjoyed cooking and eating the products from our plants and animals. There was no need to go to a Wal-Mart for meat and vegetables! There was not a Mc Donald's to swing by a drive through; therefore, we used to cook three times a day and restaurants were only open on weekend nights!

My home country is a very small and peaceful place. The majority of the people here in the United States do not even know where it is. I have to show people on a map and make it clear that Belize is in Central America. Although it is a small country, Belize has a variety of cultures and races. It is so calm there, crimes and news are a huge shock to BELIZEANS and are barely heard of.

In my opinion, life in Belize differs a lot from life here in the U.S. My country is beautiful, natural, and a very calm place to live in. I have so much more reasons to say that I love and miss my beloved land, BELIZE!

Liana Pech is a 19 year old student enrolled in the G.E.D. program at Dunbar Community School. She has lived in Fort Myers for a year but was raised all her life in Belize. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is her teacher.

Why Voting is Important to Me

Why is Voting Important to Me?

Imagine not being able to live the way you want, to say what you want, or even to dress the way you want. Undoubtedly, you have heard about the countries where people do not have democracy, meaning neither freedom of speech nor freedom of thinking.

Having freedom is like having oxygen to breathe. We breathe two or three times in each second unconsciously. Having restrictions on liberty is like having difficulty breathing. We only realize the importance of something when we lose it.

In democratic countries, voting allows people to choose a better person to lead and represent the people. However, voting in a dictatorship is a kind of depressing political jest showing on the surface that their people have the rights of freedom of speech, but it is just for show.

I remember the tragic moments in a bloody election that I experienced in my country Iran. Dead bodies were all over the streets. They protested for their rights against the government, but they were arrested and jailed.

Cities were in chaos; military forces were everywhere. You could see and feel disappointment and sadness in everyone's face. Nowadays there are countries where women have no right to vote or drive. This is the exact symbol of unjust discrimination.

Voting is important to me because I want to have the rights to change my future. I want to have freedom of speech and thinking. I want to see the people, who have left their country saving their lives, come back to Iran again. It is time to breathe the fresh air. We deserve it.

America, you were given this precious freedom and liberty many years ago by dedicated people like Dr. Martin Luther King and President John F. Kennedy. They sacrificed their lives to make America a free country having equality and freedom for all.

Now, America, you are about to elect your representative. It is not only important for your country but also is important for the future of the whole world, since it is becoming a global village.

We have chaos all over the globe. Each vote can affect the peace and prosperity in our global village. I hope in the near future we will have a peaceful and brotherly love-filled world.

Mitra Joharchi studies ESOL in Delray Beach, FL.

I Will Be a Voter

In my opinion, the only reason to vote is because voting is a way of showing your commitment to the democracy that you live in. To me, voting is a sign that you believe in your democracy and that you feel that it is a worthwhile and important thing.

Even though I say voting is important, I actually believe there is practically no chance that your vote will ever be the vote that decides an election, unless you live in a very small town.

However, if you don't vote, you give up the right to say anything about your local leaders. For example, if your trash isn't getting picked up, you may want to complain to your city's mayor. Your voice will be a lot more powerful if you are a voter.

At the moment I'm only 17, but when I turn 18 years of age, I do plan on voting. Before I can become a voter, I will have to go get registered to vote. I will show up and sign the paper that will give me the right to let my voice be heard and be powerful.

Michael McNaughton is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Rhonda Currier.

You Decide

Voting is the instrument for excellence that gives us democracy. It is the power we have as citizens to freely and voluntarily choose those leaders who will lead our nation. Through voting we express what we want and need. Voting makes us participants of the future of our nation, but only “you decide.”

Voting is not just a mark; it is the power to be a part of the decision-making process of our nation. It is not to allow others to decide for you. It is to raise your voice through those men and women who you voted for to work for a common good. Casting a vote can also punish those people for poor governance, but only “you decide.”

Your vote will be for you, your children and future generations. A single vote can make a difference. It makes you an active part of the change and the progress of our nation. Not voting means staying silent and becoming a simple spectator. Voting will make you part of the history of your nation, but only “you decide.”

Alice Colon is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, FL.

Why Voting is Important to Me

Voting is really important to me and to all people because when you are required to vote you have an opportunity to expose what you think is better for the population that you are included in.

Some people do not place importance on voting and when we have the opportunities to choose a president or mayor etc., they don't do this with attention. But when everything is going wrong, people protest and choose themselves.

For example, in Brazil many people chose the current president believing in many lies and now go out in the street asking for their employees, bills, and the country is worse to live in and harder to get stability for the family.

When corruption is wide open while you work honestly, the politicians steal your money. That's why voting is so important.

Gisele Saraceni is a student at West Area Adult School. Her teacher is Lori Cabrera.

Each Vote Counts

My name is Nelson Damis. I am from Haiti. In my country, we vote every five years to elect a new president. It is very important that every citizen exercise their right to vote. When we vote, we can change the existing people who fail to do their jobs as the governing body of the country, especially in Haiti. To me, it is tremendously vital that we vote because each vote counts toward the winning candidate. Our voice and support helps elect the proper person to become officials to govern our country. Go out and vote!

Nelson Damis is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

A Good Candidate Inspires

Voting is completely a civic duty. The act of voting puts the citizen in contact with the political process. With this gesture, we can choose our leaders: men and women, who share our opinions and who can inspire us.

In a political system based on representative democracy, people have the opportunity to freely choose their leaders to some extent. Candidates need to give an answer to their most essential claims. Indeed, voters expect of them a gradual improvement in their living conditions. Then, it is an imperative, every time the opportunity presents itself to fulfill this civic duty. With this in mind, I'm wishing to participate in political affairs of this country. I have been to the polls to choose the candidate in all evidence, capable of meeting the real needs of the population.

In doing so, it allows me to contribute to eventual changes,

both politically and economically. To make wise choices that are indispensable the president must be elected from honest men, visionaries, change carriers, actually able to ensure a better life to the entire population. To do this, we must listen to the news, and follow the televised debates through which each candidate presents his political program.

Therefore, it is an honor for me to take part in the political affairs of this country. The voting day, I will arrive very early to the poll to fulfill my civic duty by choosing the candidate that would bring change through his program. Indeed, it is the duty of each one to exercise this right because every vote counts and you can make a difference. That's why it's important for me to vote.

Jean Laguerre is an ELL student at Immokalee Technical College. He is from Haiti. His teacher is Ms. Leyva.

How Life in my Home Country Differs from Life in the U.S.

A Different Life

My name is Therese, and I am from Damascus, Syria. I graduated as an Agriculture Engineer from Damascus University and I have lived in America for three years now. I like the diversity of the people here but what caught my eye the most when I first moved here was the ease with which Americans move from place to place during their lives. People in America move frequently, often far from their original homes, in search of a better jobs, better education, and for many other reasons.

It appears easy for them to leave their city, their neighborhood, their friends and even family. Sometimes I see people throwing out their furniture by placing it in front of their homes. Sometimes they appear to only take a few bags and belongings when they leave. The new people that move into their homes are strangers to the community and the neighborhood.

In my country, when someone buys a house, they live there most of their lives, with their children, then their children after them usually near their extended family. I knew all my uncles, aunts, and cousins well; even our kids are friends now too. I think there are many good things about this way of life.

Everyone knows all of their neighbors and they operate better as a small community, like a big family. People in the community spend most of their time together. They help one another and for the most part everyone feels safe and secure. There are times, however, when people know too much about each other—good and bad things—and we lose some of our privacy.

Maybe because I am sixty years old I feel the lifestyle of constantly moving is a little weird, but if I were younger I would probably like to live and move the same way as American people. I believe this way is very important for young people, because it gives them more experience in life and opportunities to work and for education that help to improve

their lives and the economy.

I understand the reasons Americans move, but believe there could be a better balance between family bonding and following of individual goals that drive people to move so far apart.

Therese Francis is from Damascus, Syria. She is married to Tony Ahmar and has three children. She attends ESOL classes at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville, Florida. Her teacher is Brian Jones.

Colombia: The Happiest Country in the World?

Just as in 2012, once again, Colombia has been declared “The Happiest Country in the World” according to the Gallup’s Annual Global Survey. This survey was conducted among 66,000 people in 68 countries worldwide.

For me, as for many Colombians, the results of this prestigious survey was a surprise, because in spite of the efforts of this and past governments, Colombia still is a country with great social inequality. While it has great natural and human resources, it still has not developed its full potential and suffers from much corruption. This takes away from its citizens the possibility of a better quality of life and development for their families. So under these circumstances, how can Colombians be so happy?

While 85% of Colombians are declared “happy”, in the world only 66% of other countries said they were happy. Even in the G7 countries with strong economies, great infrastructure, cutting edge technology and high quality of life, countries in which we would expect its citizens to be happy, only 55% of respondents say they are happy (Canada 69%, United States 59%, Germany 57%, UK 53%, France 42% and Japan 55%).

Then I asked myself, if not the economic, social and security situation that our country currently has, what are the things that really make Colombians happy?

Definitely, the values that make Colombian’s feel happy, are different from the many countries of the world, especially

the countries with developing economies. These values don't give priority to social or economic situations, nor to material things. The things that make the Colombians happy are intangible and simple things of life. They are the ones that allow us to dream of a better future. It's those little things that despite the difficulties, gives us the energy to be optimistic and strive for better opportunities to change our future. They are the things of which we are proud, and we love to tell them to the world.

Ranking things that make Colombians happy are: love and solidarity of the family and extended family, music, dance, art, culture, sports (especially soccer) and our festivals and fairs. Also there is our variety of climates, mega diversity, the smoothest coffee in the world, the beauty of the women and fashion. Finally, our democracy, our history, our cuisine, and that we speak the best Spanish in Latin America.

For all the above, Colombia and its people are the happiest in the world, even when we are a country in the process of economic development and social challenges for the future.

Claudia Gomez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Holidays in Haiti

I've been in the USA for 11 months, and I learned a lot of different things from this country, like holidays and the way they are celebrated differently. Where I come from, Haiti, there are lot of holidays but I'm going to talk about Christmas and New Year's Eve. They are my favorite ones.

In my country, we celebrate Christmas on December 24. That day some people have parties, drink and eat. They dance and nobody sleeps. They go out, take pictures with their friends, and everywhere you pass you could see Christmas trees, and people who dance. People like to make special food like pork, plantains, and salad.

On December 31, everyone goes out with friends. In every public place we have fireworks. Everyone's happy making noise on the street and at night every family makes changes in their house, washing everything, buying new things, and making new decorations. They buy new clothes because all kids wear new clothes for the New Year's Eve. On New Year's Eve in the morning, every family makes pumpkin soup and brings some for other families and neighbors. Every kid goes to their grandparents house to say Happy New Year, and their grandparents tell them stories, and others read them the Bible, and then give them cake and money.

That's the way they celebrate Christmas and New Year's Eve in Haiti, and I love being in Haiti on those three days to have fun with friends and family, to go to my village to see my grandparents and all my family, to go to church to thank God for letting us see the New Year. Those activities make me love my country.

Witz-Berline Joseph is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

A Different Country

Life in Haiti is totally different compared to life in the USA. There is not much activity provided for the people in my country and many of them live on under two dollars every day. People in my country struggle every single day to provide food for their family. Also, in Haiti, there is no justice for anyone who has no money. Here in the US, everyone has exactly the same justice opportunity, no matter if you are rich or poor. In my country, only those who have money have the right to do absolutely everything.

Can you imagine living in a country where there is no one to call in the middle of the night if someone wants to assassinate you, or if your house caught on fire? In Haiti, the country is just like a game where everyone plays for themselves. In the capital of my country, which is Port-au-Prince, walking in the streets at any time is just a promise of not making it back home safe. The streets turn ugly when the sun goes down.

Because there is not much electricity, it's all dark which makes criminals want to commit crime easier.

When it comes to education, those in my country that have finished high school and went to the university still have no opportunity to get a job. While they struggle like that, it makes our youth have no future. The only way I can say Haiti is better than the USA is in renting a house: in Haiti we pay yearly, while here we have to pay a monthly rent.

Haiti is the first black country to have its independence, but life has been so difficult for us because of the lack of help. In the past decades, we used to live a good life. There was no problem, and students had a lot of chances at school. But now it is very hard for a family to survive, and live a simple life.

Abel Joseph is from Haiti. He studies English at Immokalee Technical College and his teacher is Ms. Leyva.

Going Through Change

My name is David Dominique Metellus. I am from Haiti. Back in the days when I was a teacher in my home country, I rode my motorcycle to work. In the U.S., I cannot do it because people mainly drive cars and I do not have a car. To make matters worse, I do not know how to drive. It is very difficult for me to go from one place to another. During my first month in the U.S., I hardly communicated with people because English is the main language. I know some, but not very well. Finally, my diploma is not equivalent to the education standard in the U.S. I feel like I have to return to school like a baby.

It was a terrible feeling at first, but I do not feel that way anymore. I am attending an English class presently. I can speak English with the students. In fact there are many students whose skill level is lower than mine. The class gives me motivation and support. It ensures me that I will have a successful future.

David Dominique is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Two Different Lives

To live in United States of America was the dream of some people in my town and a lot of people from my country. We thought, just going to the United States was the American dream. That is the reason I came here; to get the opportunities of a better life that unfortunately, in my country, were hard to get.

The first time I came here, I had to work a full day under the blazing sun. This was much harder than in my town. It was terrible, but it was the only way I could get enough money for everything that I needed. I had seen some people working easier and less than I, but their payments were larger than mine. I asked myself “why?” In time, I understood why some people were happier with different jobs. The companies preferred them because they spoke English. I learned it is easier to get by with English. I knew that the life is better in this famous country, but it is not as effortless as I had thought. The USA is wonderful, but I must learn many things here. Throughout time, I heard about an opportunity for adult education. The school was open to any person who wanted to learn English. I did not think twice and I started to study English, but it was difficult.

Every day I encounter a lot of obstacles that sometimes almost makes me quit. Because I am old, I do not have enough time and it is hard for me to learn. Sometimes, in my restroom I see my face in the mirror and I tell myself “No! My age is not an excuse to not learn!” Fortunately, I am lucky enough to have found ITECH near my home. There, I go to school and focus more on speaking English perfectly. I know that it is very important in order to have a better life. My main goal is to be bilingual and my family too. I promised myself to never stop studying!

Nick Osorio is an Immokalee Technical Center student. Ms. Katie Mominee is his boss, instructor, and hopefully his last teacher.

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

I was born in Brazil and I always lived there. This is my first time in the U.S. Since I was a child, I always dreamed about living here and being a part of the American culture. One of the reasons for this is the fact that American culture has been introduced into our culture. It is there through movies, TV shows, products, foods and other things. This is one of the reasons that make a lot of Brazilians dream about living the “American dream”.

Now I’m living here and I can see the differences between both cultures and lifestyles. I can tell you the things that I do and do not like here. I like the way a lot of things work in U.S. Of course, I need to talk in general, and that doesn’t mean that everybody is like that. I like the way people are honest and polite in the U.S., unfortunately this is not so common in Brazil. A really simple example: when you are walking on the street and someone accidentally hit you, the person apologizes here in the U.S. In my country it is common for people hit you on the street and not even say “I’m sorry”.

I don’t like the bad and famous “Brazilian Way” of always trying to win situations. Many times people don’t mind if they hurt or harm someone with their actions. They just do it because it is good for their own selfish reasons. This is being reflected in our bad policy situation. The politicians should be there to help our people but a lot of them are there just to earn a lot of money and even with really good salaries, many of them are still stealing money from the people.

On the other hand, I love how Brazilians are happy and creative. Our people really know how to enjoy the simple things in life. Even if you have no money, you are happy. Difficulties of the day by day things are sometimes reasons to laugh and think about some creative solutions to face these situations. Brazilians really enjoy having a good time with friends and family. Brazilians really know how to cook simple and delicious meals. Our food is amazing, and the meals are always a reason to get people together.

I think that the mix of both cultures would be really good. Both Brazil and USA could learn the good things about each other, from each other and put them into practice. I want to go

back to Brazil and carry with me all the good things that I am learning here in the U.S. and spread these good things to the people around me.

Suellen Pelenci is a student at ACE Jupiter Community High School.

My Life vs. My Son's Life

Now that I am a father of a ten year old boy, it is inevitable to make comparisons of my childhood in Venezuela and his in the United States of America. In my daily activities I see that it is more complex for parents to raise children. Children in the U.S. develop at a very fast rate. The amount of homework and extracurricular activities, in my opinion, leave children too little time to enjoy being kids.

When I was a child I remember going to and from school riding my bicycle. Here in the U.S. the logistics just to take my son to school and to his therapies are a major task. Taking my son to school involves all the members of the family, including my parents.

In Venezuela, as a child, I was able to go to my house at noon and have lunch with my family. Although I couldn't stay long, this short period of time was long enough to spend some quality time with my loved ones. In contrast, nowadays, my son has lunch at school and I do not know what he eats, or if he eats at all.

Today the world is moving at a fast pace and unfortunately I feel I am forcing –conscious or unconsciously – my son to live life in a hurry. Even on weekends I realize that we, as a family, are in a continuous race against the clock. I do not recall this kind of stress related to time when I was growing up.

Another topic I feel is ridiculous is the amount of homework teachers (or better said, the educational system) assigns to our children. I do not think that the “amount” will help children learn more or faster. What makes a difference is the quality and method of the homework. Nevertheless, this would be a topic for a different essay. I remember when I was a child I got home from school (on my bicycle), I did my homework

by myself and went out to play. Nowadays, my kid arrives from school and has so much homework and extracurricular activities that it's 10:00 p.m. and he is still doing his homework. When my child started school here I thought I was the only parent suffering from this. However, I have noticed that my reality is not very different from other parents'. I know that my son must be learning things that I didn't have the opportunity to learn, or he might be getting abilities about developing in a fast paced environment; nevertheless, I am not sure if the price of losing part of their childhood is very high. I believe only time will tell.

Roberto Ron, from Venezuela, 47 years old, 8 years in the U.S.A, (system engineer) student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus, School of Continuing Education and Professional Development, ESOL Program ELCATE C, Prof. Rebeca Prado, M.Ed.

How Life in my Home Country Differs from Life in the U.S.

The major differences I see from my home country to the U.S. are safety, education and the life of dependents. Every person wishes to live in a secure and safe zone. I feel very safe in the U.S. because of the response from the police, commitment by people to help, and advanced security systems. For instance, if a person met with an accident or had been robbed or was in a critical medical condition, one would call 911 and that would give leverage to all departments and get a response within the needed time. I have noticed that even high-end equipment, like helicopters, has been used to rescue a person. Moreover, people following rules and giving way to the emergency vehicles is amazing. The situation in my home country is very different. There is much less safety for life. A person who met with an accident or in need of help would not get attention even in a busy traffic zone. It would take a lifetime for the police to react and reach the person. There is no traffic sense; very few individuals would take responsibility to give way and clear the traffic for an emergency vehicle. Survival is a challenge.

The next big thing that I see is the educational system - the slogan of education for every child irrespective of cast and

creed or social status and accessibility to higher education. The way the foundation is laid, the teaching methods adopted within a joyful environment and the systematic approach in the education system creates a healthy atmosphere for learning and that is very appreciable. The way my child is learning and the way I learned is very different. In my home country, education is more of teaching in a hard way. Accessibility to good education is very limited. Though the concept of education for every child is very prevalent, it is followed with very poor governance. The only negativity I see in the U.S. education system is that graduating from college is often very expensive compared to other countries.

The final thing I really want to talk about is the life of dependents living here. It really makes me get emotional because I don't have access to work. H4 dependents are not allowed to work though they may have higher skills or qualifications to perform. It's been four years now that I stay at home doing household work, which makes me mentally lethargic, with no motivation, and it has lowered my self-esteem and confidence. Sometimes I feel very depressed doing the routine house-hold chores given that my higher education, skill set and work experience from the past are going in vain. I did my graduation in engineering and worked for three years as a software engineer in my home country. Here in the U.S. all my experience and my dreams are vanishing.

Archana Macha is studying English at Jupiter High School (ACE). She enjoys spending time with her children and cooking. She is a student in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class.

Not Afraid of the Uncertainty

Life can be a roller coaster, full of ups, downs, and turns. We can get adrenaline rush in this long journey that we all have to through. Obviously, this happens when we are the decision makers and risk takers in order to seek new experiences to enrich our lives.

I lived on a small coastal town in Ecuador called Manta. I graduated from the university thanks to the various job opportunities that I had. The smallness of this town allows me to see people I know in the commissary, in the mall, movie theatre,

bank, etc. I lived alone with my son in my own home. We are the man and woman of my house. I work hard to cover all of the economic needs and I love my job. I felt like a fish in the water - everything was perfect and I could not ask for more except to meet my Mr. Right someday.

2014 was my lucky year. I met my Mr. Right and he completely changed my life. Then I found out that for his work purpose: we have to move to the United States for 2 years. The main thing that came to my mind is whether I would sacrifice the comfort I enjoy in my country for this new adventure in United States. Well, I did.

It has now been one year since we arrived in Key West, Florida. Now I am a full-time housewife. I take care of my family, I enjoy quality time with my son, and I am studying English in a program for adult students. The city of Key West offers a more relaxed atmosphere. My son will graduate from high school in this country. My husband and I enjoy our special time together.

I must say that life is the result of good or bad decisions we make in our pathway but do not be scared about the future. If we fall, we must be strong and stand up. Let us not miss the great opportunities that life gives us, we should enjoy the good times, fight for our goals, use the time to do what we like that makes us grow to be more interesting, exciting, wonderful people.

Sugey Trampuz is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

How Life in my Country Differs from Life in the U.S.

This beautiful Island called Jamaica was my home. I am of a farmer and housewife and the last of six siblings. As a Jamaican in my country there is a saying; “now here is better than yard.”

Jamaica is a third world country in comparison to the United States of America being a first world. Due to largely in part globalization, Jamaicans over the years have experienced

or have become cultured to some of the American way of life. Migration and technology have contributed to the Americanization as well as, friends who live and travel to the United States bring customs and practices back home.

One of the main differences is the sense of family. Persons not your immediate flesh and blood become family, especially in the small communities such as ones in which I grew up. My neighbors actually grew my children as their own and vice versa. One can expect to have someone looking out for their wellbeing, checking up on them and offer support. Here, you hardly know your neighbors.

Another difference is in the structure of the system. There are more opportunities available here for the citizens. More access to the information and human rights issues are readily addressed. As Jamaica advances in the global and international status, these changes are happening. The American system teaches more discipline and accountability.

As non-adherence leads to repercussion. America might be more advanced in its practices, but life in Jamaica though not the best, presented me with serenity that came from family, love and support.

Nadine Pena is a student in Sandra Caruso GED class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

No Perfect Place

I am from Cuba. My life in my home country is definitely different from my life in the United States. In Cuba the people can only have one job, the people are more friendly, and the family is more united. On the other hand, in United States, life is more difficult because people have to work more than one job because everything we need here requires money. Also, there are many job opportunities, and it is safer to live here.

Olga Chavarria is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

How life in My Home Country Differs from Life in the U.S.

Life here in the U.S. is way different, then life in my home country, in many ways. My home country is Guatemala; I was small when my family and I left Guatemala. I have lived most of my life here in the United States, but my parents would always remind me of how lucky my brothers and I are for having grown up here. They would always tell us of their life in Guatemala. To start Guatemala is a poor country; you do not work for somebody, like here in the U.S. You do not have a weekly pay. In Guatemala have to grow your own food, beans, corn, potatoes, and other crops that are eatable. Another difference is that in Guatemala it is hard to get around from place to place. There are few cars; therefore the best way to get from one place to another, is by walking.

In the U.S., other hand we have, cars and stores on every corner. Life here, is a blessing; we don't have to walk all the time; we have cars and buses that take us from one place to another. We also have jobs that provide us a weekly pay. In Guatemala, it is hard to earn a dollar, few people have work that pays. Most of the people there have to grow crops and sell some and keep the rest for food for their use. These are a few reasons why I am happy here in the United States. I am very grateful and thankful with my parents who brought me here.

There are many things that are different here in the United States but I can't rule out the thought of going back to my home country, not to live there, perhaps only to visit. Despite the poverty there, it is a beautiful country. Guatemala has many great places to visit; its pyramids, volcanoes, mountains, and some beautiful beaches. The problem, however, that because of the poverty, many people can't afford to travel and visit all these places.

My parents immigrated to the U.S. with the intention to give us a better life and education. That is another difference between the U.S. and my home country education. Here we do not have to pay for education. This is free. All we have to buy is some school material. On the other hand, in Guatemala, education is not free. You have to pay to go school and buy your own school materials. Therefore, not many kids get the education they need, mostly because the parents can't afford it.

There are so many things that are different in the U.S., in comparison to Guatemala. I could go on and on; instead, I will conclude by stating some main differences; transportation and the roads in the U.S. are much better. The ways we earn income and the ways we get our food are other differences. Here, we don't have to grow our food; we mainly buy or food. Lastly, the opportunity for a free education is here, in the U.S. Here, we have a chance to become someone in life and have a better future.

B. Sebastian S. is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers.

Someone or Something I Admire

Press Toward the Mark

She wasn't afraid to live.

She wasn't afraid to die.

Her name was Barbara Jean Williams. She was born on September 10, 1943 in Tallahassee, Florida. She was my mother. This is the true story of someone I admire.

My mother was a strong, independent and loving person. She had a beautiful singing voice which she volunteered to various churches, to wedding parties and to funerals. After she divorced my father, my mother raised her five children—four girls and one boy—and took excellent care of us. As a single parent, she was also employed full-time. She worked at Florida Agricultural Mechanical University (FAMU), Coleman's Library for thirty years.

I admire my mother for so many reasons, but for one in particular. My mother went back to school in her early fifties. She attended FAMU and graduated with a Bachelor's degree in Librarian Studies. Afterwards, Florida State University offered her a scholarship for their Master's program. She graduated Magna Cum Laude as a librarian. Between going back to school and working full time, she also got remarried and bought a house.

One day, which I'll never forget, my mom called to tell me that FAMU offered her the opportunity to build their first digital library. She was so excited! Tragically, only a few days later, she was in the hospital with a severe headache. My mother—the strongest woman I knew—had a brain tumor, cancerous, called Glioblastoma multiforme. Her prognosis was six months to a year left to live. The doctors told her she could neither drive nor work.

During those last eleven months, I never saw her shed a tear. On the contrary, even though she was only fifty-eight years old, she believed wholeheartedly that God let her accomplish all she ever wanted to do: she raised five children,

got remarried, went to college and bought a house. She showed me with love, perseverance, hope and strength, we can endure until the end. On June 22, 2002, on her death bed, I asked her, "Mom, are you scared?" and she answered with a resolute no.

She wasn't afraid to live. She wasn't afraid to die.

Today, when I think of single parents, I think of my mother and how she achieved an education with five children. When I think of college for an adult learner like my mother, I have hope that I can go to college and graduate with a degree. Currently, at fifty years old, I am a student in an Adult Basic Education course at Gadsden Correctional Facility. I am proud of my mother. She lived well. She loved well. I hold her in the highest esteem.

At the age of fifty, Tamara Lockley is currently working on an autobiography and is currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correction Facility, Quincy, FL. She is interested in pursuing an Associate Degree in Theology so she can one day become a minister. She has two children: a 28 year old daughter and a 22 year old son. She also has a wonderful grandson who is four years old.

Priscilla of Corquin

Her name is Priscilla. I like that because it is not common. Her uncle found this name in the Bible. In our village only two women had that name. She was a very intelligent woman. Her hobby was reading. I always remember that she said, "Reading is a pleasure for me." Many people said she was a beautiful woman.

She is my grandmother, and she was born in 1926 in a small village called Corquin, in Honduras. When she grew up, women could not study. They were only allowed to go to school until the 5th grade. The men could go to high school, but the women couldn't. She finished 5th grade with honors but could not study more. Then she thought that reading was the best she could do.

One day she was interviewed for a radio show, and they asked her to give some advice to young people, and she said

the best thing a girl or boy can do in their free time is read. At this time she was 77 years old, and she had 65 years of reading because she started at 12 years old.

I will never forget that she was excited to count how many books she had read in her life. The best gift she could receive was always a good book.

We always talked a lot about different issues, and I loved that she was so cheerful. She liked good music, flowers, colorful dresses and perfumes. We often sent each other letters. She wrote to me that she loved me so much, and I achieved my dreams because she believed in me. But she also revised my bad spelling.

Now I write about her with regret that she cannot read this because she died in January, 2015. I miss you my best friend and I'll never forget that through the books we can travel around the world. She gave me the best advice, words of motivation and love that I always needed. Thank you very much, my best friend Priscilla.

Karina Gomez Romero is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Mom

Hi, I am Kendy Brunache Louis Juste. I am from Haiti, a beautiful Island. I am 28 years old. I'm the oldest child in my family. I have two brothers and my mom because my father passed twenty-five years ago. I've been in America for almost 4 years. Today is a pleasure for me, because I'm going to let everyone know about my MOM.

My mom is a beautiful black Haitian woman. She lives in Artibonite Gonaives in Haiti. She has three children including me. My Father died when I was 3 years old, you can imagine how life was for a widow mother of two small children. Because of the death of my father, things became difficult for my mom because she had two kids at that time to take care of; one at the age of three and a ten month old. She fought hard to feed us; it was difficult for her to purchase clothing and our

education. When school time arrived, she asked for help. My mother was ashamed. I was a small boy but I understood how hard it was during that time for my mom.

One day, my mom decided to do a very little business with the little money she had. She would sell our old clothing and cook hot food to sell. My mom did everything for us, she forgot about herself as she focused all of her attention on us. She was able to give us a good education even though she had to ask others for help. She used to ride and carry us at school every day on her bicycle. The distance was thirteen miles. I would ride in the front and my brother in the back of the bicycle. When I was thirteen my mom met someone and she had my second little brother. I saw my mom's life situation so I attended a professional mechanical school to learn how to fix cars, so that I could help my mother. She showed me how to respect, love, be grateful, treat people kind and how to become a great man.

My Mom really means the world to me. She is everything to me. She is my reason to be. I would like to tell all the children of the world to respect, love, protect and listen to their mom or parents because the bible says "blessed be the person who obeys their parents, their life will be long." After all that my Mom did for me, I'm doing my best to make her proud of me. My Mom deserves the heavens but I can't give it to her. I'll learn something that can help me to take care of her like the queen she is. Because, who I am now, it's because of my mother. I hope GOD protects her to see many years in life. I love my Mom oh so much!

Kendy Bruanache Louis-Juste is a student at Dunbar Community School. She is in ESOL class level 6. Her instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

A Parent's Strength

My name is Concepcion Rendon. I am a student of Parent Power Alliance at Forest Hill Elementary. I have two children. I share with you the person I most admire.

I admire my mother because she is very strong. She was married to my father and had nine children. Eight children

lived but one died at two months old. My mother helped me to get over the death of my sister. She was always there for me when I needed comfort. She stopped whatever she was doing to give me hugs and words of comfort. My mother was always affectionate with all of her children. She always taught us to keep going and wanted us to study so we would get to our goals. She was always there to protect us.

My mother is super strong because she suffered with domestic violence both verbally and physically throughout their marriage. Sometimes I saw that she was physically unable to move but she told us that we would still go on. Sometimes she washed and ironed clothes for my teachers to get money that she would hide from my dad to buy us food, clothes and shoes.

My older brothers spent time working outside the home in other cities. When they married and my younger brother turned thirteen my mother decided to leave because my father became much more violent. He had bought a gun and had threatened her several times. She told us what was happening as he became more violent. My father was an alcoholic and he needed help, but we did not understand my mom. She decided to leave her life with him because she was living in danger.

My mother could understand his alcoholism but not his deceptions with other women and so she left. A year and a half later my father was involved in a dispute with another man for being with his woman. My father was killed in that dispute. Now as a widow she became strong in another way. Though she withstood much abuse, she said we had to forgive in our hearts and live without rancor.

Now she lives in peace and quiet in Mexico. Though she is ill, she is still an outstanding, strong woman who endured beatings and psychological abuse and carried on. What I admire most is her strength and advice to have good communication with our husbands and to support and always help our children to be good people. That's simple advice from a strong woman who has helped me make a good life for my family. My mom is the person I admire the most. She is my mirror.

*Concepcion Rendon is a student at Parent Power Alliance.
Her teacher is Trish Rowland.*

Someone Who Inspires Me

When I think of someone inspiring, my mind drifts into thoughts about people like the President, Olympians, or even doctors. But the person I admire the most, the person I strive to be like every day, is my mom. My mom is now thirty-seven years old. She has had an interesting journey that got her to where she is now. My mom went through a nasty divorce; she took on the role as being both mom and dad, and now is very successful. She is one of the most inspiring people I've ever met.

When I was eight years old, my mom and dad filed for divorce. It was one of the hardest experiences my family has ever gone through. I've never seen anyone go through something so painful and heartbreaking, and still carry themselves with so much grace and strength. I hope one day when my life doesn't go as expected, I will be able to handle myself half the way she did. She is one of the strongest people I've ever met.

After my parents divorced, my mom took on the role as both parents. I no longer had a father. I had a mom. That being said, my mother had no husband. Which meant she took care of us, paid the bills, and still managed to cook dinner every night.

She worked multiple jobs and on weekends, my sister and I would help her clean houses for extra money. In the eyes of a little kid she was "Super Woman," always making it look so easy and putting her kids before herself. She is one of the most selfless people I've ever met.

Now my mom owns her own business. She is in the top percent in the world, and does trainings all over the country. She never stops striving to do better and doesn't let anything get in her way. She is a true inspiration, an example of a successful woman who truly came from nothing.

Though she has given me everything and more, she never ceases to remind us of what others do not have. She is one of the most successful people I know.

My mom is someone who inspires a lot of people. She went through a gruesome divorce; she took on the role of being both mom and dad, and now is very successful. She never gives up on her goals, and puts everyone before herself. My mom is my inspiration.

Jaiden Lanham is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers.

My Amazing Sister

My sister is the person that I admire the most. My first memory of her is when she gave me her bottle and shoes. She still helps me to this day. She has always been my best friend and inspiration. She assisted me when I was little, as a teenager, and as an adult.

When I was in elementary school, she would help me with my spelling words. As a teen, I got a lot of advice when getting clothes. In adulthood, she helped me get my first apartment. Later in life, my sister helped me in recovering my birth certificate, social security card, and other important papers. My sister has always been my strength and support through many trials and tribulations and kept me out of trouble. I am so grateful that she never gave up on me.

I wish I had the means to do something special for her. Janet Lynn, I sincerely hope in writing this that you will know how much I appreciate you!

Melissa Rodriguez is an adult student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia. Her teacher is Dr. Michael J. McCoy.

Women in Science

Not much is said of women in science, but they do exist. With precarious access to a formal scientific education, it was not easy for a woman to enter this area or to be recognized for her work. There are thousands of women scientists who remain anonymous because of our sexist society. Everybody knows Einstein or Newton, but few people know about Marie

Curie, for example. Marie Curie was the first person to win two Nobel Prizes, and is one of only two people in the history of the Nobels to win in two different fields. She won the Physics Prize in 1903 for the discovery of radioactivity. She then won in the field of chemistry in 1911 for discovering the elements radium and polonium and investigating their properties.

Another example of a leading scientist forgotten by history is Hedy Lamarr. She was an Austrian Hollywood actress, considered the most beautiful woman in the world at that time. Besides that, she was also an inventor. During World War II, she created a sophisticated radio scrambler to foil Nazi radars. The invention would not be used until 1962 by American troops in Cuba, but Lamarr's patent had already expired, and she took no credit for the invention. Lamarr's frequency device formed the basis for modern communication technology such as GPS, Bluetooth, wireless, cell phones and Wi-Fi networks.

You will be surprised to learn that the first person to develop the world's first computer program is a woman. Ada Lovelace is considered the first computer programmer. Ada is an example of a recognized women scientist. Unfortunately, this does not happen often. The scientist Lise Meitner was the real author of the calculations that led to the discovery of nuclear fusion, but the man who won the Nobel Prize for the discovery in 1944 never mentioned it. Rosalind Franklin was the photographer who unearthed the structure of the DNA double helix, and Nettie Stevens, discovered the X and Y chromosomes in 1905. They were never cited as co-authors at the time the deeds were announced. Even Albert Einstein's first wife, Mileva Maric, has only now begun to be recognized for her role in her husband's discoveries.

Success in math and science, isn't a matter of gender; it is almost entirely dependent on culture — a culture who ignores the work and the history of female scientists; a culture whose teachers don't encourage their female students to continue for advanced degrees; a culture where female scientists are hired less frequently than men, earn less money and are allotted fewer resources. It's time for this to change.

Helena Loretto is a student in College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

One Main Lady

The one main lady I admire the most is my auntie Sara Robinson. She's always positive, beautiful and strong. She is the best auntie anyone could ask for.

Sara Robinson is a very positive person. She's always been a part of my life ever since the very day I was born. Even though sometimes she feels as if she failed my brother and I, she never did and I love and respect her for that. She did the best job any child could ask for. When you have someone that's God loving and would do anything to make you smile you would feel the same as I do.

Every morning my auntie would wake up at six and prepare breakfast for everybody. But not before she took a shower and take her rollers out. Those big beautiful thick sandy gray curls that would drop perfectly with her big beautiful white smile. A beautiful smile and a beautiful soul to match. Anyone would feel loved and welcomed, that's just the type of person she is.

Since 2012 my auntie has been dealing with cancer. It has made our family closer and stronger. This will be the third time she has to have chemotherapy. Every time I feel down about her situation she tells me that she knows God and that he doesn't make any mistakes. The last time we spoke she told me that she's proud that I'm following God again. We are patiently awaiting her return so that we can and be with her—family is key.

Auntie Sara Robinson, my positive, beautiful and strong hero. If you ever get the chance to meet someone or have someone special in your life like my auntie Sara, never take him or her for granted because angels like her never come very often! God bless.

Tanena Chatman is a student at the Youth Empowerment Center.

One of a Kind

My name is Wilda Tranquille. I am from Haiti. I want to share with you someone I admire. I ask myself, “Can I admire someone I meet the first time?” You might not understand my question but keep on reading.

I met many wonderful people in Key West, Florida but this person is different. I feel comfortable with her because she is so kind and cheerful. When I first attended her class, I thought I saw a teacher. In reality she is more than a teacher.

First, she is beautiful, disciplined, and cooperative. Secondly, she loves all her students. When the students miss her class, she would go and check on them personally. For her students to be successful, it depends on partnership efforts in the classroom, at home, or anywhere to realize their goals.

My teacher is special in her own unique ways. She has positively impacted me on the very first day I met her in class. That is why I posted the question above. She remains in my heart. I admire her.

Wilda Tranquille is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Basketball

Many people enjoy doing certain activities during their free-time. My favorite free-time activity is playing basketball. Basketball is my favorite sport and I enjoy doing it whenever I get the chance.

I have been playing basketball since I was a little boy and I have always loved it. Basketball is a good way for me to stay healthy, have fun, and also get to meet new people. I can give a plethora of other reasons why I enjoy this activity but those are my essential reasons.

Basketball consists of a lot of constant running and jumping. These things are great ways to keep a healthy heart rate, which is good for the lungs and heart. This gives me stamina and helps me perform to my greatest potential. Also,

this activity is great for the bones and joints, which allows my body to stay healthy and to maneuver at ease when I am older.

The game of basketball is extremely amusing; I always enjoy every minute of it. Whether I'm playing offense or defense, I love every aspect of the game. I highly enjoy shooting the ball and every time I make it I feel accomplished. There is never a dull moment when I'm on the court. Everything about it is tremendously fun.

Basketball is an excellent way to meet new people. It is a great way to get to know someone and make new friends. I enjoy basketball because it's a friendly sport. It makes me feel like I'm a part of something when I have new teammates.

In conclusion, basketball is my favorite free-time activity. Basketball keeps me healthy and helps my body parts in many various ways. Also, basketball is a perfect way to make friends and get to know people just by being their teammate, even if it's only for one game.

Freddy Romero, a student at Dunbar Community School, is studying to get his GED. Ms. Hicks-Wiley is one of his teachers.

Someone I Admire

There is someone in my life that I admire. This person is a teacher at The Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach, Florida. She has been my reading teacher and has been very influential in my life. Her name is Ms. Caruso. What I admire about her, is the way she teaches her students, her caring personality, and the way that she is extremely helpful to her students.

I admire Ms. Caruso because of the way she teaches her students. She is a great teacher because she is very clear in her explanations. For example, I was learning how to write an essay and I was having trouble with the concept of "main idea." Ms. Caruso had a PowerPoint presentation on this topic. I was able to grasp the idea by using this visual aid. Ms. Caruso thinks about her students and the way they learn.

Another example is her patience when teaching. When going over classwork she will always make sure everyone understands before moving on. These are some of the reasons why I admire Ms. Caruso because of the way she teaches her students.

Ms. Caruso is special to me because of her caring personality. She cares about all of her students on a personal as well as a professional level. From my experience, she is a good listener and is willing to give advice on personal situations when asked. For example, on more than one occasion, she listened to issues I had with my mother. She gave me advice on how to handle my situation. Academically, she is caring because she makes herself available. On the first day of class she handed out a letter which included her e-mail, classroom phone number, and personal phone number. There were many ways to reach her if we had any questions. These are some of her qualities that make Ms. Caruso very special to me.

Lastly, I admire Ms. Caruso because she gives students the skills they need for a brighter future. She teaches a class called Career Pathways. Here, she teaches students about career exploration, writing resumes and job interviewing skills. She also takes students on college tours, and has guest speakers on topics such as managing your finances. Her students can take all of this information and skills that they have learned in Career Pathways and apply it during the rest of their lives.

I admire and respect Ms. Caruso because of the way she teaches, her caring personality, and the way she is helpful to her students. I admire how Ms. Caruso teaches with patience but most of all I love how she cares for her students, especially me. She will answer any questions I have and if I need help after hours she stays to help me with my work.

Veronica Kogan is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Person I Admire the Most

One of the people that I admire the most is Mariah Carey because she was the first woman musical artist I listened to as

a child. She gave me the inspiration I needed. We both grew up in similar circumstances, such as moving frequently due to financial struggles. Her success made me realize that no matter what, I can reach my goals.

Mariah Carey was born on March 27, 1970. She was born in Huntington, New York. Her father was an African-American and her mom was white Irish descent. When she was younger, she started to write poems and added melody to them. When Mariah Carey was in high school she began to write songs with Gavin Christopher. As a student I was in the chorus and music made me feel good about myself.

Mariah works with world hunger and inner city youth. She has inspired me to help others. She taught me how to keep your head held high and don't get discouraged even when things don't go your way.

Mariah Carey grew up in a Christian home, but I didn't. She has influenced me to become a Christian. My favorite quote from Mariah Carey is "I do believe in GOD and I have been born again. In a lot of ways, I think I have changed my priorities and my relationship with GOD. I can feel the difference when I don't have any private moments to pray. I am a fighter, but I have learned I am not in charge. Whatever GOD wants to happen, it is going to happen. I feel that I have been blessed with endless chances. It is by the grace of GOD I am still here." As a Christian this quote reminds me that I need to keep my priorities straight, keep my faith, and always pray.

Mariah Carey is a famous Christian singer who has lived a stressful life, but continues to shine. She is my inspiration because she has made a success of her life and continues to encourage others to do the same.

Susprina Grams has been with the READ Lakeland, Inc. program since 2013. She set her goals and has not waivered since. Susprina's tutor, Sue Hawthorne, a longtime tutor with READ Lakeland, continuously supports her. Susprina was the recipient of READ Lakeland's student of the year and will soon take the GED exam.

She's Number One in my Eyes

The person I most admire would be my mom. She has always been there when my brother or I needed anything whether it was just a hug or words of encouragement. She is everything to my brother and me. She's our backbone, or some may say our lifeline. Without her, we wouldn't be who we are today!

Growing up wasn't the easiest because Mom and Dad fought continuously. Dad was always in and out of our lives and hurt all of us more than I can even remember. Some people often say that they wish they had someone else as their mom, But I think my brother and I were blessed beyond measure.

Through all of the pain and sorrow, my mom stayed strong for us. She stayed up with us when we couldn't sleep, and all we wanted to do was cry. She encouraged us to go to school even though we didn't want to. She would even intervene with the school when we needed extra reassurance.

I do believe that my Mom is the strongest and most amazing person I have ever known. She has always kept food in our stomachs, clothes on our backs, and a roof over our heads. We are beyond blessed to call her our Mom!

Brianna Beckham is a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia Florida. Her teacher is Dr. Michael Mccoy.

Omila Jecroix

A person I love and respect very much is my grandmother. Her name is Omila Jecroix. When I was six years old, my father had to go and live in a foreign country so that he could help us have a better life. He left me with my mother and grandmother. Five years later, my mother left me for the same reason. At first I had a bad feeling about my grandmother. I thought that she did not give my mom a chance to be my mother. But I was wrong.

My grandmother took very good care of me in the absence of my father and mother. She understood all of our situations and she was able to survive through them all. My grandmother

was a hard worker and a good hearted person. I feel very grateful for her tender care and am thankful for her presence in my life. I will always love my grandmother for the rest of my life.

Stanley is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Only Savior

My Lord is everything to me. I want to express how much I admire him because he did great things in my life and he is the largest and most beautiful creature in the Universe. In other words, he gave his life for us in exchange for our sins. God is everything to me and I give thanks because he made a big miracle in the life of my family.

For the following reasons, God is my all. The miracle he did in my life and my family was huge. That day was not easy for me. When I heard about the disaster, a big earthquake that shook my country, I felt desperate. I was not able to communicate with my loved ones. Then I cried. I was confused. I was scared. My mind was full of different emotions. Then I pledged my Lord to help me.

Finally, I could talk to my relatives. I was very happy. A joy was left in my heart when I heard their voices. For this reason, I want to thank God for all he did for me. I thought, "My Lord is the main reason in my life." Hundreds of people died in that tragedy, but my family survived. My words are not enough to express how grateful I am to my lord for each and every one of the things he has done for me.

Marie Johanne Cineus is from Haiti, but she lived in Venezuela for many years. She studies English at Immokalee Technical College and her teacher is Ms. Leyva.

My Mother: A Warrior

My name is Rosa. I was born in a small town in Mexico. I have a big family of six sisters and four brothers. My family

was very poor, but we always had enough to eat. I remember that I never had a bed to sleep in. I studied only until the sixth grade and then I had to work to help my mother. My father died when I was 17 years old and my mother was left alone with three small children. My brothers and I could work and help my mom. My mom worked hard selling vegetables at the market to bring up my little brothers, an achievement she made with great sacrifice.

I love my mother because she is a warrior. Now I am thirty-eight years old and I live in the U.S. I am married and I have four children, two girls and two boys. They do not know my mom and they only speak with her by phone. However, I talk to them about how she helped my brothers and me become good people. Now I am going to school to learn English. When I finish I will look for a job to keep helping my mom and my husband. I want to be a warrior like my mother. The only thing I ask God is to be able to hug my mother again.

Rosa Vega is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Her Name is Love

There are many things to say about the most beautiful grandma that any kid could have. The best memories that I have in my life are from her. My grandma is an angel and her house a temple of peace and love. She did everything that she could have done, and the most important thing was her love.

She is my father's mom; I grew up with her, and we lived in her house for some years. When my parents bought a house, I had to move there. I remember that day; I was pretending that I was sleeping, but I was just pretending because I didn't want to go anywhere. Every afternoon after school I stayed with her. She combed and played with my long hair making braids. I was really happy with her and every afternoon late when it was the time to go to my parents' house, I went in silence to her bedroom and tried to sleep. I thought that if I slept, it was a good way for my parents to let me stay there with her.

When I was in her house, I felt peace and love. Her house

was my palace and I was the queen, and like that she called me, “Queen”. My sisters and cousins were the princesses, but I was her “Queen”, and they knew it and accepted that I was her favorite granddaughter. It is an easy guess which is my favorite place, and that there is no other place than my grandma’s house. It is a big house, with a big back yard, with many plants, turtles, parrots and dogs. In fact, without my grandma, the house is not the same. But it’s still my favorite place because I still feel peace and love in this house remembering my childhood there.

Every year on Christmas, I wrote a letter to “Baby Jesus.”, and I believed that he had brought toys for kids. One day I saw a letter in her pocket, and she told me an incredible and amazing story. With that story that she told me, I continued believing in the magic of Christmas.

When I got married, she wasn’t with me, and I used a braid in my hair to feel that she accompanied me on that important day in my life. It is not easy to remember my grandmother without tears coming to my eyes. I still feel too much pain, and no matter what the people say, when I talk about her, I prefer to say “is” not “was” because a person is dead when she is forgotten. And to me she lives. I can’t see her, but I feel her, and this is my way to feel better. Crazy or not, that’s me.

Ronalyn Marquez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Lovely Wife

My wife is my hero and best friend. I had to go to war between Iran and Iraq six days after our wedding. The war ended after 13 years and I was able to go home and stay with my family.

My wife is a good mother for our three children. She took care of them and made sure that they would be successful at school and life when they were growing up. She is a good friend to my family because she listens to everyone and tries to help them.

She is also a very good cook. She takes care of everyone and the house too. She is friendly and caring. She shows her kindness to everyone. I appreciate all she has done for me and my family.

Reza Tajiani is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

My Mentor Who Inspires Me

I admire a friend of mine who is five years older than me. Every time I have an opportunity to talk with him, we talk about money and how to live a better life. He says nothing is easy in this life. Sometimes we have to change our minds or take risks to get better things. Even though change is hard, if you want something different you have to do something different and take action.

We talk. I ask questions and learn. He has given me many tips, and the most important one is to speak English well. I asked him where he learned English and his answer was, "Jupiter High School for adult learners."

He has inspired me because I see how easily he can communicate with his customers. English makes a big difference in his business because he speaks very well. Six months ago, I made a decision to improve my English. Now I am studying English at Jupiter High School because he told me how important English is to reach your goals.

In April 2015 I started studying at night class. Now I know my English is better than eight months ago, but I keep looking forward to reaching a better tomorrow.

Rene Chonay is from Guatemala. After work he regularly attends Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL Class at Jupiter ACE.

Jose Ramon Lopez: The Most Inspirational Person in My Life

I think everyone has a person who makes the world a

more beautiful place just because of her or his existence. Since I was a little child, my favorite elderly person has been my grandfather, Jose Ramon. I have never known anyone else like him. He had a tiny body, but his heart was bigger than the universe. I just had to look at his green eyes to find peace.

He was like one of those really big history or geography books because of his profession: he was a sailor during almost his entire life. He studied a lot to achieve his degree, and he finally became the captain of a majestic ship. I loved to ask him about different places which he had visited, their customs, people, and culture. Everyone in my country constantly talks about the lack of resources, but my grandfather had a wider vision of the real world. He was able to see not only the sun's spots, but also its light. He shared with me a lot of experiences about the extreme poverty, racism, and hunger that he had seen while traveling. He didn't want to leave the ship when they arrived at some ports just because it was so sad to see children without shoes or clothes and parents fishing in order to feed them. Of course, he also told me about the interesting experiences and beauty that he appreciated during his adventures around the world.

He was very lovely with me and supported my dream to become a doctor as well. I will never forget the first time when he saw me wearing my medical uniform, and he started crying. Besides, he had a particular sense of humor. I usually remember the fairy tales which he recited to me when I was a child. He was able to interpret all kinds of characters while changing his voice and making funny faces. It did not matter how terrible I felt, he always knew what to say to make me laugh.

Unfortunately, my grandfather became ill in 2011, but even during his affliction, he always was the same generous, friendly, wise man. He had cancer and, after a long battle against his disease, we lost him. I know he still had a lot of knowledge to share because his wisdom was like a treasure full of precious gems which he wanted to give me little by little at the right time. But above all, I think he had already transmitted the most valuable advice to me: we should feel grateful and blessed for everything we have, even to wake up and breathe every morning. He will be forever the light that illuminates my path, my protector, and my inspiration to

continue studying and fighting to realize my dreams and to make him proud of me. I will love you forever grandpa!

Niumis Martinez Lopez is an Academic Skills student at Brewster Technical College, Tampa, FL.

My Father: My Role-Model

I was born in a big family: there were my parents, six brothers and three sisters.

I can say that we had a very happy childhood, and that we were fortunate to grow-up with values, principles and love.

My father was an exceptional person; he was my role-model who inspired my life. Being still very young, only nineteen, he married my mother, an extraordinary woman. They moved from Cartago, his hometown, to live in Cali, a big city in Colombia. He started working as a messenger in a major leather store, and in his free time he started learning everything he could about the business. He was soon promoted to the sales department where he stayed for three years, until he went to work for a big distributor of spare parts and industrial machines. There, he learned everything about that business. He also started studying general accounting at night.

After 7 years of hard work in that company, with 5 children and my mother to support, he decided to establish his own company. Starting from the bottom, he, with my mother helping him during her spare time, began La Balinera S.A., a successful company that still exists.

He started the company in 1950 at the time of the industrial expansion in Colombia. As he had a clear vision of what he wanted to achieve, he put all his efforts to make it real and possible. He was a very organized person and always liked to do his best. He had to face difficulties, but never surrendered. He was a real hard worker, and had an innate intuition for business. As a result, he built a successful company, always did his work with honesty and integrity, and was willing to attend to all his customers' needs to satisfy them. He put technology to work for the company and gave a

lot of importance to his customers' suggestions. He would also encourage his employees day after day to become better in all aspects of their lives.

My father died thirteen years ago and I miss him every single day, but I feel very grateful to have had the opportunity of being his daughter.

Amalia Montoya Lara is a student at the Adult Education Center. She takes Advanced ESOL level 6 and her teacher is Silvia Giovanardi.

My Exceptional Role Model

The person I admire most is my mother. She is my role model and lives her life in a manner that I strive to follow. My mother abides by a strict daily, organized schedule. She is a very strong, independent woman and she is everything I want to be when I get older. Now, I will explain all these qualities in detail to illustrate my admiration.

First, my mother is very organized and keeps to a very strict schedule; she follows a daily routine with little to no deviation.

Every morning she wakes up and goes to the gym. After a rigorous workout, she showers then joins my dad at work. After work she goes back to the gym for another workout then comes home to cook dinner for our family. Her schedule is full, yet she is still able to keep the house clean and orderly.

She keeps all of her duties on a strict time schedule and sticks to it every day. Her favorite phrase is: "idle time is the devil's handiwork." I strive to follow in her steps and make productive use of my time. If I could achieve only half of this I would achieve a lot.

Second, my mother is strong and independent. Her parents passed away when she was 7 years old. She was appointed a guardian, but the guardian was inadequate. The guardian could not meet even the basic needs of a young girl growing up in a small town in Tennessee. My mother left and became responsible for herself at the age of 15. My mother

started working to care for herself and moved into her own house. From that point forward she took care of herself until she met my father and started her family.

All of these qualities make up the type of person that I genuinely strive to be. She is the epitome of success. I can only hope to be as successful and independent as my mother. There is no other person that demonstrates happiness, fulfillment, and achievement like my mother.

In closing, all of the qualities I have listed describe why I admire my mother the most: she has led a free and fulfilled life. I can only try to be as good a person as she.

Alexandria May is a student of the D.A.W.N program in Jacksonville. Her teacher is Shelletta Baker.

My Dad

I was raised by my father whose name was Manuel. He was a farmer and a very kind man. In his early years (when he was eight or ten) his father died and left his mother with two daughters and four sons. My father left school to start working in order to help his mother raise his younger siblings. He never learned to read and write, but he knew the value of money and how to deal with it.

After he divorced my mother, he was granted custody of me and my little sister. He worked hard to take good care of us. My father remarried and his wife became our stepmother, whom we loved as a mother.

In my primary school years, I was promoted three times and received a scholarship for fifty dollars. This made my father very proud of me and he used to say, "My daughter knows more than her teachers."

During that time most girls were not allowed to move to higher education, but I wanted to continue studying. My father said, "You are not going to be a teacher." He was right; I became a social worker. He was happy about that.

Our relationship was very close, as we were like

confidants. He was always there for me and I was there for him. He taught me to be honest, to work hard, and to be brave. Also, he taught me to do more with less. My commitment to him was to never let him down and to always love him dearly. My father died on January 19, 2013 and was very close to becoming 94 years of age.

Margarita Torres Rodriguez is a student at St. Joseph's ESL Classes in Lakeland, Florida.

Luck Supports the Brave

There's a proverb that says, "Throw a lucky man in the sea, and he will come up with a fish in his mouth." This saying is meaningful to me when I look back forty years to the time when I graduated from the University of Damascus in Syria. I majored in agricultural engineering and received a job upon completing my degree. It was through this work that I first met the owner of a poultry company named Mustafa.

Mustafa started his company from scratch. Initially, since he was a student, he didn't have the ability to work full time. He would buy the necessary amount of chickens, take them home, process them, and then deliver them to customers on his bike! Over time, he saved and borrowed enough money to make the dream of owning his own poultry farm become a reality. Mustafa won the confidence of his clients, continued day and night, never knew the fatigue or boredom.

He worked tirelessly toward achieving his dream. Mustafa's work ethic and precision made him a credible trader throughout the land. Through his hard work he had the opportunity to deal with representatives from European companies. This further helped his company to grow, and soon it became one of the leading producers and traders of necessary raw materials. Of course, the growth of his company also provided numerous job opportunities for young people, and I was one of them.

I worked hard and learned everything I could. I tried to imitate him. Through him, I learned the valuable lessons of love of work, prioritizing objectives, drive and ambition. He was my idol and I was his admirer. I consider myself a lucky

man for working with an admirable person like Mustafa.

Tony Ahmar is from Damascus, Syria. He is married to Therese and has three children. He attends ESOL classes at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville, Florida. His teacher is Brian Jones.

My Role Model: Bruce Lee

Bruce Lee has been my role model since I was six years old. Because of him, I have studied martial arts, the Yin-Yang, and meditation. Bruce Lee is known as the greatest martial arts champion of his time and no one could beat him because his fists were as fast as lightening. I first saw him in his movie, Enter the Dragon.

Bruce Lee said, “Discipline and self-control go hand in hand.” He also said, “Your fists aren’t used for attack, only used for defense.” From what he said I learned to walk away and not attack, but to defend the ones close to me.

I learned to use meditation because Bruce Lee said, “Meditation is the key to self-balance.” It helps me to calm down and to train my mind and body. Because of meditation, my mind is clear and I was able to come back to school and to study for my GED.

I also learned about both types of the Yin-Yang. The normal Yin-Yang (perfect balance in yourself) and the Yin-Yang heart (perfect balance in love). There is a legend about a weak swordsman who was in love with a captive maiden. He brought the castle down and saved her.

He had the Yin-Yang in his eyes and the power of the Yin-Yang heart on his sword and also carved on his chest. Because of what I learned from Bruce Lee and from martial arts, meditation and the Yin-Yang, I’m happier and not as stressed. These teachings have enabled me to handle any crisis like bullying. My friends have role models like rap artists, and like some rap artists, they have been to jail. They haven’t learned the discipline and self-control like I have.

Bruce Lee might have died but his words and his example

still inspire me. For two years I have followed his example of discipline and devotion in my own way to prepare for the GED.

I'm still going to use everything I've learned in the future as I have used it in the past. Thanks to Bruce Lee, I can think clearly and I'm able to take my GED and manage the rest of my life.

Brian Jewell is a student at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg and has been working on his GED with his tutors, Janet and Martha. Brian has become quite the fiction writer.

Someone I Admire

Someone I admire is my grandmother Mary Nelson, who is no longer here with us today. I love my grandmother with all my heart. She was born May 4, 1956. She was a mother of five children. She birth two daughters and three sons. My mother was her eldest child. My grandmother raised me like I was one of her own children. She loved me dearly.

Being the eldest grandchild, I thought very highly of my grandmother. She was all ways there and loved my sister and brothers, and I very much. As a grandmother, she taught us to never give up, to stay strong, and told us that we could achieve any goal we wanted to obtain.

Mary was a loving lady who would shelter and feed anyone who needed the help and who was willing to help themselves. Mary wore a smile that could lighten up a dark room. She was a grandmother who taught me about subjects such as religion, logic, wisdom, knowledge and justice. Growing up as a child I remember my grandmother saying, "One day you'll have kids and I hope they turn out like you"! She believed in the abilities of her children and grandchildren.

I admire my grandmother because she was a hard working woman and nothing or no one stopped her from providing for children and grandchildren and protecting her household. This motivated all of her kids and grandkids to stay focused and work hard, like she did. She was a single mother that made a way when there was none. She was a God-fearing and God-loving woman who taught us all, how to become believers

of Christ.

I remember before my bedtime, Mary would yell across the house, "Don't forget to say your prayers". The love my grandmother showed me, I have never felt before, from anyone. I appreciate everything about my grandmother; she always made me feel that everything was going to be okay. Now that Mary not here with us on earth, she leaves her spirit behind. Sometimes at night, I still find myself crying over my grandmother. Family gatherings aren't the same without her.

Keshondra Johnson is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers.

Love Can Do That

Someone I admire a lot is Martin Luther King. There are many, many reasons for my admiration but the top three would have to be his courage, his strength, and how he changed American history.

Imagine having to stand up for yourself and for your people in a country that hates you. How courageous is that? And because of this, he lost his life!

Secondly, I love Martin Luther King's strength to do all he did in peace; marching while having things thrown at him, being spat on, and never being violent back.

Everything Martin Luther King did can never be undone. He changed American history forever. Even though racism still exists, it is not like it was before and, hopefully, it will never be again.

So, the person I admire the most is Martin Luther King Jr. for endless reasons, but the top three are his courage, his strength, and how he did all he could to change America.

Darkness cannot drive out darkness.

Only LIGHT can do that.

Hate cannot drive out hate.

Only LOVE can do that!

Thalia Lima is a student at Palm Beach Gardens Community High School.

My Dad

The one person in the world that I admire the most is my dad. He is loving but strict. He pushes me to be a better person, wife, and mother. He encourages me to make my dreams come true.

When I was I child, my dad played many games with me. He joked and laughed a lot; however, he was also very serious about rules. I am an only girl with three brothers. I remember going to the stadium to watch soccer with my dad. My three brothers did not like soccer. My dad and I developed a very special relationship and I loved hanging out with him. He gave me the best LOVE and I am grateful for that.

My dad is a person who likes to advise me. He said that he has already lived what I'm living and for this reason, he knows how to resolve problems. He taught me and is still teaching me with his examples and wise counsel.

He is a successful man. My dad started a company 30 years ago in Honduras and today he has four branches in the country. With hard work, he accomplished his goals and now he is pushing me to achieve my goals and dreams.

My dad is the person that I admire the most. With his love and example, I will be a better person, wife, and mother. I will make my dreams come true.

Astrid Coello is enrolled at Dunbar Community School. She is working very hard to make her dream a reality. Her teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

Someone I Admire

I admire Ann Palmer because she is a great person. She is the president of the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. She is hardworking and dedicated to her students. She makes sure we have everything we need to learn, books, pencils,

computers, and classrooms.

Ann is an excellent teacher who works with the tutors and she helps students who need extra help in the classroom. These are just a few of the reasons I admire Ann Palmer.

Samuel Bennett is a student at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. His teacher is Ann Palmer.

My Son Stevenson

My name is Edouanise Pascal I'm from Haiti. Everyone has a hero, for me it's my son Stevenson, he will always be my son and the best friend I will ever have. When I was twenty-eight years old I became pregnant. I was so excited because this was my first pregnancy.

I knew this baby would be very special because the doctors were concerned about my pregnancy due to excessive large fibroids tumors I had. I prayed daily for a normal healthy baby boy or girl. GOD blessed me with a nice boy, so intelligent, and with lots of love to give.

I admire him not just because he's my son, but because he is very intelligent for a three year old. He brings me much joy into my life because of his caring ways. He's very bright, funny.

He has a remarkable insight when knowing that things in my life are not going just right. When I have a problem and I am sad my son always comes to me and asks: "what's wrong mammy?" I say "nothing, babe."

He gives me a huge hug and says tome "don't forget I love you and I will always love you". That's all I need in life to have a son who brings much joy and happiness in my life. I will pray that GOD blesses him with long life.

Stevenson my son is the one that I admire.

Edouanise Pascal is from Haiti and has lived in the U. S. A. for three years. She is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers Florida; she is in ESOL Class Level 5 & 6. Her instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

What the American Dream Means to Me

My Great American Dream

My American dream is not easy. You find a lot of obstacles that you have to overcome in order to achieve your dreams. My goal is to have a GED, go to college, and get a Master's Degree in Economics. In other words, to have a good education.

A good education is very important to me because I strongly believe that is through education that I can make my dreams come true. It's hard, but not impossible. I can accomplish my goals if I study hard.

I also want my family to feel proud of me. I am a person with a lot of abilities and I am very positive. I never look back, no matter what happens. I know I make mistakes, but I keep on going, always thinking in a positive way.

I am learning English. I know that many doors will open to me. Success can be achieved by working hard and never giving up in one's dream. The harder the situation, the better is the triumph. If one day you fall, get up and continue working. Be positive so you can achieve your dreams.

My American dream is still to be fully accomplished, but I thank God I have completed part of my dream. And I want to continue pursuing my education so I'm able to reach my great American dream, no matter what obstacles I have to face.

Susana Barcenas is an ELL student at Immokalee Technical College, and her teacher is Ms. Leyva. She considers herself very positive and optimistic.

The American Dream

This is what the American dream means to me. It means believing and trusting in God, having the right to vote, encouraging everyone, getting a good education, freedom of speech, as well as helping people in need. Believing and trusting in

God makes living the American dream better for me.

Having the right to vote gives me the right to express the way I feel about America. Voting is the freedom to voice our opinion about the American Government. Voting also gives me the right to express the way I feel about taxes. As a responsible citizen I believe we should want to make America a better place for all and one way of doing this is to pay our taxes.

Encouraging everyone, to me means helping every one reach their goals in life, and showing them that they can be anything in life they want to be. Encouraging everyone means doing all we can to lift everyone up when they are down.

Getting a good education means building my skills and showing everyone that anything is possible, when you set your mind to it. It also means telling everyone that having a good education will take a person far in life in the work force.

Freedom of speech means having the right to say what's on our minds. It also means having the right to say how one feels about how the American Government and the president run America. Freedom of speech allows me to voice my opinion about how congress and the president act on the laws congress passes. I am so happy to live in a country that lets me express my opinion about things I like and don't like about our government.

Helping people in need means helping the homeless find a place to stay and helping them find food and drink. It also means being there when someone needs you to be for them. This is what the American dream means to me; being able to help others as well as myself in a free country.

Kevin Archibald is a student at East Area Adult School in Auburndale, Florida.

My Life Dreams in America

My name is Jack Hyacinthe and I came to the United States of America one year and three months ago. When I came to the United States I had many dreams because the United States has more opportunities than my country. When

I achieve my dreams in America, I want to be a hero to my family by helping them achieve their dreams.

My American dream began the first day I came to the United States. My dream to go to school every day to learn and practice English is a reality. After I learn English, I will go to UTI to get my mechanic's license. Then I want to become a business owner of a big mechanic shop. I want to work hard and make more money. I will buy a beautiful house, a fancy car, a big screen TV, lots of electronics, and have a very comfortable lifestyle. This is the American dream to me. Afterwards, I will be looking for a nice uptown girl and marry her. Then I will praise God and ask him to give me two children.

I cannot tell people who think that the American dream consists of materialistic items that they're wrong because it is always nice to live comfortably. A lot of people in my life say to me that I will never be able to do this or that. However, if it is just a dream, why do so many people have a fancy car, own a business, and live comfortably? Maybe it is not only a dream.

I will do everything I can to succeed at school and in my life because it is not fun to live a life where you cannot do things because it is too expensive. One day I will be an owner of a mechanic shop and have a fancy car. If I really want something in my life, I just have to work hard to achieve it. Whether it is to be rich, famous, powerful, or to have a family; these are American dreams worth achieving.

Jack Hyacinthe is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

A Dream Come True

Twenty three years have passed since I visited Israel. I can remember and continue to feel the excitement of being there. It was not an ordinary vacation. It was a precious opportunity to go to a place that means so much to me.

I remember each one of the places I visited, especially the holy sites. It is hard to express with words what those places represent to many people from different cultures. For example, The Church of the Sepulcher in Jerusalem is the Holiest Christian place. Inside the church there are many chapels divided

by denominations, such as Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, American Orthodox, Coptic, Syrian and Ethiopian.

The Western Wall was one of my favorite places. It was beautiful to see so many different people praying together. There is a tradition to place a note into a crack of the wall. Thousands of people do this each year. I placed mine there too. My visit to the Jordan River was full of emotions because I learned about so many events that happened in the history of Christianity, and I saw for the first time “Drip Irrigation Systems,” an Israeli invention.

The Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem is the site of Jesus’ birthplace. It is the oldest surviving church in the Holy Land. During our visit to the Mount of Olives, I felt a great peace there. From the east we could see all the Old City of Jerusalem. It is a beautiful view.

The visit to the Masada Fortress was an exhausting day. It was very hot, but I was glad to be there because the place is amazing and has an incredible history. One thousand men, women and children were killed. They committed suicide. They preferred to die rather than surrender to the Romans. This place was built by Herod, like the Western Wall.

To complete our journey we went to the Dead Sea to have a relaxing and resting day. We did not have to swim, just let our tired bodies float on the water. We loved rubbing our skin with black mud. I learned and enjoyed so much during those days in Israel. I was not expecting to return back home with rich knowledge about the country, and full of emotions.

Today while I was writing this, it took me back to my teenage years, when my dream was one day to be an archaeologist or at least be able to visit an archaeological site.

After all those years, I still think about Israel, and I love to study about it. The desire to go there with my family is growing each day in my heart.

Izabel Lipkey is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The American Dream: My Life in the US

I have lived in America for many years. I was born in the country of Mexico. I was very young when I came to the United States of America. I am proud to live here because I am offered many opportunities to have a better future for myself and my family.

One of my dreams is to become a Citizen of the United States. In order to do so, it is very important that I strive to obtain my GED and learn the American way. My first step, was to pass my entrance exam by focusing and studying for my test without watching television, or listening to my favorite Spanish music. It became frustrating to me because I felt nervous about testing. However, due to my determination, will power, and consistency I passed my entrance exam for placement in level 6.

Upon completion of level 6, I will continue perusing my GED. After I obtain my culinary licenses, my dream is to use my skills and talent to own and operate my very own up-scale restaurant. Also I want to give others the opportunity that has been given to me; by providing on the job training for the underprivileged.

These dreams are very real and important to me. I will not stop until I complete My American Dream.

Ismael Villalobos is from Mexico. He is a student in ESOL Level 6 at the Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. His teacher is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

The Beauty of a Dream

The expression “American Dream” has been present in most Cubans’ hearts, perhaps before I was even born, and became a kind of obsession. They could lose their life trying to go to the U.S., but still, they keep doing it. Ninety percent of these people spend their lives thinking of how to make this goal come true. So, there is no way that they will stop risking their lives.

Before I came to the U.S., the American Dream was my wildest dream. I never really expected it would happen someday. Despite that, I never gave up: I chased my dream until the end. When I arrived in the U.S. and started facing the real life here, I had the possibility to compare how similar what I had heard was to what I was living day by day. My reality was finally better than my dreams.

The American Dream is what I expected and much more. I say this because I am living in the country where I have choices and the most important is that I feel free to choose and give my opinion anywhere. Here, I can see people who work hard every day and get good results due to their effort. These things can be possible because we are in a land of opportunities, where you can pursue something you want without limits.

For me the American dream means a new change in my life to achieve stability, start a family, and live a quiet life. If you want to have fun or even become homeless, you can. If you want to be a criminal, you can, but sooner or later you will be in prison. If you want to become rich just work on it little by little. All options are open, and all you have to do is decide.

I know that each of us has a unique vision of the American Dream's meaning, but this is mine. For me, it is a chance to build a successful business, and that's why I am especially fortunate. By way of conclusion, for those who haven't reached the American Dream, my advice is: don't be disappointed. You just make a decision that you're going to move on. It won't happen automatically. You'll have to rise up and say, "I don't care how hard this is. I don't care how disappointed I am. I'm moving on with my successful life."

Carmen Arencibia is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Peoples' American Dream: Thousands of Opportunities in The Land of the Free

This is a story about the American Dream through many eyes. Even people who don't live in this country are wanting a shot at the American Dream. America is the greatest country

in the whole wide world, the United States, the land of opportunities. There are thousands of people trying to get into the USA every day, trying to get their start in the American Dream. The American Dream, to me, is being able to have various opportunities in the job field. You can be anything you set your mind to, from being someone who works on cars, to building houses, or creating the newest technology of today's time.

Other than the work field, the American Dream is about freedom of speech and being part of something. This includes voting for our rights and our laws and even future leaders for our country, and trying to make the United States a better place for future generations.

The American Dream is all up to you, as long as you set your mind to whatever you want to do with your life. This is mine: wanting to set up shop working on motor vehicles or any kind of transportation with a motor in it because this is what I love to do. Other than being home, keeping the livestock living and my garden growing that is the American dream to me.

Kyle Bryant is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructors are Beth King and Renee Goodson.

Sis Louis Restaurant

My name is Marie Nelie Louis. I am from Haiti. To me, an American Dream means when what I wish for, when I live in America comes, to realization. Now, I want to own my own business. It will be a restaurant named Sister Louis. At Sister Louis, I will serve exotic rice and beans with beef, mashed potatoes, macaroni and cheese, pasta, fried pork, chicken, and fried plantains. The beverages will include lemonade, juice, and soda. For desserts, there will be my special cakes and pies. I will provide comfortable seating, and the food price will be very reasonable.

Marie Nelie Louis is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Personal Story

Special Kid has a Special Mom

This is my experience as a mother of a special kid.

I'm from Honduras and I got to this special place in June of 2001. I was married in November of the same year. At the start of 2002, I found out that I was pregnant. In my fourth month, the doctor told me that the kid might have Down Syndrome. Women who have had kids can understand my happiness.

When the doctor told me what the kid could have, I was very scared. After they knew his condition, it was the truth that he probably had Down Syndrome. I didn't want to worry so I decided not to take more exams.

I decided to have a quiet pregnancy. I felt pressured to have an abortion, but for my husband and me, it was not an option. We decided to take care of myself. On August 31st 2002, Daniel was born, and he did have Down Syndrome.

For me it was a difficult moment: I felt very scared, I did not know what to do. We were alone in this country and I had no idea how to bathe or feed him, but when they took him so I could meet him, my small Daniel smiled and his look told me don't be scared, "let's learn together." That gave me the strength to get through postpartum depression.

Every day, I decided to look at my son like a normal kid. My small Daniel showed me lots of lessons and I can write a book of positive things and I can live my life.

Today, I have two more sons who have no problems. Daniel is 13 years old and I can tell that is the best blessing that GOD has given me.

This year is his last year of middle school. To finish this story, I want to tell all mothers not to be scared. You only need love and an opportunity to see them in person to see they can be unique and be accepted by society, because they give lots of love.

I give thanks to God, my friends, and to this country: they helped me.

Ana Mendoza is a student at Parent Power Alliance. Trish Rowland is her teacher.

Life Changing Experience

A life changing experience happened for me on January 12, 2010 at 4:53pm in Haiti's capital, Port-au-Prince. An earthquake of a magnitude of 7.0 shocked the country, followed by two aftershocks of a magnitude of 5.0 and 5.5. For me this was the very first earthquake that I have ever experienced. At first I had no idea what was going on and I thought that the world was coming to an end. This terrible devastation left the people of Haiti scared, homeless, and searching for their lost loved ones.

I still remember that day I have never been so terrified in my life. Seeing so many people crying and running out of buildings and homes; not knowing where they were running to. Everyone was terrified, even after the destruction. The people of Haiti were still scared because of the two aftershocks, but mostly seeing their loved ones trapped inside of collapsed buildings.

There are still some people that are suffering from this disaster; with no money and no homes. Even after all these years, there are still many people living in tents and in unsanitary conditions. All because this earthquake. It has taken everything that the people of Haiti had owned, especially their dignity. Life has been extremely difficult even though we received help from other countries such as, giving out free tents, food and water to those who were homeless. Unfortunately the supplies we received were not enough to care for the thousands who were affected.

Families of the victims set out on a search for their lost loved ones, not knowing if they were dead or alive. Many of them were found with minor cuts and bruises or with extreme injuries like missing limbs. There were some people that were never found or died during this earthquake.

The people of Haiti will never forget this terrible day of January 12, 2010. Although this was a long time ago, it will never be forgotten and has forever changed my life. I have learned to appreciate life more because it is very short and you never know when something like this will happen again.

Charles Jr Louis is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Going to the Special Olympics

I liked to go to the Special Olympics. I got picked to go for the Bowling. I am good at bowling.

The Special Olympics was in Orlando, Florida. There were lots of nice people in Orlando.

I won a fourth place ribbon for bowling. On the ribbon it said, "Skill, Courage, Sharing and Joy." My mom and her friends came to watch me. I had fun.

Kevin Rouse is a student at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. This is Kevin's first story. He is learning to read and write with his tutor is Arline.

My Nightmare

My name is Lovely Garou and I am from Haiti. The first day when I arrived in America in 1997, I was very panicked. My arrival was a nightmare for me because of my visa. The immigration people kept me in a detention center for almost 6 weeks! Finally, my uncle came and got me out.

I thank God, for today, I am an American citizen and I have a good job. I pray that God will continue to bless me in my life.

Lovely Garou wrote this when she was in Vicki McDonald's ESOL Levels 4 and 5 class at Dunbar Community School in Lee County. Now she has moved to Marilyn Savage's ESOL Levels 5 and 6 class. Congratulations, Lovely!

My Difficult Obstacles

I'm Clementina Martinez. I was born on November 25, 1976 in Esteli, Nicaragua. I have one son and I'm single.

My life was difficult because I grew up with many needs. My mother died when I was born. My father got married and had another family. They treated me bad and often hid the food. I endured much hunger. I always dreamed of becoming a lawyer to get ahead. Sadly I had no money or support from anyone. My purpose is to continue to learn day by day and achieve my goals to improve my English reading and writing. I want speak well to help friends and to feel good about myself.

I've been in Florida for ten years. When I came to this country, I started selling flowers in the streets of Miami helping a friend. I remember very well it was hard. Many times I felt frustrated when people asked me questions in English and I didn't understand. My second job was in a restaurant cooking for almost five years. That was hard too because I did not understand when the customers were talking. Another difficulty was when I went to the hospital, restaurant or stores. I could not communicate with others. I was not being able to communicate with my doctor when I was sick. I also wanted to help my friends in the hospital when they did not understand the nurses.

In my past work, I often missed my country, family and friends. I hid my feelings and cried so they would not see me. I knew that I had to find another job. Luckily another friend helped me. Now I study English. I have been studying English for 2 years at ITECH College. My teacher Ms. Katie Mominee is a good teacher. The pronunciation is very hard but I strive and continue to practice. I feel proud of myself because now I can communicate better with other people and try to help others with what I have learned.

I plan to prove to myself that I can do it. Through accomplishing my goal of learning English, I will be able to interact in the society around me. It's very difficult but I will keep helping people near me and find a good job. I thank God for everything he has given me in my life. He knows his purpose. I also thank Ms. Katie Mominee for her time and my mother for taking care of me from the sky. She

does not abandon me and gives me strength to go forward. I know now what I can do it and I will do it!

Clementina Martinez is a student at the Immokalee Technical College Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

Soulmate

Do you believe in destiny? Have you ever dreamed about finding a soulmate? Have you found yours? When you were a child, what were your plans about the future? Did you imagine yourself married with four kids, a dog or a cat in a house full of love? There are so many questions about this exciting topic: love! Well, for me, I had decided when I was a child that I would never get married. I always wanted to have a child or two, but marriage was never a dream until I had an encounter that changed my life. It was in 2002.

Brazil. July 17, 2002. It was in my senior year in college; I was working in my own company and single. My friend invited me to go to a club with her. I went, but I had no idea how my life would change after that day. I noticed a handsome guy wearing a white shirt. It was the only thing I knew about him. Then, around 5 AM, his brother came up to meet us. We started talking and we made a plan to meet the next day. It was during our summer break, and in my city, everyday there was a party. We met at three more parties before we had our first kiss. At this time, I already knew he lived in the United States, and I already knew it would be only a summer love. In fact, he had to fly back to the US one week after we met, but he decided stay one more month, so we could be together a little more.

It wasn't a summer love! We stayed in touch by phone and mail for four years after that, seeing each other once or twice a year. It was a difficult time. If you have known someone that you liked but that lived far away, you can imagine how hard that type of relationship is. However, when it is a true love, your soulmate, it's written in the stars. In 2004, we had a fight that could have ended our relationship, but he came for my birthday by surprise and spent only one day in Brazil! Can you imagine that? Two years after that, he surprised me again and asked me to marry him. I'm sure you know my answer!

We married in 2006 and decided to live in the United States. We will complete ten years of marriage this year, with two wonderful kids! I still miss my family in Brazil, but I never regret the choice that we made for one second! I look forward to spending the rest of my life with this amazing man!

Cybelle Matarazzo is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness Class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Arrival in the USA

When I came to the United States in a trailer on the back of a cargo ship that contained gallons of diesel oil, I was four months pregnant with my first child. It was a moment of great fear. But I had faith in God and dreams for a better life and better opportunities. I always thank God for the opportunities in my life, my family and this country and what it offers me.

Veronica Crespo is from Mexico. She is learning English at Dunbar Community School in Vicki McDonald's Levels 4 and 5 ESOL in Lee County, Florida.

Fight for my Dream

My name is Claudia Tzarax. I was born in 1985. I come from a very poor village of Guatemala, where many children can't study because of poverty, especially women. I grew up in a culture where women are taught only to have children and take care of their husbands. Girls age 12 to 14 are forced to marry and women are not allowed to study. In my case, I had to leave my family, quit school and start working; all at the age of 11! This pointed me in very different direction in life. Due to this experience I have become a dreamer. I know with the help of God, I can achieve my dreams.

My main goal is to learn English. I have 10 years living in the United States and never studied to learn English. Now I realize that these years have been wasted. If I do not learn English I will never meet my goals and dream in this country.

There are many reasons I have decided to learn English. I've had horrible experiences with my children's medical appointments. Often they do not have Spanish translator and I remain with unanswered questions. I have also been ridiculed and humiliated in restaurants and other public places. Now that my son is going to school, it is difficult communicating with his teacher. I don't want to rely on a translator all my life. Also, it is important for me to socialize more to reach my goal. I want to have open conversations without fear or shame, feel fulfilled with myself, and accomplish my biggest dreams to get my GED and become a nursing assistant or teacher.

However, I have many barriers to overcome to accomplish my goal like work, car, and family. Money and time are the biggest obstacles I've ever faced. I'm married and have two children, but we do not have money to pay the babysitter. Sometimes I can't find anyone to take care of my children and the daycare will not accept my children because I can't provide proof that I work. That's why I can't study everyday full-time. Many times I have to walk one hour to school. Therefore every day I struggle to make time to study.

In conclusion it's not easy to study another language, but I know I can achieve it. No matter what, I have to force myself to reach my goal. "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." (Philippians 4:13). Regardless of what it costs me, I will fight for my dream!

Claudia Tzarax attends English class at Immokalee Technical College. She is happily married and has two children. Her teacher is Katie Mominee.

Cooking Brings the Best Out of Me

When cooking, you can either enjoy it or dislike it. For me, it is a stress reliever. It brings me into my comfort zone. I love to cook!

Cooking is a stress reliever for me. On days when I'm stressed, I find myself cooking a lot. Cooking turns my frown into a smile and gives me so much energy. Cooking brings the negative out of me and shows the positive in me.

I am in my comfort zone when I am cooking. As strange

as it may seem, I'm at ease and love trying new recipes on my own without being afraid. Also, when I'm in my comfort zone, I accept the negative thoughts of others and turn them into positive thoughts to push to do better and come up with unique recipes.

I love to cook. When I was younger, I watched my grandmother cook her famous southern recipes daily. Once I got up in age, she showed me how to cook simple recipes. After, I learned different cooking methods. That's when I developed a love for cooking. Many Sunday mornings, I would get up and cook my oldest sister, my grandparents and me salmon patties, grits and scrambled eggs for breakfast before going to Sunday school.

Cooking brings the best out of me. It is a stress reliever, it brings me into my comfort zone, and I love to cook!

Latoya Ervin-Sturgis is enrolled at Dunbar Community School in GED classes. Her teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

American Dream

I challenge you to go to Brazil and look carefully for Brazilians that never thought even for a minute about coming to America to live the American Dream. Of course with me things could not be different. In fact I'm one of America's greatest fans.

It's a long story that began more than thirty years ago when I was only seventeen. At that time making an international trip was something only for the rich, and unfortunately I wasn't in that group. So I studied hard to get a scholarship from my English school, and I came for an unforgettable six month intensive English course at FIT in Jensen Beach, Florida.

Trust me, I was in heaven. I'm not just talking about the huge differences between countries, not just talking American's educated behaviors and the economic condition, but about the wonderful sensation I experienced after years of study when I realized that I could understand what people were saying and that I could make myself understood. Years of

dedication on learning a new language was really worthwhile.

Thank God it was not only studying and classes after classes. We had plenty of time to travel around, to know different cities like Miami, to go shopping, go to restaurants and the most important at the time, to visit Disneyland.

At that time communication was not that easy. Internet? Computers? What the hell was that? To make a phone call was very expensive and my mother could not afford it so we wrote letters back and forth. Once I posted a Disney card to my mother and after the text in Portuguese telling her about my experiences here, at the end I wrote in English that “one day I’ll live here!”

I worked hard my entire life and guess what?

Today this small piece of paper is framed in my home in River Walk, West Palm Beach.

The American Dream came true!

Jorge Belem is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The True Meaning of Thanksgiving

Last November I experienced the beauty of this holiday first hand.

The season started when Florida decided to embrace the fall palette. Everything was gold, lime, and orange, and the weather followed the manual for a “Perfect Thanksgiving Season.”

A couple of local friends invited us to celebrate. I loved the idea of having a real Thanksgiving. When we arrived, I noticed the decorations. It was almost like Christmas! The pumpkins, the candles, the “gobble ‘til you wobble.” It amazed me!

We were the first to arrive, but suddenly a human wave opened the door: parents, brothers, and grandpas, all with arms filled with food, hugs, and welcomes for us, the new

friends from a galaxy far, far away...

From the comfort of a quiet corner, I witnessed moments of pure bliss: laughter shared between generations, a few kitchen-police and their lax reprimands to the strange disappearance of food, and some heart-melting hugs that made me miss my mom.

On the patio the TV was showing a football game, but no one was fully engaged with it. The anecdotes of past Thanksgivings or the bets about who was going to have a food-coma were more interesting.

“Dinner is ready!” And the human wave, now including us, moved to the kitchen where a Red-Riding-Hood-grandma-look-a-like said, “This has been a good year for us, with a lot of blessings, but now it is time to be grateful. Please join your hands.”

And there I was, standing in a kitchen, holding hands with someone I just met, listening to all the reasons they were thankful, seeing all the nods and warm glances to each other; there was love, acceptance, and compassion in the air, just like in a church. And that’s when my eyes started to pour, like now as I write this essay.

I gave thanks for opportunities, new friends, and the ability to share this experience with all of them, but then I stopped because my shaky voice betrayed me.

We said a prayer to close the literal circle that we were in, and the food took the lead. I tried everything! The stuffing, squash casserole, roasted ham, and the delicious and equally evil pecan pie.

After dinner, they shared some stories and asked all kinds of questions about our country, but most of all they made us feel at home.

This experience was so beautiful that I can only hope that everyone is able to learn the true meaning of this holiday, beyond the food and decorations. Of all the blessings that you can have, the most important is a family to share them with.

Ana Laura Alegre is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s

College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Way of Life on my Grandparents' Farm

There is a beautiful place located in the region of Cundinamarca. It is a city in Colombia some 32 miles north-west of Bogota, the country's capital. The weather is 62°F which means it is a warm climate.

My grandparents' farm is located 45 minutes away from la Vega village, at the top of the mountains. The landscape shows a variety of green color. The trees come in different shapes and foliage. On the way to the farm we can see natural and crystal-line small rivers.

On the farm, my grandparents harvest different kinds of green plantains and bananas, yucca, a variety of oranges and tangerines and also have a vegetable garden with tomatoes, onions, basil, parsley, and mint. But mainly it's a coffee plantation on the side of the road and everywhere inside the farm. Because of its geography, it makes an excellent place for the production of coffee. It is something that gets a hold of you and does not let you go.

I used to live there when I was a small girl. I was doing my elementary studies in a small school 30 minutes away by foot. I went to school with my sister. At that time I was living with my parents, grandparents, uncles, and cousins.

I used to help my grandfather by doing small tasks related to coffee production, and also helped my father take care of the cows and collect some fruit. I also enjoyed playing around with my sister, climbing the trees, running across the mountains, taking a bath in the river, and eating all kinds of tropical fruits everywhere on the farm.

We also enjoyed collecting the hens' eggs and feeding them and their chicks. My mother taught me how to cook and do some housework. People living in that area were honest, friendly, confident, simple people and hard workers.

When my sister and I grew up and were ready for middle school. We moved to the capital city with my parents and life changed completely, but we never forgot our grandparents and visited them for vacations.

When I look behind me, what I can remember about that period living on the farm is how happy, pleasant, and simple life was. Also it is magnificent that whenever I want, I can travel and visit that great place and see my grandparents. In fact, since I came to the U.S.A. from Colombia, I have traveled there a couple of times and spent time with them. They are still alive, and healthy, living in the same way and the same place.

Jacqueline Bernal is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Thanks to Life, Which Has Given Me so Much

When I was a child, I always dreamed about the perfect place, where I could live safely and happily. Yes, my entire family was my amazing and comfortable Shangri-La. I remember all the happy moments that I had with my family, all the teachings that my parents shared with us, all the hard work they did just to make us comfortable and secure. They gave us – my sisters and I – the best education and always emphasized the significance respect and humility. The importance of family was our principal life rule; how the entire family, as a unit, could solve any problem and overcome obstacles together. In my mind, that was the key to making our life easier and competitive.

Our school life was awesome, brilliant, and prodigious. My parents constantly told us, “scores do not matter, the knowledge gained and how to use it, is the most meaningful”, such momentous words! This is a paramount tool for the rest of our lives. Ultimately, we finished high school. First my older sister graduated, and immediately she enrolled in school for an administration degree in Peru. That opened a big door into my parent hearts, their dreams fulfilled, and they felt pride. One year later, my other sister began her law studies. My parents and I were very taken aback, yet overjoyed. My sisters initiated

a different kind of life and I felt alone, because they did not pay attention to me anymore. My two best friends followed different paths and exhibited attitudes completely in contrast to mine and I did not understand why. I asked myself why the university had totally changed my sisters. Anyway, I carried on in my wonderful world until the expected day arrived.

Even before I finished high school, I applied to the Informatics Engineering School and the university accepted me and sent me the paperwork. My parents and sisters were very impressed. Finally, they had achieved one more goal. I felt really excited and finished my high school competently. I wanted to experience all college had in store for me.

I started my studies and began to understand all the teachings and advice that my parents shared with us; I started to figure out all of my sisters' attitudes, and I began to develop my personality. Years passed very fast and new joys were coming. My oldest sister had her degree in Business Administration, one year later, my other sister had her law degree, and again my parents were blessedly proud. Immediately my sisters obtained great jobs and quick promotions.

I finished my studies and got a great job too. I saw how our parents, with their good advice and coaching, guided us to successful paths. They planted in us the strong seeds of honesty, respect, and dedication. Now they are completely sure that they achieved their purpose in life and all their dreams have come true. All their hard work is reflected in us. I am thankful and every day I pray for the kinds of parents that God gave me.

Henry Bernuy, from Peru, is a student in the ELCATE program at LWTC in Naples, Florida. Upon completion of this English class, he will enroll in the Business Administration program.

A Changing Dream

Since my childhood, I have always wanted to become a civil engineer. In 2006, one year after I graduated high school, I started to study civil engineering. I was excited to see myself

facing my dream, but it had never been easy for me from the beginning because my father did not really like spending too much money for his kids. It was a big struggle and nobody could imagine what I have been through, except my older sister, my mother and I. At that time, I decided to look for a job. I heard some friends talking about their decision to apply to PNH (Police Nationale D'HAITI). That was the easiest job opening for the Haitian youth. I did not have any other choice than to follow their steps. Two years later, while I was in third year, I was selected and called to have my physical test done. I had to drop out and join the police force. I spent six years serving and protecting my community. I also tried so hard to continue my studies, but it was in vain, because I did not have enough time to go on.

In 2012, I met a beautiful girl from the USA. We fell in love with each other, and she finally brought me here on February 13, 2015. As a matter of fact, the USA is the greatest country that offers so many opportunities. However, I have to work so hard to feed my family and pay my bills. Adapting to the reality, I have decided to change my goals and ambitions. I am getting older and life's getting harder.

I began by the first step which is going to the AEC (Adult Education Center) to learn English. I am planning either to go on to college to study criminal justice or to go to school to learn how to drive trucks. I am also willing to learn a few other things that will be convenient in my life. I am such a hard worker. I will do my best to reach my goals and ambitions as expected. Once I have a chance to start doing something, only God can stop me because "In God I Trust!"

Markingley Constant is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

A Difficult First Year in the U.S.

I always wanted to leave Cuba in search of freedom and a better future for my son. Another very important reason was to be together again with my brother and his children. It had been ten long years since we had last seen them. My mom moved to the U.S. in 2012 and would have the opportunity to

live near her grandchildren. In August 2014, we finally arrived in the U.S. We were all very happy, especially my mom.

We were determined to work hard and to study English. We opened a small business called L.L.C Travel Advisor because my husband and I had enough previous experience in tourism. My husband also possessed a customer portfolio. We had to start a new life from scratch, but we were full of optimism.

Our son started school and his success filled us with joy. We had the unconditional support of his new school teachers. He was awarded a scholarship based on his merit.

Just when we were getting adjusted to the U.S., life became difficult and our happiness ended when my mom got sick and was diagnosed with ALS*. Everything changed in our lives. We saw how in one year her body and her quality of life worsened every day. I fell into a great depression watching everything happening around me, but I had to be strong so the situation would affect my son as little as possible.

Due to all of these events, I decided to change my ESOL course from two nights a week to the day class five times a week. It was therapy for me to be able to shut out the outside world for a short time each day while in class. In the midst of trials and vicissitudes I was lucky to fall into the hands of a wonderful person and great human beings, my teacher and very nice classmates. When my mom passed away in November 2015, all of them were supportive to help me move forward.

In our family we are overcoming our loss or rather learning to live without my mom because we know she is resting in peace. I continue to go to school and my English is improving daily.

I need to improve myself academically every day. Despite life's obstacles, I never forget that this country is full of opportunities and I have to go out looking for them.

*Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis

Sara Guevara is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Change of Life

I'm from Mexico and I never thought I would come to United States. Back home, I had a good job and a wonderful place to live. After I met my husband, who lived in the U. S for over twenty years, my life changed. I moved to Florida.

When I arrived here, I had many mixed feelings. I was excited to finally live together with my husband! However, I was also sad because I left my family, friends and job. They were all things that I loved so much. I was also afraid because I didn't know English or about the American culture. Therefore, I decided to go to school to learn English the first week I arrived.

On my first day of school, I was very scared because I didn't know anybody. When my teachers spoke to me, I didn't understand anything. I felt like a child in a kindergarten. Although now, I understand a little, I still need to learn more. I would like to express myself as well as I do in my native language.

People say this is the land of opportunity and I have a dream. Once I finish my English class, I intend to study for my GED because my goal is to work in a library. That is why I like to read, play with children, feel useful and help my community as I did in Mexico.

I think that if I ever want to achieve my goal, I need to focus on my studies more. I need to sleep less, read additional books, newspapers and other printed articles. Specifically, I need to speak more with other people without embarrassment or fear.

On occasion, I think it is impossible, but other times I consider that I can. I know it isn't easy, but I want to be and do what I like. After all, it is never too late to learn!

Maria Patricia Islas is a student of the English Class at Immokalee Technical Center. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee. She has been in U.S.A for eight months.

Anxiety is not a Joke

Anxiety is the single most challenging task I have ever been given. There has been so much joy taken from me by anxiety. The things I go through day-to-day I would not wish on any person, not even my worst enemy. My day consists of questions like “Will I die if I do that?” or “Am I dying right now?” I truly never know and I can tell you it is horrible.

I know so many people that treat anxiety like it is some kind of joke, when it's not. Anxiety affects so many people's lives. Honestly, if I could trade a leg or an arm for my anxiety, I absolutely would. That would be the easiest choice I've ever made.

Anxiety is not a joke, so please don't treat it like one.

Jesse Howell is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Jesse's instructors are Beth King and Renee Goodson.

Realization of Love

I remember laughing loudly one day when I was nine years old. We were running and playing in the rain on an afternoon in September 1990. That time was the last playing with my friends for the next four years because while we played, I felt a strong pain in my left leg. It didn't permit me to walk well. For the celebration of Guatemala Independence Day, we prepared a presentation about our Mayan culture and the conquest and colonization of the Spanish people. In this I had to represent the Mayan Prince, who fought against the settlers at that time. Independence Day came and I already was sick, but I was excited to be able to play the role that I had practiced. With difficulty, I walked holding a cane. I reached the stage and accomplished the presentation as it had been planned.

Next day my parents took me to the hospital. It was four hours to get there from our village. I stayed there for six months without positive results. The doctors referred me to a hospital in Guatemala City and it was fourteen hours to get there by bus. I had to travel lying down because I couldn't sit. They diagnosed me with femoral head necrosis and the

treatment was putting a plaster bandage on me from chest to ankle for one year. I couldn't sit nor move my left leg. After three months in the hospital, we came back home, but still had to travel to the hospital each month for medical checkups. I couldn't attend school, but the teacher visited me to help me in completing assignments. I loved school and tried to do a lot of schoolwork in bed, because I couldn't attend school for two years. However, my ratings were satisfactory.

The treatment was working and after one year the doctors removed the plaster bandage and I started therapies to walk again. This situation changed, but mainly my understanding about our vulnerability as humans in difficult situations and also the huge love and sacrifice of parents for their children because they give their lives to save their kids. During this time my three younger sisters suffered too, because my parents left them alone, while they took me to the hospital. Everything was hard for my family, mostly for economic reasons as they had to sell part of our little farm where we were growing our crops. Besides that, our country was dealing with an internal war which lasted until 1996.

Now my wife and I have two wonderful kids and we love them dearly. Our lives revolve around them. We are really happy enjoying everything that I couldn't when I was child, and we give thanks to our God for everything he allows us. Now I understand my parents' feelings 24 years ago.

Luis Montejo is a student at ACE Jupiter Community High School.

Growing Up Without My Mom

Hello. My name is Meiby Mora. I was born in Matamoros Tamaulipas, Mexico on May 29, 1989. My life was really hard from the moment I was born.

My mom gave me away to her aunt when I was only one year old. From that day forth, I never heard anything about her. I knew I had a mother, but didn't even know what she looked like. It was really difficult for me growing up without knowing who my parents were. When I was feeling sad, I

didn't know who to talk to or who to celebrate with when I was happy.

The years passed by quickly. One day when I was 12 years old, I decided to go to the store. When I arrived home, I saw a woman at the door. She saw me and started hugging me. My aunt told me that she was my mom. I was really disoriented. I didn't know how to act or what to think. I was happy to see her, but at the same time, I was angry. What kind of mother abandons her child?

She saw how I was responding. We started to get to know each other. She explained to me why she did it. I was in shock! I didn't know how to react. She told me everything. I felt conflicted; I both wanted to know everything and nothing at all. Then, she asked me if I wanted to visit her at her house because she had a surprise for me.

When I arrived, I opened the door and I saw two little kids. My mom told me that they were my brother and sister. When we met, it was really weird. They didn't know about me, but they accepted me into their family. I met everyone around me. It wasn't easy, but little by little I felt more comfortable.

For the first time in my life, I had a family and I had someone to call "Mom". Sadly, over the years, my relationship with my mom became bitter and we still have problems now. Through this difficult situation,

I learned the importance of parental support: to help you to become a good person. Even though I didn't grow up with that support, I learned that I control my own destiny. Now that I am a mother myself, I can tell you that, for my little boy, I will do everything. I never want him to experience what I did.

Meiby Mora is a student in ITECH COLLEGE in Immokalee, FL. She has been in ELL classes one semester with Ms. Katie Mominee. She looks forward to a better future for her and her little boy Jovani Mendoza.

Music in My Life

My name is Gabriel Solarte. I'm 20 years old and so far my

life has been quite interesting; as a kid, I was able to travel a lot. But at the cost of moving often, it made my social abilities awkward, to say the least. I was a shy, quiet, kid and it was really hard for me to make friends. I usually spent all my time learning new things through observation: looking at how people lived, how they behaved, and even how they spoke. I learned to be careful while speaking, but more importantly, to be cautious while listening, as people can mean different things than the words they say.

This listening ability allowed me to be talented at music, as I could analyze the different feelings that I experienced and translate them into sounds. I felt partly satisfied with myself, as I was creating something that only *I* could fully comprehend; it has always amazed me the way that people connect to music, the way they behaved while listening to “their song”, and how different songs affect the mood of those people. All these things made me realize that I wanted to be a musician, not only because of my talent with music, but also to connect and communicate with people in a way that I knew: through music, my talent, since speaking the words didn’t work.

Making people realize what the motif to a certain piece was—the message behind a sound pattern—or a simple melody that transformed into a giant symphony inspiring many different thoughts in the process; those were the happiest moments of my life. I felt that connecting with people was the thing I was looking for. That connection made me open myself, little by little, to different ideas, to different hobbies, even to people. It changed me into a more cheerful person and for the *first time* I was able to share all these things that I learned, even if they seemed unimportant, they meant a lot to me.

One of my teachers said “Music transcends art and becomes a philosophy.” Ever since I started playing music the truth behind those words became even more clear to me, since sounds are what defines us: our voice, our heartbeats, even the way we walk makes sounds. It’s our duty as musicians to make those sounds important, to make them have meaning, and that’s the greatest satisfaction I could ever have.

Music unites us; it makes us happier, sadder, lonelier, and angrier. Music makes us feel, it makes us think of distant lands, of adventures that are almost impossible. Music says the words that you and I cannot express. It makes us love and

fall in love, it makes us dream. There is no reason for us not to, no reason to shut our ears to the world. We'll be missing all these beautiful things music gives us. Music makes us live and that is awesome!

Gabriel Solarte is a student at the Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers.

Sports and the Outdoors

Ever since I was a kid I have always liked sports, especially baseball, basketball, and running. I also enjoyed the outdoors. Sports and being outdoors gave me such great experiences when I was growing up and still are important for me today.

I once played baseball in my town's league in Puerto Rico. My team ended up winning the championship in my town. I also got to play basketball in my town league. I was the team player to represent my hometown in games taking place outside of my home town.

Along with playing sports, I also was part of the Boy Scouts. I used to do many hikes in the woods and I also got to camp in the woods as well. As a pastime, I liked to fish in a river close to my house. I would always catch fish, but I would mostly catch shrimp instead.

To conclude, I want to tell you all how important sports and exercise are for me. Too many kids stay stuck in their homes wasting time. It makes me sad to see how they miss out on such great experiences as I had in my childhood.

Luis Miranda is a student St. Joseph's ESL Classes in Lakeland, Florida.

People, Gestures, Food, and Animals in America

When I came to America my English was very basic because my situation was not perfect but I don't complain about it. I had a home with my family and food to eat when I feel hungry. Now my situation has become more favorable and I can eat more (yes, I love food). In the beginning, I couldn't

pronounce in the right way the English words, but talking with people in malls and with old people in restaurants made me improve my English and I realized that wasn't only learning English, I was learning about life lessons from American people and how they see their own world: travels, relationships and how to buy things (a very important topic in the U.S). I laughed a lot with people who are really strange and it was funny because they use to do a lot of gestures when they are talking, and I did the same because I didn't know some words, the power of communication.

In this country I learned that all the people have cars, and you can buy guns in the same way you buy meat at the supermarket. I learned that the people can shoot a tree at the middle of the night and no one will notice that if they are far from "civilization". A

n interesting point of living here is the relationship with the nature, I have seen bunnies, turtles, and snakes and I feel so glad that I never found a gator in my neighborhood (I don't want to die being bitten by an animal). All these animals are special and the only thing that you have to do when you see one of those is keep them safe from the traffic and don't kill them; that's why I enjoy playing with frogs or that kind of small animals, taking care not to be bitten by them.

I learned that in the night you should close the door because the moisture will invade your house, and you will sweat like a pig if you don't activate the conditioned air. There are accidents; however, you should always see the good side of the life and try to do your best (except if you don't have food, if that is your case you can cry for a moment and after that, go work).

Welcome to America, and welcome to the most interesting and multicultural country that you can visit and live in.

Mac Fernandez is a student at West Area Adult School.

My Life in the USA

When I was in Haiti, I worked really hard at school but it was difficult for me. At the same time I knew that going to

school is a better choice. While I worked in Haiti, the salary couldn't help me to support my life. I always thought about coming to the USA to have a better life. Certainly my dad helped me to come to the USA. I felt so excited and so scared also. Excited to come to USA, to meet my dad, my brothers, and to see also this country many people talked about, and scared to travel by air plane for the first time as well. I knew everything would change.

My first day in the USA was so strange. Everywhere I looked, things were not the same as my country. The food tasted very different, I could not understand the language. Houses here are larger and taller than my country. All of the streets in the USA looked the same, I was afraid of getting lost. I felt homesick, missing my mom, sister, brothers and friends. It took time to feel comfortable, but every day I tried to be. I stayed at home, watched TV, went to church, made new friends and went to school. Now I have many friends. It wasn't easy at first because I didn't speak English, now I can speak and I try every day at school.

Now, I feel comfortable. I learn English every day and then I work. It's my desire to learn especially the laws about driving, community, and work. It's why I'm planning to try harder to learn more English and practice too. After that I'm going to study to be a nurse. I want GOD make my dreams come true. I feel USA my country now.

Magalie Pierre has been here for two years. She comes to learn English at ITECH. She's comfortable in English now. She has a great teacher.

Life Has Its Challenges

As a girl growing up in rural Northwest Florida in the 1960's, life was very hard. By the time I was six years old, my mother and father had separated. My father left my mother with seven children to raise on her own. Being next to the oldest, I had to help my mother raise my younger sisters and brothers. There were times when we had little or no food in the house. We had family members that helped my mother as much as they could. They couldn't help much because they had very little themselves.

I can remember moving all over the county because there were times when mother had no money to pay the rent. I had to share school days with my sister because we had to take turns staying home so mother could work. I remember as a child telling myself, "When I get grown, I will not allow myself or my children to have to live like this."

When my father left my mother, he also left us kids. There were times when I would happen to see him in a store. I would ask him for money and he would tell me he didn't have any. It wasn't that he didn't have any money. He just didn't want to give any of his money to me.

By the time I became a teenager, my father had become an alcoholic. I was a daddy's girl. I became a tomboy because I knew he wanted a son. My goal was to please my dad. In my early years, before my father left, Daddy made sure that I did my homework.

He would reward me for making passing grades. For every A my sister and I made, he would give us a dollar, and for every B, we would get fifty cents. For every F, we got a whipping. I used to pray that God would bring my family back together. It never happened.

I now realize I became very bitter towards my father. I blamed him for a lot of things that went wrong in my life. I felt that if he had been home raising us, a lot of things I went through wouldn't have had to happen. It wouldn't have been so hard.

I did go on to finish high school. However, I kept the promise I made to myself as a child. I went on to own and operate a children's daycare center for eight years. I now work as a substitute teacher in the local school district as I work towards a future career as an intermediate grade certified teacher.

Marilyn Bowman is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

I Never Give Up

Positive things create positive lives. No matter who you are or where you came from, the sky is the limit. What do you think? In 2004, I moved to the USA with a lot of dreams. I didn't know that the land of opportunity had a big box of surprises for me; different language, different cultures and different people from other countries. I had a hard time finding a job and when I found one they paid me the minimum wage, because I didn't speak English.

My life was in my hands and I wanted to be successful in life. After a year, I decided to look for help. I met a caring woman who taught me how to speak and write in English. She also explained to me how to manage my life in order to stay out of trouble. All in all she was a God send to me and she helped me get on the right track.

Through my trials and errors, I learned that "you only fail if you quit." So, I decided to go back to school. I started my English journey at the Adult Education Center, in ESOL level three. I am now studying for my GED test. Guess what? The lady who helped me during my most difficult time is my GED teacher. Ms. Sosa taught me my first English words. I will never forget her. In fact, Ms. Sosa is more than my teacher, she is a great friend.

Opinions don't define your reality. Remember, no matter who you are, or where you came from, the sky is the limit and positive thoughts create positive lives.

Hilario Arias is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Growing Up in Polk County

Life as a Child in Davenport, Florida

I was born in Tallahassee, Florida. At the age of two, my twin sister and I moved with our parents to a small town in Florida called Davenport. I attended Davenport Elementary School. We walked to school every day, and God knows it was more than two miles each way. Unfortunately, we didn't have a

bus to take us to school. By the time I was in the fifth grade, we were going to work after school and on the weekend.

Life in the Citrus Grove

Some of my siblings and I worked a lot in the citrus groves to help our parents out with bills. Also, our earnings helped with the down payment on our new home that our parents bought in Haines City, Florida. We worked on the weekends from early in the morning. It was so early that sometimes we had to use our father's car headlight to see. We also worked after school 'til it was dark.

Life as a Teenager in Davenport

My life as a teen in Polk County was hard. We had to work, go to school and go to church. This was a must; nothing ever came before those three obligations. We didn't have much, but we made things to play with out of trash we found on people's trash piles. We made a basketball goal out of a bicycle rim, a jump rope out of an old water hose and a bat from a broomstick. We played with these on the old red clay road in front of our house.

My Adult Life

By the time I was an adult my time working in the citrus groves was over. I finished high school but I didn't get a high school diploma because I was a half credit short. That's why I am in G.E.D. classes today – to finish my high school education and get that diploma.

Carolyn Carrington is a READ Lakeland, Inc. adult basic education student who joined in 2015. Her tutor is Beth Bodenstein who has tutored for READ Lakeland for over a year.

Love Story

My personal story is a love story. In 2001, I moved to another town in El Salvador to continue my high school studies. One day a friend introduced me to a young man who, by coincidence was the grandchild of the owner of the house where I rented a room. The young man started visiting his

grandma frequently, but he was actually looking for time his grandma wasn't home. He always wrote me poems of love and daily he brought me a rose to school that he secretly cut from his mom's garden. Our beautiful relationship only lasted 3 months, but I still kept the poems and roses between the pages of my books that conserved my love for him.

Two years later I finished my studies and came back home where I made the decision to go to U.S.A. Before I left I had the chance to see him, say good bye, and tell him I was going to move. He told me he was studying to be a priest. Upon hearing that it calmed my wishes to tell him that I still loved him.

After coming to U.S.A, I settled in Long Island, NY. I started a new life, but my love for him was still alive. I couldn't accept that something so beautiful, that was our love would finish suddenly. The time and distance would separate us completely now that I moved to U.S.A. So I thought.

I was so sad for two years, I wasn't happy. One Sunday morning, I received an unexpected call. SURPRISE! It was the man that I didn't forget! I was very excited hearing him tell me, that he wasn't a priest and he also lived in U.S.A, but in another state, Florida. Before finishing the call he promised me he will call again, to my surprise he called again that same afternoon! Since that, he called daily. We talked about what we feel, each other and the future. Because of work, we talked during the night, not counting the hours that the calls would last or if we even went to sleep on the phone. One day he promised to come for me, and be together forever in the dream of love we started as teenagers.

On October 21st, 2006, the moment that we talked so much about, came true. After being able to see him and touch him again I felt that our love had overcome obstacles that life had given us. We've been married nine years and every day we love each other more. As a result, the fruit of this love we've had the blessing of two beautiful children. And the dry flowers that were the memory of our young love are now fresh flowers in a vase.

Rosa Guevara is a student at the Parent Power Alliance.

Dancing in the Dark

One night she threw off her blanket and left her bed. She looked in the mirror and turned on the radio. She listened to the music, closed her eyes and sailed with the rhythms. She made it loud, and started dancing fluidly and unconsciously as if she were holding her destiny in her hands.

She believes she was born to be a dancer, but society around her will never accept her as a dancer.

She! No, it is not she. It is “Me”. But we, the eastern women, can’t talk about “I”; we can’t talk about the self. That is why we always hide behind “She’s” shadow.

The body is lustful. The body is seductive. The body is a source of sins. That is why I was always obliged to hide it, to imprison my body’s movements that could be mixed with the music. I wasn’t allowed to dance. I became a little bird who couldn’t move out of her cage. And now, even though an anonymous power opens the cage for me, I will never know how to fly.

One day my friend told me that I’m a coward. She became a dancer. She defeated all the rejections she met and became a dancer. But her chances to get married and live peacefully are very low, while my chances should be higher as I didn’t break the traditions. That is why I didn’t break them.

Marriage: the definition of our happiness, the definition of our lives. I mean us—the women. Marriage is our ultimate goal and all other goals are secondary. That is why I chose to be a doctor, not a “dancer”. But I confess, I didn’t achieve any real success in my profession. Dancing is what I can really be or do perfectly.

In the dark nights, I listen to Oum Kolthoum or Abd el Halim Hafez, old Arabic singers with a very traditional and hard Arabic rhythm. I listen to them for a long time and then when my body can’t stand staying still anymore, I throw off my covers, hold my night gown’s hem imagining myself sailing into the deep ocean as a mermaid. I dance freely with the Arabic music. I move my body. I move myself. I move my unconscious. I know that I don’t dance for seduction; I dance because this is the one thing I know how to do perfectly. I

dance for dance.

Hanan Dia is a talented writer from Lebanon. She is currently studying English at Jupiter ACE and is in Level 7 - Academic Skills. Her teacher is Susan Mitchell.

Never Give Up

I grew up in a home with my parents and five sisters. We were raised in a two bedroom wooden home, in the valley of the beautiful Island of Trinidad and Tobago. My father was a musician and my mother was a home – maker. Occasionally our aunts, uncles, cousins and, grandma would visit us. There were times my mom would accommodate relatives or friends to stay with us in their hard times.

We lived in a poor neighborhood. A family oriented people that strived with small businesses and continually stressed education to their children. It was as though “We were the switch that turned on the light bulb”. Which is ironic because in those days we were fortunate to have only one bulb, but many candles burning bright for a time, in hope of giving light to the shadows of life.

Money was limited, necessities were limited, food was limited and we had gone without from time to time; but we had an unlimited amount of love for each other. We also had faith to believe in the impossible and never give up!

There were people that were fortunate in our neighborhood to have huge houses, cars, even small businesses. Also, people who started building their own homes but suddenly encountered problems, the foundations of their homes were left only to disappear into the wild bushes and thorns. This must have been heartbreaking. These families had to relocate to live with relatives, as they would seldom visit the site of their broken dream. Other families in our neighborhood had solid concrete homes, secure roof, and tap water inside their homes. We lived in a wooden home with a tin roof that had holes, which invited the rain to dance in the bucket beneath it in the living room. However my mother would always prepare such great tasting food for us that, the leaking roof and rickety floors would not be able to dampen our spirit.

In our life there were great expectations and big disappointments but our faith and belief in the impossible would allow one of my sisters to become a Police Officer, another sister became a Postal Worker and myself would soon to become a Cosmetologist. My family has managed to push through the insecurities, darkness and leaks of life to take on being part of a strong community; we are now those switches to the light bulbs in every room we enter because we never gave up!

Joann Edwards is a student at Palm Beach Central Adult Education.

This is Me

My name is Jenny Monteagudo and I'm from Honduras. I am a student at Dunbar and I'm a mother of three children who I love with all my heart. My first son Oscar was born in 1990, two years later, in 1992, my first daughter Yasmina was born. My second daughter, Ashley, was born in 2000.

When I came to this country, I didn't have an opportunity to go to school because my children were totally dependent on me. Well, my children are all grown up and now it's my turn to set and reach my goals. In August 2015 I enrolled in English classes at Dunbar Community School. I want to improve my English, so that I can attend college. I understand this is a blessed country with many opportunities, which I didn't have before. Although, I haven't reached many of my goals, I am pursuing them now with the greatest admiration.

One of my main goals is to have my U.S. Citizenship by next year, so that I may do all of the things a citizen can do here in the States: becoming a resident, voting, works as a federal employee and understanding the laws and their changes. I would like to have the opportunity to achieve my goals and dreams. I am so happy because I am learning a lot of English. I want to be a good role model for my children, they are everything to me, and they give me strength every day. I'm a blessed mother with a great husband, and I'm very happy now.

Jenny Monteagudo is a student at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers, Florida. She is in ESOL Class Level 5 & 6. Her instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

My Lovely Grandsons

I consider myself a lucky grandmother because I have three grandsons from my daughters. They are Anthony, Jonathan and Ethan. My oldest daughter, Yesenia, is pregnant and the baby's name will be Luke.

On my husband's side, I have three grandsons and two granddaughters. They are Julio, Luis and Andrés. The girls are Michelle, the oldest, and Valentina. I met my husband's grandsons and I met Michelle too. I have not met Valentina because she lives in Chile. Her mother is moving to the USA as a permanent resident.

My youngest daughter had Anthony at a young age. Because he is my first grandson, he is special to me. Anthony is studying music. He plays the flute, guitar and piano and wants to be a music producer.

They lived with me for one year so I had time to spoil him. They moved to California for one year, and I missed Anthony very much. They came back to Miami, so I have time to spoil him again. Three years later, she had Jonathan, my second grandson. He likes drama and wants to become an actor in the future. The youngest grandson is Ethan. He is two years old. He is very smart. The new baby, Luke, is coming in January. We are nervous for the arrival.

When the boys were young, they make an "abuela" (grandmother) sandwich with hugs and I miss that. They got older so they don't want to do it anymore.

For all this, I consider myself a lucky grandmother and I thank God for my grandchildren.

Gisela Villar worked at Miami-Dade County Park and Recreation and learned a lot in the past four years from the Project LEAD program in Miami, Florida. Her tutor was Barbara Papademetriou.

Never Give Up

In my country, Iran, I was a teacher. I worked hard at three places. I loved my last job teaching at a high school. I also worked as a swim instructor and coached a hand ball team at Azod University.

Five years ago, my documents from the U.S. were approved and we had to move there. I was happy living in my country and was sad to leave. When I came to the U.S., I could not speak English and it was hard for me to find a job or to even go shopping. However, I made a decision for myself to study and study. I could not go to school because I had to take care of my son. We stayed at home and learned English together.

Now my English is getting better and both my son and I are going to school. I have a plan to go to college to become a dentist. My son has seen my example of working hard and he once told me, "I am proud of you, mom. You work hard and you study too." I always tell him it is never too late to learn. While we are living we should always keep learning and improving ourselves. I want to be an example to my son by showing him that a person is never too old to learn or should never stop improving their life.

Hamideh Karimzadeh is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

My Decision

Ten years ago, I planned to spend my life in my sweet little house in Mexico City. I still remember this day like it was just yesterday. That night, I went to pick up my son from school. It was around five in the afternoon. Two cars were speeding by so fast. Then all the sudden, shots started bursting. It was two men shooting at each other as they were driving by. "How can this be true?" I asked myself. "Do they not see children coming out school?!"

My husband and I then decided it would be best for everyone to live in the United States. We had visited ten years before and liked the United States. This was a better place to

live. We wanted to ward off our children from violence in our country.

At first, my children had the idea of someday returning home, but as our lives changed, we decided we could not return. It was difficult to adapt to this new life but my family and I took it step by step. In my country we lived in the city, in the US we had to live in the countryside with very few people around. I could not leave the house because I did not have a driver's license. I also could not speak English. I had to start all over again.

Years later, I was still missing my family in Mexico. I had the opportunity to return for visit. Although I enjoyed those moments, I imagined that things could go wrong. I was scared. When I tried to return to my new life in the United States, I lost my freedom. I was detained by immigration for two months. It was a very difficult experience, but I found many good things that I learned from this experience. At the detention center, I met many people suffering. I decided to forget about my problems and dedicated my time and effort to do something for them. It was a gratifying experience.

I felt like I had been in college because I learned about the value of my family, friends, and possessions. These things I should not take for granted. God helped me. One day, when I least expect, they gave me another chance. I was released. Now, I have the opportunity to live in this country without fear. I have a work permit, a driver's license, and the joy of being able to study this wonderful language.

Maria Elena Montiel is a student at Immokalee Technical College. (ITECH). She is a wife, mother and she wants to continue her studies to have a career.

Surprise

It was in 2001, I was sitting in church all by myself on a pew on Sunday. After thirty minutes I felt someone sit next to me but my eyes were closed. When I opened my eyes, I saw this beautiful lady. My heart began to beat very fast. I could not wait until church is over because I was anxious to speak to this attractive person. Today, this woman is my wife. I cannot

forget this special day in my life.

Rod Marc is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Slowly but Surely

My first entry in the U.S.A. was on January 17, 2014. I came here for a holiday. It was wonderful. I explored several sites. I had fun. Then, in October 2015, my family and I decided to settle down in this country. This totally changed my life from being a Customer Service Representative in Haiti to a housekeeper in hotels in the United States. I used to converse a lot at my workplace but now I hardly say anything while cleaning the rooms.

Though I am not happy with my job, I know it is just temporary. I will persevere and continue with my ESOL course to break my language barrier for high position in the future. I am confident that I will eventually reach my goals because of the support I always get from my teacher. She is also my mentor and my example. She encourages and guides me to achieve my dreams and objectives.

Rachelle Desroches is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Just Quincy and Me

I grew up in a family of four kids. I am the youngest of the four. My brother passed away as a child. I also lost my mother and father when I was a child. Both of my sisters are still alive. I grew up in a small town in Florida. At the age of twelve, I was sexually molested by a stranger.

I graduated from high school with a special diploma. After high school I was in and out of foster care homes because both of my parents had died. In 1989 I was old enough to get into my own place and began living by myself. While living on my own, I got employment at a convalescent center where I worked in housekeeping for three years.

In 2009 I met the man who would become my son's father. We began dating, and in January 2010 I gave birth to my beautiful son. He is now five years old. His father is not in the picture. I am a single mother. I do not receive any child support. I am on disability, but I struggle to pay my own bills. It's just me and my son. We live by ourselves, but we make a living the best way we can.

I attend adult day school where I am trying to obtain my GED® diploma. The diploma that I have is a "special diploma." I would like to get a regular high school diploma because I want to become a CNA or even a nurse. That is where I am at this moment in time. I am working on achieving my GED® diploma.

Penny Sherrod is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

Everyday Life

As I sit here on my bunk talking with fellow inmates, I am reminded of how truly lucky I am. I still have my mom and dad; I am very thankful for that.

Because there are women here in prison that lost their mothers and fathers just before they got here. Some did not lose them until they got here.

There are others who have lost their very own children, due to an accident at home, or they were killed by their parents or someone came into their home and murdered them.

Yet we never sit back and think of the ones that are in confinement, psyched out, or even sleeping right beside us, above us, below us, in another dorm or quad. All we think about is ourselves and why? Why? Because at that moment or that very second we are the only one that matters. Hell, many of us stay the same as time goes by. We do not want to see another person's hurt or pain.

We want to believe that they don't know what it's like to be in our shoes; that our life is so much harder than everyone else's. Think about it...and ask yourself, "Did you wake up

this morning?” “Can you give hugs and kisses to the ones you love?” Really just think about it, because if you said, “Yes” to any of those questions, I dare you to now think about the people who did not wake up, the ones that can’t hug or kiss the ones that they love and why? Why? Because we’ve made that one little mistake that cost us our lives. The one mistake that hurt others, or even that mistake that caused us to be locked away in our minds, or in a cell surrounded by women or men we don’t even know.

So, take the time and tell your children, your family, your parents, your spouse, or your partner how much you love them EVERYDAY! Go out of your way to make them feel special and loved, for you never know what may happen from now until then. Leave your hurt and listen to others for a few minutes, you might be surprised that they have a lot in common with your own.

Michelle Anderson is currently incarcerated at the Gadsden Correctional facility.

Enjoying Every Moment

My name is Angel Orellana. I am from Ecuador. I manage human and material resources in a Naval Base in my country. I am being sent to work for two years in the United States on a special mission. My current job is to control the illegal entry of drugs into the United States.

I am impressed by the highly organized government, and the people are hardworking here. Besides work, I seize the opportunity to travel to different places: Niagara Falls, museums, the Big Apple and Central Park in New York; theme parks, Universal Studios, and Islands of Adventure in Orlando; and Miami Beach.

My family and I are enjoying our stay in Key West. My two children will be completing high school in this country. My wife and I are learning English at the Adult and Career Education Center. We will return to Ecuador in 2017. Certainly, I am grateful and thankful for the wonderful time here.

Angel Orellana is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult

and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Personal Story

My name is Francieli Silva de Oliveira. I'm from Brazil and I'm an agronomy student. My graduation will be at the end of this year. For now, I'm doing an agricultural internship in the United States of America. I chose to do this internship because I want to have new experiences as well as to improve myself. The opportunity to learn new things in a new country is something unique and America is an amazing place to do this.

America is a big agriculture producer. So for my career as an agronomist, the chance to see all the technologies and how the growers work in this country in this area is something that will contribute to my professional career so much. Besides this opportunity, to do an exchange is something good to improve myself in so many aspects.

I can meet other people, live in a different culture, learn another language, and have a lot of new adventures and experiences. I want to acquire as much knowledge as I can to improve myself, because knowledge and experiences are the keys to obtaining a good professional placement.

In my future I hope I can have a good job and I know this experience that I'm living right now will be worth it.

Francieli Oliveira is a student at ACE Jupiter Community High School.

My Family

There are four members in my small, but beautiful family. First, there is my husband William. We have been together for twelve long years. Also there are two kids in my life. Each one is very special to me. First is my son William, who is nine years old and my little daughter, Ashley who is four.

My husband is very special to me because we work together as a team and we have a special connection with each other. We help and motivate each other to always do our best. Especially in those moments when you feel down, it is good to know

that you have a strong person next to you to help you carry on the heavy load of life. We are not just husband and wife; we are the better half of each other.

Now, my son William is in 3rd grade and his favorite class is math. He also likes to play video games and go swimming. He is full of energy and always tries his best at everything he does. This little guy always amazes me. I remember when he started school. He did not know the sound of the alphabet or how to read words like most of the kids in his class. But two weeks after school started he learned the sounds and he was reading.

I remember him wanting to achieve his goals, and for me that was a life lesson to never give up without trying. My son is very special to me, for so many reasons. He is my first born. He also gives me the courage and motivation to keep working on my goals in life.

My little girl, Ashley, is four years old. She is getting ready to go to head-start and she is very excited about it. She likes to watch the movie Frozen and pretend that she is a princess. But not just a princess, she likes to pretend she is a princess with super powers.

My little princess is one that knows karate and has magical powers. I guess you can say that my little princess is one of a kind. Also she likes to play tea party and most of the time she is the doctor in the house. This little girl has been an inspiration to me, because she is a very pleasant little girl.

In conclusion, each member of my family is special in their own way. My husband is my partner in life and the one person that I can count on for anything. Like they say “for good times and bad times,” we always have each other, no matter what. My son and my daughter are the best things that ever happened to me.

They give me courage and inspiration to keep pursuing my goals in life. My kids also gave me the opportunity to become a mother. At first, it was scary and something new for me. But once I held them in my arms, I felt proud and blessed to have been given the chance of a life time: to be a mother.

Francisca Espinoza is from Nicaragua. She is a student in

ESOL Level 6 at the Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Family

My name is Marie W. M. I was born and grew up in Haiti. My parents worked very hard to keep our family together. Now I'm married and have my own family. After being married with my children in Haiti, ten years later I came to America with my husband, two sons, and two daughters. I have two children in college, and two children at home. This is why I am able to attend classes at the School District of Lee County. I am in an ESOL class at Dunbar Community School to improve my reading, writing, listening and English skills. I am so proud that I am able to attend school. This is a dream my parents always had for me. Attending school has made my life more exciting. When I speak now, I am so happy. This is a new beginning for me and my life is much better.

Marie W. Moise is from Haiti. She is a student in ESOL Level 5/6 at the Dunbar Community School. Her teacher is Mrs. Savage.

My Personal Story

I was born in a Mexican state called Guerrero. I'm the second child. I lived with my parents up to the age of 5, but they separated. Afterward my mother got married with an elementary school teacher and he took us to live in the state of Mexico. My new life started, I experienced a new environment on my step-fathers ranch until I was old enough to be on my own.

In my new life, at the ranch, was my favorite place where I lived. Living on the ranch made me feel free, and at night I was able to see the stars and moon. I was never able to see many stars in Mexico City and I never heard crickets chirp and frogs croak at night. Having my own plants and animals was the best thing about in a ranch. I was able to ride horses, take care of sheep and have fresh milk and eggs from the cows and chickens. My family grew many fruits and vegetables such as tomatoes, watermelons, bananas, corn and papayas. There was an abundance of fruits, vegetables, meats, milk and eggs;

and my family sold them at the local market. I learned to be independent at a young age by selling the food products with my younger brother.

After the ranch was sold, I went to live by myself in Mexico City. It was there that I met my husband. I worked at a corner store and my husband always passed by the store and bought many candies and sodas. At that time, I worked in a company that bought coffee at the ranches. After that, we moved to the state of Jalapa, and got a piece of land from my father-in-law. During that time, I had my child, so we built a house.

When my child was eight months, my husband and my brother came to the United States to make a new life for us. My husband was lucky and found many nice people to help him to get a stable job and became a citizen. I took care of my child by myself and at the same time, I studied for accounting, administrative assistance, and computer technician.

I remember my past now that I'm in Florida with my husband and my son. From living in a ranch to living independently with my child. I still have my objectives like studying and finishing my GED and getting into a college. I want to become better in this country, in each phase of my life.

Sonia Castrejon is student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

About My Life

My name is Rosa Fortunato, I'm from Venezuela. I came to the United State in 1994 when I was 29 years old. I have three sisters all of them living out of this country. Lina and Gianna are living in Rome, Italy with my Mother and Franca lives in Margarita, Venezuela with her husband and my nephew, Cristian.

After my divorce in 2001, my life did a complete change because I became a single parent in a new country. My son was eight months and it was not easy to raise a child without a father figure and with a low income salary. I only spoke a little English. I made a decision to leave the USA and moved to Italy. That decision wasn't easy but I did not have the right

paperwork to work in this country and I did not want to stay illegally. After almost seven years we come back and I had a second chance to be in this country legal, because I could stay under the U visa.

I live with my son Michael he is 15 years old and attending 9th grade at G-Star School of the Arts. He is very happy to be a part of the Number One High School for Film in the World. In this school 97% of the students go to College and have a lot of opportunities to get a better job.

I also started my class in Adult Education and Literacy because since I moved here I never had an opportunity to go to school to learn English well. After so many years I realized that it is very important to write perfect English, even if I can speak and understand. I do make mistakes because my grammar is poor. My goals for this year are to improve my English skills to feel comfortable and secure at Palm Beach State College where I'm planning to get my Business Management Degree.

I want to be a better person in this country and help another parent and motivate them to learn English. You will miss opportunities when you don't know the language and what is going on around you. Anyone has the right to make their dreams come true in this beautiful country, because it unlocks doors. Doors open when you have good education skills, especially for single parents that need to work more than one job to bring the food to the table and pay the bills.

I hope my own experience encourages another parent and the new young generation to never give up and keep going to get better educational skills. You can do anything that that you love to do and want to do in your life. Remember to focus on the wonderful future for yourself and your families.

Rosa Fortunato is a student at Family Impact Greenacres. Her teacher is Sherelle Fields.

I Won't Complain

My name is Roberto Gabriel. I am from Guatemala. I migrated to United States when I was 19 years old. So far, I cannot complain the life I am living right now. I have learned to

be independent whether I could afford it or not. It was difficult at the beginning. Upon leaving for United States, I promised my parents that I would finance them to build a house so that they could live in it comfortably. I am very happy that I could take care of them from this distance.

I work very hard in this country. I have two jobs and I work every day. I ride my bike everywhere. On rainy days, I would find a way to get to work. Besides work, I make time to learn English at the Adult and Career Education Center. This class has helped me a lot. I can communicate better with people who do not speak my native language. Some people ask me what my goal is. I tell them that I want to save money and to keep on studying.

Roberto Gabriel is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

The Day My Life Changed...

People all over the world have heard the word “cancer”... and in my case it was every day. Cancer... it sickens, hurts and it kills. I lived in an overly judgmental, rich kid, small town in Florida. My mother was 41, happily married to my father and highly cherished. Taken by the devil of cancer and never lived to see the seven wonders.

I was a 14-year-old girl at the end of my 8th grade year, or as I like to call it, the last four months of my life that I had with my rainbow’s end. Right from the beginning, my mother was diagnosed with stage four cancer: breast cancer, ovarian cancer and lung cancer. Days, weeks and months went by, and so did she. It finally set in that my mother was going to die. I thought to myself, “She is my mother...She’s supposed to be here forever.” I never thought twice that my mother would die, so much love and strength she had.

The hospitals did everything they could. I don’t hold anything against the doctors or nurses. The hospice did everything they could to make her feel no pain. My mother’s last wishes were to be pain-free, comfortable, and have no shortness of breath. The sound of the machines keeping her alive killed me inside. The memory of the sound of her breathing while a ma-

chine pumped the liquid out of her lungs is buried so deep in my mind that it sickens me. If you have ever lived with anyone with cancer, you know how traumatizing it is for any age. That was also the last day I ever saw my mother.

Months later, at the age of 22, my brother shot his girlfriend (23) of 2 years, 2 months and 16 days, four times from behind. He then shot himself in the head and committed suicide. My brother was an amazing guy, loved by everyone, and would always lend a hand to a friend. Love is extreme and sometimes it overcomes a person and the hurt gets so wrapped around the mind that people will do crazy things.

His girlfriend was physically and mentally damaged, yet, to this day, she holds her head high and puts a smile on for her daughter who was only four years old when this happened. She is now eight years old. Life for me has changed... I deal with the pain and memory of all of this every day. You have to think that the people you love are in a better place and you'll reunite with them all one day. I am now almost 18 years old, getting my GED and moving my life forward. Things happen for a reason, so make the best out of what you have.

RIP, Mother, 1968-2011

RIP, Brother, 1990-2012

Savannah-Lynn Sanchez is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructors are Beth King and Renee Goodson.

I Am Blessed

My name is Brigida Moreno. I was born in Nicaragua. I came to the United States in 1995 illegally. That means I passed the U.S. border without formal papers. Coming to the United States was a big and hard decision in my life because I had to leave behind not only my three-year-old son, but also my parent's house, my entire family, my friends, my roots, and my customs. In other words I gave my old life away with high hope for a new one.

During my journey to reach the U.S. border, I traveled

through three countries: Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico. My trip lasted for one month. I walked, hopped on the bus, took the train and many times I did not eat or sleep. I knew that my life was in danger especially when I crossed the river on a floating device. All along the way I told myself I had two choices: to die and leave my son hungry or try to come to the United States to get a job and survive.

In 1996 I met my daughter's father and we got married in 1997. Everything went well. I have a job. I became a U.S. citizen in 2006. The three year old son I left in Nicaragua is with me. He is currently 24 years old. He is also a U.S. citizen. My teenage daughter was born in this country.

Now I am a happy person. I love my job, my kids, and all the things around me. I really appreciate everything because my life is not easy and I was able to overcome many challenges. I value the opportunity this country gave me. Presently, I am trying to learn English while having to work at two jobs. My goal is to be a good citizen, obey the law, and teach my children these same values.

From the bottom of my heart I want to say with pride, "Thank you to the United States of America for giving me an opportunity to have a better life for me and my family."

Bridiga Moreno is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

Our Love Story

My love, I still remember that day when I met you. It was a freezing morning; my whole body was shaking with anxiety to meet you. My hands were sweating, and I felt butterflies in my stomach. I did not know how your face looked or what would be your first word.

Suddenly, you showed up and my heart was smitten with love for you. You took me in your arms and stole a kiss. My heart skipped a beat, as the sweetness of your lips was impregnated in my mouth. Since that moment we have always walked together.

Against all odds, in spite of setbacks along the road, we

continue to be next to each other, overcoming obstacles of life to always be together. I enjoy your soft kisses, your tender touch, and your beautiful smile every time. I enjoy waking up next to you every day and I feel calm because I know I have you. You are my unconditional love. Every moment I spend with you is like touching the sky. My love for you is endless.

I love you...

Anareli Trejo attends at Immokalee Technical College (ITECH). Her teacher is Ms. Katie. She decided to keep going to school to be a better person in her life.

Ideas That Guided My Life

Over the years I realized that experiences can be so significant in the life of a person that they can change your life for better or worse. I'll tell you how some of those experiences gave me ideas that guided my life.

When I was in seventh grade my grades went down, and the next year I was moved to a lower group. My dad called and asked me if I liked the new group and I said, "Yes."

He answered and said, "But you are not in the right group."

That got me thinking, and I decided to give the best effort that I could to raise my grades. This gave me self-esteem and I realized that I could be moved back to my original group the next year.

In math class a young teacher came into the room and she did not know my name. I decided to put special effort in the class to get good grades. When I got one hundred percent on the first test the teacher never forgot my name. I discovered that I had ability in mathematics and I liked it. Until then I did not know.

With the passage of time I became a math teacher. I discovered that education is a vocation to which every teacher is called. Being in front of a group gives you the privilege to contribute to the life of every student that you have. We have to be positive role models whom they can imitate.

In life you must set goals that drive you every day and we try to give the best effort to achieve them. Success is failure backwards. But in life there are no shortcuts; every day you have to do the job. It will cost work and sacrifice but at the end the fruit of your efforts will be in your life.

We must learn to discern right from wrong, grain from straw. It is a decision that you need to do every day because temptation is “talking” to us every moment.

We cannot get carried away by negative influences of others because at the end you pay yourself, and no friends will be with you. The only ones who are with you on your via crucis are your family members who truly love you. God must be in our life. He is the source of grace that we need to achieve happiness and to overcome obstacles and the difficulties we face in life.

Roberto A. Ortiz is a retired math teacher from Puerto Rico. He is a student in Susan Mitchell's Adult ESOL class at Jupiter Community High School.

Looking for a Better Future

In Mexico before I was married I lived with my family, I loved being with them. I married at the age of 19. Then my husband and I came here to the U.S.A. because he wanted a better life for us. We have been here for twenty one years.

The month when we came here we started to work. I worked only 5 years, all the time in the field. This was physically difficult for me because I had never worked in the fields before. When I picked tomatoes the other people in front of me taking the better tomatoes and left me with the little ones. The bucket was heavy to carry. I also picked other vegetables like squash, peppers and cucumbers.

I started to go to school when my second child was born. The first reason that I started English class was because I did not understand when my son's teacher sent me papers and I couldn't talk to her. I like to understand and talk to people because when I understand others I can express myself better.

Also English can help me to communicate at medical appointments. Another goal is when I can speak and understand English, I would like to go the GED class. When I learn English I can get a better job. Then I can go to study to be a nurse. I know it's not easy but it is also not impossible. Success is achieved little by little.

These experiences helped my family and me to have a better life. I think so it is important for me to improve and is worth every effort. I know that I will feel very happy when I succeed in reaching my goals.

E.G.M. is a student at Immokalee Technical College. She enjoys her family very much. Her teacher is Katie Mominnee.

Going Through Change

My name is David Dominique Metellus. I am from Haiti. Back in the days when I was a teacher in my home country, I rode my motorcycle to work.

In the U.S., I cannot do it because people mainly drive cars and I do not have a car. To make matter worse, I do not know how to drive. It is very difficult for me to go from one place to another.

Next, during my first month in the U.S., I hardly communicated with the people because English is the main language. I know some but not very well. Finally, my diploma is not equivalent to the education standard in the U.S. I feel like I have to return to school like a baby.

It was a terrible feeling at first, but I do not feel that way anymore. I am attending an English class presently. I can speak English with the students. In fact there are many students whose skill level is lower than mine.

The class gives me motivation and support. It ensures me that I will have a successful future.

David Dominique is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Short Story

Hi, my name is Evaristo Baten Tum. I am from Huehuetenango, Guatemala. I came to the United States when nine years ago. When I arrived here, in Florida, I started working; I had a goal; I wanted is to buy a piece of land and my own house. I soon realized that I can do more than that because there are many opportunities this country offer us. I also realized that the education is very import in this country. Education is the key to success; it can open many doors, to things I want, not matter what it is. With education, I can go much further.

I am attending an adult community school and pursuing my goals and dreams. Now, my main goal is to get my GED diploma. Though it seems this won't be as easy as I thought, I know I have to study more and more, read books whenever I can to improve my skills. Reading is a journey I am enjoying very much!

Evaristo Baten Tum is a student at Dunbar Community School.

My Story, My Son

In January 2007, my first son, Jonathan, was born in Cuba. My husband, Jorgito, and I were very happy. We had a beautiful baby. When he was ten months old, his eyes began to turn and his whole body was vibrating. We did not know or understand what was happening. I started to cry and mourn "Ay, ay, Jorgito! My child! Ah my God! Save my son!"

My husband carried him in his arms and we ran to the polyclinic, the clinic, for almost two kilometers because we had no bicycle or car. The doctor and the nurse gave oxygen to our baby and told us that he was convulsing. After observing him for three days he was released to us.

However, from that frightening experience, I was alert to his every reaction and kept watch over his movements. We didn't have a baby monitor, so we put a plastic sheet in the cradle so I could hear his every move. Jonathan convulsed every two or three months. Every time I cried and prayed

because I thought he could die or have something very serious. I screamed for my neighbors to come and help me on those difficult days.

The neurologist said that after five years with medication and vitamin B6, Jonathon's problems could disappear. We were still worried and wanted more tests. In Santiago de Cuba only important people get tested, so Jonathon was not treated for epilepsy before coming to the United States. Upon our arrival to Lakeland, Florida on July 31, 2015, he has had several tests which have shown untreated epileptic damage on his right side.

Now we have more information, like books to know reactions and treatment before he has an episode of seizures. Jonathon has had some episodes, but his younger brother, David, and his friend help us a lot and pray for him. As a family, we have not assimilated to the full state or our oldest son, but we trust that God is working to make him healthy.

Emilia Almaquer is a student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

My Personal Story

The day my life changed forever, was in November 2011, when I received a phone call saying my younger sister had been taken to the hospital. When I arrived at the hospital, I was told my sister had one of the worst tumors anyone can have. I honestly felt like I was on a rollercoaster ride at that very moment and I actually feel the same way now. But the ride has slowed down some; thanks to my "HEAVENLY FATHER" above. The tumor caused great damage to her body and in 4 short months, though it seemed like a lifetime, my sister was gone!

So instead of just having 4 kids of my own, I became a mother of 7 more children! My kids are now 23, 17, 11, and 8, respectively. I also have my "spoiled" 3 year-old grand-daughter. My younger sister had 7 kids; 2 were adults when she passed away; but I became the mother of the younger 5 which are now 18 year-old twins, 15 year-old twins and a 10 year-old boy; I specify "boy", because he's the only male in the house. I

know what someone would say, poor little boy! I think, “poor me” with so many girls with their girl needs and their attitudes; they can drive anyone crazy!

Truthfully, I rather be crazy than to live without them. So here I am, a grandmother at the age 37, now 41 and about to be a grandmother again; my 17 year-old decided to “lose her mind” and sneak a boy in my house, and now, she is pregnant. Raising all these kids is the hardest thing I’ve ever had to do in my life! Paying bill or buying things such as toilet paper, bread, milk, is a struggle.

When the doctors in the hospital first discovered my sister’s the tumor, they told us it was terminal; she was put on life-support. So I made the choice to have her come home from the hospital, if she started breathing on her own again. She was on life-support 2 weeks. A week after that, on 12-21-2011, my sister came home. I took care of her 24 hours a day until the day she died. She could do nothing for herself. She couldn’t chew so I chewed her food for her and feed it to her. I bathed her. I cleaned her. I simply just loved her.

After my sister’s death, and now a mother of 11 children, I thought about the fact that I never graduated from high school. My oldest daughter and I decided to get our GED together. Now, we are both enrolled in an adult school, working on getting our high school diploma. One of the oldest twins has been invited to run track in Australia representing the USA team in July 2016. Things are getting for us; my children make me proud every day. We will have more good times than bad ones as long as we have one another, we’ll make it!

Toshiba Taylor is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers.

You Not Like English, Go to D.R

My name is Lucyleidi E. Gomez, I came to the U.S. for first time in December 31, 2009. I waited for this opportunity for seventeen years before this great day arrived. Finally I left my country D.R. with JFK, NY airport in mind. My happiness and joy overflowed. I lived with my cousin, her husband, son and daughter in Craryville, NY for three months. My cousin’s hus-

band (my self-adopted father) told me every day that I needed to learn English if I wanted to stay in America, earn a good job, a car, and a house or even to become a citizen. Then and only then will I have a good life in this country with all the opportunities it has to offer.

In America the main language is English; every afternoon, my adopted father would try to teach me English for the three months. One time I told him that I did not like English, it was too hard for me. It was my first time trying to learn different from my original language. His response was Oh! So you don't like English, then go back to Dominican Republic, because you need English to get ahead in America.

At this time I was really feeling down and mad at him for speaking to me like that, I even thought that he was a real nasty and bad person. Two months later after that episode I went back to D.R. I stayed home for two months. All this time I was thinking that D.R. is not for me anymore, so I came back to America. This time I arrived in Maryland, it was 2010. The minute I arrived in Maryland I started to look up schools to learn English. I found the Sanz School. I stayed there for eight months. They were the hardest eight months of my life. School was Monday through Friday from 8:00 AM to 2:00 PM., and I worked at Taco Bell (my first job in the United States of America). My hours were from 8:00PM to 5:30AM, so literally I did not sleep for these eight months.

But today, thanks to my adopted father for pushing me to learn English, I'm now a U.S. citizen, and I've had some very good jobs. In 2013, I moved to Palm Beach County, Florida. I believe it was the best decision of my life, because I've decided to continue my education to get my GED, and later to go on to Florida Atlantic University to study Criminal Justice, and it was here in West Palm Beach that I met the LOVE of my life.

Finally I say thanks to my adopted father; because I can now say to him I have many, many goals in my life now, and I still want to make more goals, because the "winner takes it all."

Thanks daddy (Angel Rubet).

Lucyleidi Gomez is a student at Palm Beach Central High School.

She

As the night turns into day, I find myself walking deep in the woods with the weight of sorrow from my aching heart. I gaze through tear filled eyes at the streaks of purples and pinks reaching across the sky. I need to mend. So I let the tears fall freely. I stopped, suddenly feeling that I am not alone. She is there. In the darkness and in the light. Does she know just how my lover broke my heart? I reached out wanting her to take my hand, "Please, rescue me!" I cried out! "Help ease my agony!" There is no reply. Just the lonely sound of my echo.

A warm chill moves on my neck, up to my ear, and then through my hair. Shivers run down my spine. I turn and look, but nothing. No one. For a moment it seems I've forgotten my pain. As if my heart was never broken, I quickly sink back into reality. As the earth presses into my feet I continue allowing myself to be lost within my sorrow. "Oh!" How my heart just aches so. Wait, I feel her close again, all around me.

A sensation moves over me as the thick, damp fog slowly envelops my legs and caresses my entire body. I started weeping thinking of my lovers touch. "Oh," how I will long to be touched again. Will I ever be able to love again with such a wounded heart? Or will I just forever be destined to be alone? With all of this running through my mind, I pause and lean into a tree. She's here again, I know it, I and I feel so at ease. Is it because of her I wonder? I did ask for her help. So why be surprised when she gives it?...Right?....

Feeling the smoothness of the bark against my skin, I lean further into the tree, feeling such an embrace with arms of passion reaching around me. My heart is no longer aching. I'm so confused. Is this a daydream, or a "Higher Power" that be? The leaves rustled and the wind blew.

With the wind came an unfamiliar scents, one of passionate fire, intimacy and a deep love for all that is around me . I had to follow. I had to see where it led me. As I journeyed further it became clear to me, that she had been right here helping and teaching me to become connected and be one with life, earth and eternity. There is no burning inside anymore. Just her beauty. She was healing me, mending me, and showing me how to love again; by gracing me the warmth of the fog and holding me in the arms of the trees. She is "Mother Earth"

and she is a powerful “SHE”!

Kristina Sawiki-Cruise is currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correction Facility, Quincy, FL.

A Smaller World Through Language

Out of the six official languages of the United Nations, the most used universally, is English. Even if the most frequently used by human beings is Chinese (Mandarin), on account of the huge population of China, it is mostly limited to their own population.

Another language that is very popular is Spanish. Not really on account of the population of Spain, for there are nearly as many Spanish speakers in the U.S.A. as in Spain itself. Following the discovery of America by Christopher Columbus, who was under the command of the Queen of Spain, Mexico, South America and Central America were populated by the Spanish. These territories retained the Spanish language.

There is not such a big difference between the number of English and Spanish speakers, but the important factor is that English is recognized as the world’s most influential language, mostly because of the influence of the U.S.A.

The United States of America having the #1 economy in the world may partially explain that popularity. Most of the big companies founded in the U.S.A. are also in most industrial countries of the world.

Is there a country where you go that doesn’t offer products like Coke, Kellogg’s Corn Flakes, Ford and GM products?

The film industry, with its American actors being so popular throughout the world, exposes a level of life that makes every foreigner dream of America.

It’s like fashion even for the French and Spanish speaking youngsters. When ‘texting’, they use a lot of English words and expressions. I go to Spain every summer and I see many young boys and girls that spend a month in England, the U.S.A. or Canada in an English speaking family to learn the language.

When we arrive in a European airport and go to a rent-a-

car office, even if I try to deal in Spanish (Madrid), they keep on answering in English. A friend of mine owns a company in Spain and he goes to

Germany for business. When registering at hotel, even if he speaks fluent German, they answer him in English.

These are different examples that show the popularity and the importance of the English language throughout the world

Guy Williams is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Original Poetry

Life

Sometimes you have ups, sometimes you have downs.

The downs are always the time that keep you with a frown.

The clock's always ticking so just play your part.

Eventually happiness will be in your heart.

Trials and tribulations will always come through.

But God embedded desire and power to help you get through.

Never look at your imperfections as a curse.

Just remember someone, somewhere has it worse.

Joshua Clark is a student at the D.A.W.N. Program in Jacksonville.

For You, My Mom

For you that gave me life,

For you who always stand there for me,

For you who is always there for me,

You are my soul, you are my heart.

You are my flame, my happiness,

The one that gave me life, you are part of me.

She is my blood, she is my eyes

Going Places

She is my angel, the most precious
It's just what I have more expensive in the world!
My reason of being, my reason for living.
Near you I will be until the last second.
You are what I love, you are my life.

She is my shadow, she is my way.
She is my gold, she is my voice.
She is my luck, she is my breath.
My existence and more than everything.
It's just what I have more expensive in the world!
You are my whole life, I will love you indefinitely.

I LOVE YOU MOM!

Marie Solene is from Haiti. She studies English at Immokalee Technical College, and her teacher is Ms. Leyva.

Who am I?

I am me!!

A son of Jennifer and Donnell Mitchell,
I am a father who cherishes and adores his children.
I am a poet in my own mind, in love with my own rhymes.
I'm a saint and a sinner, a real friend not a pretender.
I'm a student, I'm a teacher, I'm a listener, I'm a preacher.

I am more than words define, before and after my time.

I am a king, a human being that can accomplish many things.

I am loyal, I am respectful, I am honest, sometimes
neglectful.

I am me!

I am black, I am fair, I am here, I am there,
the only son my parents had which only means I am rare.

I am kind, I am cool, I am one that came from two.

I am truth, I am real, I am someone you can feel.

I am happy, I am sad, I am grateful, I am mad.

I am worthy, I am calm, I am nervous, I am a man with a
purpose.

I am ashamed, I am shy, I look at my reflection and ask,

Who am I?

I am delusional, I am confused, I am life, I am true.

I am love, I am hate, I am a blessing, I am faith.

I am low, I am high, still trying to figure out...

Who am I?

*Donnie Mitchell is a student at the D.A.W.N. Program in
Jacksonville.*

How to Fly

When we refuse to act in compliance

Going Places

we are silenced

which causes anger, rage, and violence.

In a society where there is no life, the only rebellion left is to live.

It doesn't really matter

life's a disaster.

We die and wake up after looking through new eyes.

This really makes me wonder if there is any wrong or right
or if the fight is even worth the fight

But take flight

Take pride in the things you do because your legacy will never die

and neither will you.

You'll be kept alive in the hearts and minds
of those who also wish to fly.

I want to, do you?

Katelyn Cruz is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus.

A Mother's Love

As I lay my head down tonight, I thank God above,

For allowing me to see the strength in a

Mother's Love.

For a Mother's love does not waiver, no matter the cost.
A Mother's love will reach out, and find her child that is lost.
Nothing reaches Heaven quicker than a Mother's tender
prayer,
For when nobody else will accept you, she is still standing
there.
There may not be approval in those loving eyes,
You can always believe, she sees right through your lies,
But when you have reached the end, and
Cannot fathom what you've done; when you
Have decided to face yourself, and this
Time, you simply refuse to run.
You come head to head with your
Demons, and let God take your hand.
Only then will your thoughts clear
And you begin to understand.
While you hold hands with the devil,
Trying to make the pain go away,
Your mother fell on her knees every night to pray.
Praying for deliverance for her baby girl.
And now I can see she is the most
Important person in the world.
For as I put myself in the hands of harm,
My Mother stood there praying for me
With open arms.

Going Places

Arms to hug away the hurt when I

Finally found my way.

And as I write this to you Mom, I thank you for every day.

Every day that you prayed for me, with your broken heart

And now, it is my turn to pray; we can overcome the past and
make a brand new start!

I Love you Mom

*Michelle Brady who is currently incarcerated at Gadsden
Correction Facility, Quincy, FL.*

Floating

Floating, lonely, lost, hoping we both make it to the outside.

Hoping we last to the outside, it's been so long since I've really
been touched.

Only contact I ever get is when I'm cuffed and moved around a
little bit.

Floating, lonely, lost, hoping I make it out there sane.

Hoping when its time I'll be ready to have my life again.

You get used to routines after a while.

But this here, damn I feel like a child.

Floating, lonely, lost sometimes I wonder why I am here.

Hoping I keep myself now that I found Jessica again.

Sometimes when this gets to be too much,

I try to dream and when I wake at morning's peak.

I'm told all I did last night was weep.

Floating, lonely, lost, all I want is for my someone to come
and rescue me from down here.

Someone to come and rescue me from down here, keep me,
love me, hold me dear.

My heart is turning cold I'm becoming bitter and only needed
to be still,
preoccupied, and real.

Jessica Fain is a student at the D.A.W.N. Program in Jacksonville.

Our Love Is...

Our love is the wildest,

Our love is undoubtable,

Our love is amazing,

Our love is undeniable.

Because we make it work

We try not to treat this love

Like a day job or a vacation.

Our love is magnificent

There is nothing more I would want.

We display unconditional love

Each time we speak

Our love is one.
Our Love is so beautiful
As butterflies surround us,
We feel how powerful our love is
As we watch the lilies, roses, and daisies
Bloom in the spring.
We don't have to say we love each other
Because our affection tells all.
Our love is speechless,
Our love is unforgettable,
Our love is a dead silence,
Our love they can't duplicate,
Nor imitate.
Our Love is spectacular,
Our Love is incredible,
Our Love is phenomenal,
Our love is filled with sunshine.
Our Love Is...
With the love we have
We hold each other's heart in our hands.
Vowed to never let them go
To keep our love strong.
We keep our love spontaneous
And in mystery from others.

Our Love Is...

Our love is crazy,

Our love is insane,

Our love is psychotic,

Our love is in a strait jacket,

Held down in a padded room.

Our Love is...

Like a love song

Our bodies move smoothly to the beat.

Slowly moving to the melodies

Holding each other closely as the music plays.

Enjoying the R&B move through us.

Our love is monumental

Our love is stuck

In one place vowed to never move

What can we do or say but...

We love each other.

Our Love Is...

Gift from God

While the angels play the harps and horns,

Given to us with hearts and roses,

In a basket full of divine chocolate

Sung by a loving spirit.

Our Love Is...

Like two cups of coffee
Dark, with six sugars
Sitting in the nicest cups,
Placed perfectly in front of us.
Our love is...
A blooming of beautiful flowers
During the spring time.
Watching a coral charms blooming
In the morning
As we watch the sunrise.
You completely smother me in your love.
It makes me excited to know
That you love me so much
When no other woman makes me feel
Like a king.
I completely smother you in my love
I make you feel like no other man
Has made you feel:
Like a queen.
We made the plan to keep it that way forever
We are royalty.
Our Love Is...
Not defined by one word
Our love is defined by us

And only us.
We make us happy,
We know how strong we are together.
Our Love is bigger than
Cupid's heart.
Our Love Is...
Royalty
Our Love Is...
A Gift
Our Love Is...

*Aaron Frierson is a student in Sandra Caruso's GED class at
the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.*

Secret Place

I had a lamp it was
all he gave.
It flicked and turned
as I watched it burn.
He gave a message to me
One day
Tell me to go wonder away.
I obeyed those words but
felt confused
Why or Who has taken me here?

I looked around
that green field,
Flowers growing everywhere
With music in my ear.
I heard a voice say:
You will find the answers
One day, my dear,
but for now
I have taken
you to
my secret
place...

*Renae Hyppie is currently incarcerated at Gadsden
Correctional Facility, Quincy, FL.*

Don't Doubt Me

I'm an angel, fallen from heaven.
My appearance is a gift to the world.
I'm unique.
I'm one of a kind.
Life is but a span, road is a long.
Don't doubt me.

I'm not a girl, who you once knew.

My life will not swim with the tide.
It won't be easy.
It has to change.
Search for my goal, tomorrow will be better.
Don't doubt me.

I believe I can fly, proud to fly up high.
My dreams are waiting to be started.
Have belief in me.
Have belief in my ability.
Reach for my peak, everything will be great.
Don't doubt me!

Jie Piang is a student at ACE Jupiter Community High School.

Broken Pictures

A girl that was lost in her mind
Everyone left her behind
Her heart broke every time
She had to say goodbye
No one could see through her mask
Love just took her to task
Life is too short to ask
And too long to wonder why

Going Places

You don't know what war does to you

Until you are left standing bare

You're forced to take sides

Emotions collide

It's too much to repair

Broken pictures fill a dark room

Broken dreams haunt the gloom

The light inside goes out too soon

A girl was suddenly found

When those she lost turned around

Lourdes Velazquez is a student at Miami Dade College Inter-American Campus.

Love Lost and Found

Love lost

No love found

But still only one sound

With no one around

The tears I've cried only

Fall down as I look inside

Only to find love was alive

All along, inside of me

Love lost

Love found.

Jessica Davis is a mother of three. She is a student in Tallahassee who sends her thanks to Mr. Wright and the staff of NPI.

Reading

Reading

Difficult, embarrassed

Stopping, slumping, succeeding

How far can I go?

It is the way of life.

Jesus Holland attends EMPOWERED, a Reading Literacy small group ministry of Grace Family Church, Temple Terrace Campus. His tutors are Gladys Miranda & Elizabeth Brooks.

Time for Change

From being sprayed with water hoses,
just believing we have a right to speak our mind,
back then, in those days, was a terrible time.
He spoke up, he believed, and most of all, MLK fought till the
very end,
nothing could stop him from believing –
Not being attacked by dogs, beaten by policemen and being
thrown in jail.
MLK was so remarkable no one could compare,
he dreamed that a lot would change,

and life on earth would be a better place.

Whites and blacks united, for the same rights,

This inspiring leader would not give up, no, not without a
fight.

No violence, just speaking on what he believed,
people coming together as one, is all he wanted to see.

Millions marched, such a touching day, he thought,
not knowing the consequences that this day would have
brought.

He was shot down and killed,

all for keeping faith,

and for what?

Nothing from then has changed.

Violence still occurs today.

Such innocent lives have been taken away,

The dream has been forgotten along the years,

How sad, it fills my heart with tears.

We need to remember the “Dream”

it’s not as hard to keep the peace as it may seem.

We as people have to realize that violence with violence does
not solve an issue,

when trouble stirs, keep his words with you.

We need to live his “Dream”

Where “unarmed truth and unconditional love will have the
final word”

Only then will “Freedom ring” “Freedom ring”

*Navajia Horne is a student in Sandra Caruso’s class at the
Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach*

Time

Time waits on no man!

Time is on our side!

The time is at hand!

The time is now!

I have no time!

Gimme time!

In the mean time!

Time is wasting!

Time is not guaranteed!

Time is in the making!

I have no time!

You have run out of time!

Is it time yet?

The time is on the wall!

It’s about time!

We’re all doing time!

What time is it?

It’s about time!

Time for peace!

Time for love!

It's my time!

Who's time?

God's time!

Time to pray!

Time to go!

Time is slow!

Where did time go?

Diane McMillian is currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correctional Facility, Quincy, FL.

Build Me

Build me Jesus, Make me right

I woke up this morning, after I died last night

I left the old me lying in the dark;

So I could awaken with you in my heart.

I'm lucky to have hired you to first remove all the dirt;

Lord I know I'm a lot of hard work.

You are a craftsman like no other that is a fact;

You fix what is broken, stained, rusted, and cracked.

My soul my Lord is in desperate need of repair;

My days and nights have been filled with despair.

It is only a carpenter like you that can do the work needed;

So I cried and lifted my arms up and pleaded.

For you are my judge, with you I can't fail;
You scream this to me with the sting of every nail.
So build me O' Lord, make me brand new;
Thank you sweet God
I love you!

Nicole Shaw is a student at the D.A.W.N Program in Jacksonville, FL. Her teacher is Shelletta Baker.

You Don't Know

You don't know my life: I've been through some pain,
I've been waiting for things to change.
I've been hurt and I've been used,
I've been stepped on, betrayed and abused.
Life is what you make it only if you choose,
Leave your past behind, don't let it dictate you.
All those tears that I cried,
It's been a struggle all my life.
I won't run and I won't hide,
Whatever I'm faced with I have the strength
inside.
Even when the devil tried to take my life,
I still have a lot of praise inside.
I know it sounds strange, but I wouldn't
change a thing,

Because my sunshine came after the rain.

No matter what, I will rejoice and be

Glad,

The more suffering means more

anointing I have.

I will make it to the top,

I'll give it all I got,

I promise I won't stop.

You don't know my life.

Jahreisha Satchell is currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correction Facility, Quincy, FL.

The New Me

The days pass

The nights I can't rest

I think of life's past

And how it came to be

To my regrets I now see

My thoughts haunt me

You should have won

But now it's done

You can't keep me

My future looks bright

I finally got it right

This is the woman I should be

Here's to the new me

For the world to see.

Samantha Bailey is a mom of four children who overcame a meth addiction.

Look At Me in Five Years

Soaring across the clouds,

Flying high,

Dreams turned into reality,

Without any doubts,

I've listened, I've learned,

From great and powerful minds,

Flying so high, like a bird in the sky.

Who am I?

From whence I came?

I have evolved,

There is no shame.

My new smile brightens the steps I now take,

Yes! I did it. I played no game.

Tailored suits,

Diverse cultures, all in the air,

New horizons,

Going Places

Oh! So unique from that old tale,
Focused, confident, for the rest of my life,
Flying so high, like a bird in the sky.

It wasn't easy,
My own revolution,
An answer to a problem,
Positive solutions,
Happy feelings, delightful thoughts,
A window of change, its closest to my heart.
Hold your head up,
Wave that old me goodbye,
I made it, I made it!

*Sophia Spense is a student at the Adult Education Center in
West Palm Beach.*

It's Hard to Imagine

It's hard to imagine, a place
Where you're so carefree.

It's hard to imagine, a place
Where the lions lie, down with the sheep.

If I could touch heaven once.
His face I would seek.
I would lay myself down
right before His feet.
I can only imagine, Angelic voices
ringing through the sky.
To see a love one I lost
standing by His side.

It's hard to imagine, majestic
maintains or infants soul soaring.

The Shepherd laid down His life
just to save his sheep.

It's hard to imagine
The Truth.

*Brenda Dudley-Newson is currently incarcerated at Gadsden
Correctional Facility, Quincy, FL.*

An Encounter that Changed My Life

Life Lesson

“Don’t touch me, don’t touch me,” She whispered softly, more to herself than to be heard. She rocks back and forth while chugging a bottle of Bacardi Rum. The deafening thunder of fireworks is exploding outside. None of her family notices she isn’t enjoying New Years with them. As the ball drops and the clock hits zero, she makes a silent vow to never be as vulnerable as she was that night. With tears streaming down her cheeks, she chugs the rest of the bottle and falls into a blissful haze as she drifts to sleep. Dreaming of whatever an eleven year old is supposed to dream of.

Her life passed in a blur the next few years. Parties and drinking consumed every second of her days. It was no concern that it was 2 o’clock in the afternoon or that she was fourteen years old. As she sparked up another blunt, a lady she’d only met once before gave her the very thing that would save her life: a journal. This isn’t a fairytale, so I won’t lead you astray by saying she quit smoking weed and drinking. However, the Journal did provide her the escape she desperately craved. She began writing short stories about romance, poems about destruction, and journal entries about her daily life.

Life became promising soon after. She graduated high school and even attended college. She put on a facade that everyone believed. All the way down to the ring on her finger. Little did they know she screwed half of the small town she called home. She thought she had it all together until the night her world shifted on its axis. There it was those two blue lines that spoke volumes. Nineteen years old and welcoming an innocent child into the world. She would be a single mom, because the father didn’t want either of them. She wrote everyday for the next year; she wrote about the Joys of Motherhood in a blue baby book for her son, Hadley. He is the spark of light in her dark hour of need. Nothing can compare to the love she feels for her baby boy.

A young man named Joey waltzed into her life like he knew that what she was missing was him. He was a miracle,

always just out of her grasp. She was his trophy, his sex slave, his Queen. She never saw it coming, the night her worst fears were confirmed. He was a wolf in sheep's clothing.

She shifts in bed and winces as pain shoots through her ribs. Her head is throbbing to a steady beat and she is having difficulty opening her eyes. The bed clips behind her and finally allows her to roll over and face him. She reaches out and touches Hadley. Her precious five month old baby boy. She soon realizes there is a problem; Hadley is taking shallow breaths. A surge of adrenaline shoots through her and she leaps out of bed, wincing, but pushing through her pain. She rushes Hadley to the emergency room. Almost an hour later, 7:12am to be exact, she is sitting in the hospital waiting room. Reality sets in. He's gone! No more cooing, no more babbling, no more middle of the night parties. Her little ray of light was snuffed out. Her world shattered in a blink of an eye.

A week later she thought it couldn't, wouldn't get worse. Five hours before Hadley's funeral, she was arrested for the death of her beautiful baby. God has a sense of humor; she found out just days before that she was expecting a baby boy. A brother for the boy who will never grow old.

She was sentenced to twelve years in prison; that was four years ago. The life jacket that was supposed to save her life still manages to keep her afloat. There are many moments where the memories threaten to drown her; she turns to writing to get air. She writes about life and the cards she has been dealt. She writes fantasies to create a world she can escape to. Above all else, she writes about survival. She is a survivor. She is me.

I AM A SURVIVOR!

Brittany Arnett is currently incarcerated at Gadsden Correction Facility, Quincy, FL.

Maria's Prayer

One morning, during my meditation, I was thinking of my limitations to being a better provider. All the jobs I was interested in required me to write. I knew that if I wanted to change careers, I would need to work on my weaknesses. I

started to pray, “Please, God, help me to find someone to help me write better. I want to be a better writer, so I can go back to school. Amen.”

I grabbed a notebook and pen and dashed off to the library. With an open mind, I was determined to find some books to teach me how to improve my writing. I was hoping to find an available computer to start my search. There was one. What luck?!

As I started to work, I was surprised by an enthusiastic lady calling my name.

“Maria, Maria?”

“Yes, I am Maria.”

The kind lady said, “I am Lynda and I am your tutor. Remember we spoke on the phone yesterday? I have some books for you.”

I was in shock. I had not spoken to the nice lady the day before. I did not know what to say. Again she said, “I am going to be your tutor. You are Maria Rosado?”

I said “No”, and began to explain. Just a moment ago, I prayed for a tutor to help me with my writing.

“When you called my name I thought it was a miracle.”

Ms. Lynda was as surprised as I was when she heard the story. She called the director, who said she would find a tutor for me.

A week passed and another. My heart was sinking. That very afternoon, the director called to tell me she was looking for a tutor for me that she had not forgotten me.

Two more weeks passed and then I got a call from my assigned tutor, Ms. Barbara Carey. We met at the library and I have been blessed with her wisdom ever since.

Maria Espino is an ESL student from Mexico with the READ Lakeland program in Lakeland, Florida. She has been with READ Lakeland since October 2014. Her tutor is Barbara Carey and she has been tutoring Maria since October 2014.

Nothing Happens by Chance!

In our life, decisions are inevitable. All decisions that we make give us results, and we need to be prepared for that. More than emotion, reason must be the way to choose the best option to follow. We need to keep in mind that whatever happens will be our responsibility.

I have made many decisions in my life and the most important one was to move to the U.S. with my family and leave our country, Brazil, because of a great professional opportunity for my husband.

Identifying what were the pros and cons to make the decision was very hard. In the beginning, we thought about our family and living far away from the people who are very important in our life! To see our children growing up away from their relatives and friends is a very sad feeling. That decision would cause us to give up our then stable life. However, after many days thinking about it, and talking to our family and friends, we decided for the most important thing: our children's future.

To live in the U.S. is a dream for many people, like a gift. The opportunity for my children is singular. For us, this place is an example of dignity and respect, where the justice prevails and everything could happen if you do your part. We know that nothing is perfect, but the wrongs here are too small compared to many other benefits. In the beginning, problems with adaptation are normal for everybody, anywhere. Day after day, we learn a bit more, and overcome the difficulties. Time helps us do that.

We just moved, and we know that we will be happy here, if we decide to. Our children enjoy their school, my husband is doing great at his job, and I am working hard to improve my English skills.

In Portuguese, we have a single word that expresses a very strong feeling of being far away from somebody, something, or somewhere. That word is "*saudade*." In English, the definition is a feeling of longing, melancholy, or nostalgia that is supposedly characteristic of the Brazilian temperament. We feel it every time we think about our family, friends, foods, places, etc. in Brazil.

Usually I like to say that every decision involves changes, and every change gives us at a certain point, a great opportunity to be better, even if we suffer momentarily. Everything that happens to us, be it good or bad, is to make us stronger and to give us more maturity to learn more and make right decisions in the future. Nothing happens by chance!

Thelma Freire is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The True Love

Many people are married and many people are in love, but I think that I have the best love in my life. It is a love that gives me peace, happiness and it makes me feel as if it is always a sunny day. My love doesn't have eyes, but he has something that makes mine shine. He doesn't have a mouth, but he teaches me the best words in the world. My true love doesn't have a body, but he gives me all things that make me happy.

This love teaches me that in life, there are times for everything: there is time for my family, my friends and there is time for me.

I think that the true love for each person is to do what makes him really happy all the time. For example, when I discovered medicine, I really knew what love was.

Alejandra Guarin is from Colombia. She has a great interest in medicine, and she is currently studying English at Jupiter Community High School (ACE). Susan Mitchell is her Level 6 ESOL teacher.

An Encounter that Changed My Life

This encounter that I am going to describe changed my life forever. My life was changed in so many ways.

By the time I was born, most of my family had already left the country. Therefore, I grew up without knowing many

uncles, beautiful cousins and people close to my family whom I had never seen in person before. I knew all these people from pictures. Now that I live in the United States every time I see one of them, I ask who they are because I forget who they are.

The special encounter was my arrival to this country. All these people that I had never seen nor spoken to before were waiting for me, my mother, my younger sister and stepfather. They were all there at the airport just waiting for us.

The feeling of having loved ones waiting for us was beyond what words can describe. There they were, all of them waiting for all of us, receiving us with open arms. We received big, strong hugs that said more than any words could ever explain. There were tears everywhere, tears of joy. People were recording our arrival, that special moment, others were in shock. We felt all types of emotions.

This was the encounter that has changed my life forever. A new beginning for myself and my family. I will never forget that very special moment.

Roberto De León, from Cuba, student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus, School of Continuing Education and Professional Development, ESOL Program ELCATE C, Prof. Rebeca Prado, M.Ed, she is a really nice teacher.

When My Family Moved To the U.S

The day that changed my life was the day my husband said to me, that we were moving to the United States of America. I was raised and have lived in Mexico my whole life. My teenage years were full of playing sports like volleyball, basketball and track. I also attended school and completed all grades there, which involved having incredible friends.

I lived in a small town called Manuel Doblado, Guanaajuato. In walking distance I could go grocery shopping and to the gym. No cars were needed. My life felt easy and relaxed. Nothing compared to the United States of America.

When I got to the United States of America, I was alone, no family members or friends, only my husband. I had no idea

where any stores or clinics were and couldn't talk or understand any English. I felt depressed and anxious because of this dramatic change.

My life started to get comfortable, when my daughter started going to school. I started getting familiar with people and places, when I had to go to her school meetings I met a lady named Mrs. Rosa Sanchez, she showed me how to make clinic appointments, order in a restaurant and even showed me how to get to and from different locations.

I have lived in the United States of America for twelve years now and I feel good for that drastic change in my life, because I have a better life now. I have raised all four of my children here in the U.S. Now, I can go anywhere alone and not be afraid because now I know where everything is. However, I don't imagine my life in Mexico any more, this encounter was for the best.

Rosa Manriquez is from Mexico. She is a student in ESOL Level 5 & 6 at Dunbar Community School in Fort Myers Florida. Her Instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

An Unforgettable Day

January 12, 2010 started as a beautiful day for me. I usually wake up at 6:30 am to start my activities. Going to the gym was my daily routine which I still do now.

That day, after I came back from the gym, I prepared to go see a friend at the hospital who had eye surgery. On my way home, I stopped by another friend's house. That friend of mine had a small shop, and we stayed there for about 45 minutes. After that, we went home. When we got home we played video games. After we were done, I went to the playground to play with kids, which I loved to do. We spent over three hours playing with the kids.

Around 4:45 PM we heard a big noise. By the time we stepped outside, the house started to shake with everything falling to the street. I grabbed the baby and started to run, but there was nowhere to hide because the whole environment was affected by the earthquake.

Houses, buildings, and businesses were knocked flat down. Thousands of people lost their lives in front of me, but I could do nothing to help at this time.

I was breaking down as I saw kids, babies, adults, and elderly dead in the street. That tragedy left us with a wind in our hearts that we will never forget.

I never wish to experience any of that again or see any other country going through an earthquake such as that.

It was crazy after the earthquake. Everyone was trying to find their families. I thank God because I found all my family safe and some of my friends as well.

Jemby Oriental a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Forced American Dream

I used to be a professional tennis player and traveled a lot within the United States, Europe and South America. I lived in Florida for about three months when I was twelve.

You will now wonder why I chose "Forced American Dream" as my title. Well, at the end of this short story you tell me if I was wrong or right with that decision.

I come from Ecuador, South America, where the word corruption is on every morning news. Before you to get involved with my story, you should know that there is a big difference between the US laws and the "laws" of my country. In Ecuador, politicians create laws to benefit themselves and their closest ones.

Almost one year ago when I was getting back from a vacation with my whole family, my mom, a 75 year old woman, was detained at my city's airport by the police. She was accused of something she didn't do. She had a car accident almost 5 years ago, in which the daughter of a bad cop and a polemic judge, hit her when they hit a red light. Although the police statement clearly identified that this lady was guilty, they tried to send

my mom to jail, destroying the majority of the documents from the case.

A couple of months later and many trials, lawyers and politicians, I had to leave my country in a blink of an eye. My kids were almost kidnapped, so I had to decide if we were going to stay under the witness protection program or find a new life away from home. Would you stay if some bad cops and corrupt judges were against you?

I sold our car, locked my apartment, shut down my own business, and realized that there was the beginning of my Forced American Dream.

From now on, I had to start a new life, meet new people and try to make every day the best for my family. My wife, an amazing woman, has been the one who helped me build the necessary environment to move on, now that my goals and ambitions have changed.

You might think that being away from all that you love would be a very complicated task to achieve, and you would be right. It's difficult trying to adapt to another culture, different flavors and daily routines, but when it comes to your family's safety nothing matters.

I am now sure that God sent me this "Forced American Dream" for a good reason, to protect my family and to contribute with this wonderful nation who opened their arms to us, who saved us from been killed.

Americans should be very proud of themselves and their leaders. Proud of this wonderful country full of freedom, where everyone has rights and their constitution protects each one of them.

Fabio Intriago is a student at ACE Jupiter Community High School.

An Encounter that Changed My Life

An encountered that change my life was when I gained full custody of my great nephew when he was five months old and

did not know his condition, all I knew was the abbreviation, TBI. Being 21 then, this abbreviation, TBI, was very puzzling to me. I was providing therapy for my great nephew him and had no understanding of his condition. I faced many difficulties trying to piece together a puzzle in my mind about his brain condition and how it affects him. With no knowledge besides knowing how to love him, I went back to school to learn more about taking care of someone with TBI and about nursing. I received my Certified Nursing Assistance (C.N.A.), license to learn more about my great nephew's condition, so I can care for him the correct way and as the court determined.

Being pressure to jump into a field I never dreamt of being in, really changed me into the caring, loving, and patient person I am today. Understanding the severity of his condition, my routine was changing constantly; it was tough waking up during all hours of the night helping him cope with his pain and his condition. I tried hard not to give up on him because he was just as innocent as "they" claimed his parents to be for causing his brain damage. So as I faced the jury and the judge to "paint this picture" as his nurse and caregiver, even though, I was still learning. I became a mother that day. It was in me; I fought hard not to mess up and lose my great nephew to the courts.

As a mom everything came so natural, having him in my life. Working in the nursing field as a C.N.A, it didn't feel like a battle; I learned and grew with him going back and forth to doctors and specialists which help increased my knowledge to help him become stronger, to this day. He has weakness to the left side of his body and right side brain damage, and is he deaf in his left ear.

I placed my challenges and fears aside to help my great nephew (my son), to keep our family together and be strong. I feel like if I can go through an experience like this I can face anything! He gave me hope when I didn't think I had it. He helped me became educated and deal with the doctors, and the family members who turned their back on me and would pray I would give up and give my son back to the courts and the state. But in my heart I felt something different and became more determined every day to the role of being a mother, caregiver, and nurse; I gave it my all and learned as we both grew together, and realized that no matter how hard it was for me, I would be there for him. I knew if I gave up, I would be hurting

us both. I created a goal, to learn “my son’s” abilities, to help him gain his strength and understand his weaknesses.

Today, I am pursuing my GED diploma, to become a physical therapist and learn how the brain affects the growth of a human being. I want more knowledge because we both can benefit from it.

Deserai Broomfield is a student at Dunbar Community School in Ft. Myers, FL.

A Bridge from Miami to Cuba

My name is Henry López and I am from Cuba. I will share how an encounter has changed my life forever, since I arrived in the United States of America. My story began when I was a kid, maybe thirteen years old. I had a lot of dreams I really wanted to achieve, but they were still dreams until I grew up and arrived to the United States of America, where I would be able to see them come true.

Coming to the United States of America was my biggest dream, but I never knew what my dream looked like. I thought North America was full of huge buildings, exciting places, drunken people everywhere and of course I believed the U.S was at war with every country because this was what I saw everyday on TV’s and American movies. What I never saw, because it was never shown on TV, was the very nice things and the extremely respectful people.

I remember the day when I left my country. I remember the last moments at the airport when the tears were rolling down from my mother’s eyes and the big heartfelt hugs. From that day, I knew I had a big responsibility upon my shoulders. I had to achieve my dreams, my goals. I had the responsibility to make a bridge between the United States and Cuba.

I arrived to Miami on July 25th, 2015 and the weather was just like Cuba’s. However, the places, the cars everywhere, the tall buildings and the people speaking English were like everything I had seen on TV. That was amazing.

I have to say that I really love the United States and I

have no regrets of the difficult decision I made. Currently I am working and I am able to send money to my mom and have her feel proud of the person I am.

Henry López is from Cuba. He is a student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus, School of Continuing Education and Professional Development, in the ESOL Program ELCATE C. His teacher is Prof. Rebeca Prado, M.Ed

My Favorite Day

Tet, Vietnamese New Year

In the past, VietNam used the Chinese calendar, based on the moon cycle rather than the sun cycle like in Western countries. So the first day of the lunar Vietnamese year is not the same as in the Western calendar. But this first day of the New Year, called “Tet”, was the most important celebration for Vietnamese people in the year, and nowadays they still celebrate it longer than other festivals in the year: seven days, and in the past, the entire first month of the New Year!

Tet is the day of ancestor’s commemoration. The day before Tet, people make a ceremony which has this meaning: to invite deceased ancestors to come back to celebrate the New Year with their family. In nearly every Vietnamese home, there is an ancestor altar, a high table with flowers, and photos of ancestors on it, where all ceremonies about ancestors take place. The ritual for each one is the same.

Foods, special dishes, drinks, liquor and candles are put on the ancestor altar. Then each member of the family, beginning with the oldest, burns sticks of incense and meditates a few seconds, trying to communicate with ancestors (wishes, invitations), then bows low before putting the sticks of incense in a bowl. When all sticks of incense finish burning, they take foods from the ancestor altar to tables, and there begins the feast for the whole ‘big family’.

On the first day of the New Year, people wake up very early. They wear new clothes, the most beautiful they have. Girls and women wear their most valuable jewels. Then the very first thing they have to do is to make a ceremony at the ancestor altar to invite ancestors to enjoy with them the New Year. They bring presents to their grandparents, then their parents, and wish them good health, long life, prosperity, good luck, and a good year. The parents give back “lixi”, lucky money for the whole New Year.

They cook special traditional dishes that they enjoy with their family and their friends. Tet is also the moment of the year people visit relatives, and play special games with them

like Chinese chess. It is also the period of the year where children have 'free time' where they can do things they normally are not allowed to do, for example, playing games all day long with their friends.

This tradition of celebration of the New Year remains a very important event for Vietnamese people, even though it lasts fewer days than before because of modern life, it remains an important family get-together.

Dang Huynh-Hoa is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Sunday Tradition

Sunday is my favorite day. When I was ten years old, my grandfather always took me to go fishing. Then we went to eat ice cream. After he died, I told myself that Sunday will be my special day. Now on Sundays, I get my children up early. Then, my husband and I take them to go fishing, ride our bikes, and finally got them ice cream. I am very happy on Sundays.

Maelys is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult and Career Education Center in Key West, Florida.

My Favorite Days are Saturday and Thanksgiving Day

I have two favorite days. The first is Saturday. This day is very special and different from the other days of the week for me. It is a day dedicated to God and family. Every Saturday we get dressed up in our nicest clothes and go to church. We pray, sing, have biblical classes (adults and children), and hear the preaching finally.

Some Saturdays we have lunch for the whole congregation in the afternoon. We visit the sick and elderly who are in nursing homes and return back to the church. I like this service because it's different from the morning service. It's more interactive and fun. We do biblical games, games for children, and pray that the new week will begin. At night, my

family gets together and decides on a place where we will go for dinner.

My church gives food banks for the community every Wednesday. That's how we help the community. I love my church, but I love Saturday too, because we forget about work, school and daily routines. It's a day we all have in communion with God.

My second day is Thanksgiving Day, it's also my favorite day and special too because it's a day for giving thanks to God. My family meets together for a special dinner and gives thanks to God for all the things given to us during the year. This is why thanksgiving is another one of my favorite days.

Marlene Vazquez is a student at Dunbar Community school in Fort Myers, Florida. She is in ESOL class level 5 & 6. Her instructor is Mrs. Marilyn P. Savage.

Life after Death

Nowadays for me, one of the most important old traditions from my country is the "Day of the Dead". Also this day is one of the most popular celebrations in Mexico. This is a moment when people remember dead family members, and it's celebrated on the November 1st and 2nd. The first day is known as "Day of the Little Angels". On this day, Mexicans celebrate babies and children. On the second day they celebrate the rest of the deceased.

What is the meaning of Day of the Dead? First I want to say that is not a sad day. For most Mexicans, the Day of the Dead is a good day for connecting between life and death, so we are not sad at all. For example, in my case I feel that my mom is always in contact with me, but on this day I remember her a lot more.

In Mexico, the people visit cemeteries and stay all day praying for their loved ones. Also they bring music and *mariachis*, because this holiday is like a party. Members of the family gather around the altar to pray and tell stories of their loved ones, and they bring a lot of flowers and food.

Relatives build special altars in their homes called “ofrendas” or offerings. That includes special orange flowers called “cempasuchil”, candles, traditional Mexican food, special pastries called “bread of dead”, candies, decorations like pictures and famous Mexican beverages like *tequila*, *mezcal* and *pulque* that the deceased used to love.

All parts of the “ofrenda” mean something, for example: the candles lead the way from heaven to the land of living. Mexican people believe that all of the deceased arrive at the cemetery and the offerings are used as a welcome to the souls. Most of the altars include a cross, pictures or sculptures of the Virgin Mary, and photos of the missed relatives. Some sort of altars are also built in schools, government offices, etc.

When I was a child, I used to go to the cemetery with my parents, but when my mom died two years ago, I make an altar in my house called “ofrenda” and I put pictures of my mom and her favorite food and beverages.

For me, this day is the most important holiday in the year because I remember a special person, my MOM. Sometimes it is difficult and there are a very sad days, but with this wonderful tradition I’m sure that my mom see me wherever she is.

Lucia Martinez is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon’s College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Day My Life Changed

My favorite day was the day that I signed with the Houston Astros. When I woke up and saw the sun that morning I was really happy and excited, but at the same time I was anxious and nervous. I was waiting for that day for a long time. A lot of things were in my head. I was wondering if I could really do it. I talked a lot with my father about baseball and what I needed to do every single day in order to improve.

He makes me feel comfortable when I talk to him because he always gives me a lot of good advice about baseball, about my personality, about what all of the scouts want, and what they like. I remembered everything he told me and put it into

my practices to be a better player so I could make my dream come true. Finally, my signing day came on July 2nd, 2012 at 12 noon.

On that day, we met at a restaurant where I was finally going to sign a contract so I could become a professional baseball player. I was so excited when I saw the scout with that contract. My whole family has always supported my dream to be a professional baseball player. My mom, dad, brother, grandpa, grandma, aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends all came to the restaurant to support me when I signed. There were so many people who work for the newspaper at the restaurant too. I could not eat anything that day because I was so excited. I was shaking a lot because I was anxious too.

It seemed like my parents were more excited than me at first because they started crying and told me how proud of me they were. When they told me they were proud of me I started crying too. All of my friends and family sent me messages or called me to talk about my favorite day. It made me very happy to know that so many people cared about me and that they wanted to congratulate me. I told them that I was finally a professional baseball player and that my dream that I had since I was very young finally came true. That is what I wanted to do my whole life. I am never going to forget that day...my favorite day... with my whole family and all of my friends when my dream came true and I became a professional baseball player.

I am very happy that today I can tell this story in English, the language I learned so I could play here in the United States, where I continue to learn hoping that I can play here for many, many years in the big leagues.

Kristian Trompiz is a prospect from Maracaibo, Venezuela signed with the Houston Astros. He is a student in their language and literacy program. His teacher in FL is Doris Gonzalez.

My Favorite Day

Saturday is very special and different from the other days. I love Saturdays because we forget all about work. This is the

only day I could dedicate to my family because I'm always working.

Every Saturday we go out to eat as a family in Naples. My son gets very happy when we go out to dinner as a family and that also makes me very happy to see my son happy. Sometimes my friend also invites me to her house. Parties are also a good distraction from work. I like that she always has a lot of different foods like tamales, BBQ beans and a lot more stuff. Or sometimes we just decide to go to the beach with my family and friends and have cookout there.

I like going to the beach because it is so relaxing and peaceful. We swim and get our tan on sometimes. My husband likes to spice things up and he invites me to go dance at night clubs. It is very fun because we go as a couple and leave my son with a cousin.

When I have time and am in the mood we also like to go shopping. My son also likes shopping because he always gets new clothes or shoes. There are Saturdays when I just don't feel like getting ready so we just stay home and watch TV. Or just listen to music or talk as a family about our week or just about what we like. Then at night I make some time to call my mom in Honduras and check up on her and see how she's going.

Wuendy is an English student at Immokalee Technical College. Her teacher is Ms. Katie. She has been attending the English class for over two years. She grew up in Choloma Cortes, Honduras.

Monday

Some people hate Monday but not me, because I love Monday. I have loved this wonderful day since I was in my country because it's the first day of the week when I go to church or share with my family and friends. For me every Monday is very important to thank God for my family, my job and my life.

So Monday has been the day when I start to create new emotions or new goals for my future and start learning many

new things in life.

So now in this country, the United States, I don't care if I work on Monday; it is still my favorite day. I think Monday was created for us to be very happy

Julio de la Cruz is studying English at Jupiter Community High School (ACE). He is from Guatemala. Julio is a student in Susan Mitchell's Level 6 ESOL class.

My Favorite Day

In 1993, there was a chance to come to the United States from Mexico. My family and I tried our luck working in the fields. Everything was different, especially the language. We all wanted a better place and opportunity. We worked in Florida, North Carolina, and Indiana. When the season ended, we returned to Florida as day workers. My dad was offered a work plan by the week.

The language was different, but I started working in a store and I met my future husband. Six months after, we were married. I was beginning to feel dizziness and nausea, so I stopped at the pharmacy and got a pregnancy test.

It was positive and we were overjoyed with happiness. I stop working for the rest of my pregnancy. I was scheduled for a C-Section and it was time to go to the hospital.

When I opened my eyes to see, the doctor put my son in my arms and when he looked at me, I knew this was going to be my favorite day.

We arrived home with our son, Diego, and found that my parents had made a surprise party for us. They were happy to see their new grandson and know that I and the baby were all fine.

Maria Nopal is currently taking ESOL classes through work at the Goodwill Industries, taught by her tutor Verna Urbanski from Manatee Reads! Literacy Council.

Sunday! A Great Day!

Sunday is the greatest day of the week. It has biblical importance in many countries. It is a day for me to relax and to do my tasks.

I was born in a Christian family. When I was little, every Sunday my mom and dad took me to Baptist church. They brought me a Bible. Throughout the Bible, Sunday is the Lord's Day. It is a special day to worship, to give thanks, and to praise God. The Words of God tell us miraculous things happened on Sundays. For example, the Bible tells us about the resurrection of Jesus Christ at the first day of the week which is Sunday.

Sunday is a day of relaxing after six days of work. I get up later than usual. I prepare breakfast for my family. After breakfast, I always go to church with my husband and my little boy. When we come back from church, my husband helps me to cook lunch. Sometimes, we invite our friends to have lunch with us. During this time, we sit together and share our opinions. Later, my husband and I often go to a fresh place to cheer up our hearts and have a lot of fun. We talk about our plans for the future. This makes Sunday really amazing!

I work six days a week. Sunday is the only day I can afford to do my own tasks. In the evening, I clean my house. My husband helps me to do the laundry and wash the dishes. Before I go to bed, I do my homework and review my lessons.

Sunday is a Great Day. You can see my values by how I spend my Sundays.

Guerda Jeune is a student at Dunbar Community School. She has her GED. She is working to improve her skills to better prepare for the future. Her plan is to apply for college within the next year. Her teacher is Ms. Hicks-Wiley.

My Precious Gift: A Day to Remember

The best day of my life was when God put in my hands the best gift ever. A gift that any woman wish to get. Being able to see the little face of that little creature that was in my belly 9 months was an unforgettable experience. The one that each day gave to me a lot of emotions. How am I going to forget that Friday, August 1, 2003? I was having the feeling that she had arrived in the right moment.

With a big scream, wanting to say I'm already here, she came to me. From that day on, all my life has changed. With her cute face and her reddish hair, she filled with love, each spot in my heart. She makes me understand how that day she wasn't the only one that had been born; even I was born like a new woman.

A new woman, a mother that was having to start fighting with more force and check my steps and actions because she will be following my good examples. The years have passed and for me she will forever be that little princess that will always count on me. I'm never going to stop hugging her, and reminding her that in my arms she will always be safe. That I'm here to give her hope, and guide her in her steps.

Wow! How having a child can make us change our life in a positive way? I am now the mother, the friend, the confidante. And especially responsible to see her grow as a good person, a creature that God gave me as the most precious gift. My Best Day without a doubt!

Juana Marisol is a very enthusiastic person. She's from Dominican Republic. She studies English at Immokalee Technical College, and her teacher is Ms. Leyva.

The One That Got Away

I look forward to my day off from work and enjoy being in my kayak on the flats of the mangroves in Palma Sol Bay during the calmness of the early morning.

My favorite spot to go to is what I call my "Honey Hole". That is where I find the best chance to catch a fish. I've caught red

fish, 19” spotted sea trout and a 16” flounder, all of which tasted great.

I invited my friend along to enjoy the morning sunrise and the excitement of the next catch. On this particular day, my friend hooked a huge jewfish. A jewfish is related to the grouper family and can be as big as a small tuna weighing up to 500 lbs. or more. This one was at least 100 lbs. and about 25” in length. Being a bottom dwelling fish, it put up such a fight that it broke my friend’s pole as it pulled him out of his kayak. So not only did we lose a good eating fish, because it’s illegal to keep, but his rod as well.

Whenever my friend and I get together, we often talk about that day and remember it as one our favorite fish stories of the “One That Got Away”

Chris Hagen is taking the ABE program at Manatee Reads! Literacy Council and his tutor is Verna Urbanski.

The Day Cash Changed My Life!

My favorite day falls on December 8th, 2014. This was the day my son, Cash, was born, and I became a mother. My life also changed forever in many ways but probably the three best reasons are I quit work to become a stay at home mom, my lifestyle changed, and there is a purpose to who I am.

Being a stay at home mom is a big change from what I am used to. I was a cocktail waitress, and also was lucky enough to pose for calendars and billboards. Now I traded it in for changing dirty diapers and washing bottles and I like it!

Motherhood has also taught me, and has also given me, more responsibility. I no longer have to just dress and feed myself, but also now this tiny, little person’s whole life is in my hands. This has most definitely made me more of a responsible adult.

My purpose in my life is him. Without him I don’t know where I would be. I can truly say my son, Cash, has saved me! I finally decided to go back to school and plan on having a career has an esthetician, and in skin care. He has given me so

much ambition!

So, these are the reasons why December 8th is my favorite day! This day made my lifestyle change, gave me more responsibility, and most definitely gave me more of a purpose. The arrival of my precious son, Cash, made me a more loving and caring, and understanding human being. I am so excited to see us grow together!

Brittany Dello Buono is a student at Palm Beach Gardens Community High School.

Sundays

My favorite day is Sunday! There are a lot of reasons why I love Sundays but the top three are spending time with my husband, shopping, and watching television.

I like to spend time with my husband because he has only one day off. I make coffee and breakfast. We always sit around the pool every Sunday morning to have breakfast together. It is a wonderful day for us!

Secondly, I like to go shopping with my husband. I like looking around. I am shy to speak English with people so I enjoy going shopping with my husband because he can help me with English.

And lastly, I like watching television. I especially like to watch soccer that only plays on Saturday and Sunday. Sometimes I like to watch movies, too.

So, in conclusion, I like Sunday for many reasons but the three most important ones to me are spending time with my husband, going shopping, and watching television. I really like Sundays a lot!

Uraivan Suiphonoi is a student at Palm Beach Gardens Community High School.

Index

A

Accime, M.	47
Ahmar, T.	132
Alegre, A.	153
Alexander, R.	62
Alfaro, S.	48
Almaguer, E.	192
An, S.	9
Anderson, M.	179
Andre, S.	48
Anonymous	21
Anonymous	75
Archibald, K.	138
Arenciba, C.	142
Arias, H.	169
Armando, M.	22
Arnett, B.	222
Avila, M.	235

B

Bailey, S.	218
Barcenas, S.	138
Basile, V.	1
Baten Tum, E.	191
Bazile, C.	28
Beckham, B.	123
Beers, H.	13
Belem, J.	152
Benitez, H.	74
Benjamin, J.	49
Bennett, S.	136
Bernal, I.	50
Bernal, J.	155
Bernwy, H.	156
Bertrand, E.	35
Bowman, M.	167
Brady, M.	202

Broomfield, D.	230
Bryant, K.	143
Byrnes, S.	69

C

Carrington, C.	169
Castellanos, A.	68
Castrejon, S.	183
Chatman, T.	118
Chavarria, O.	107
Chonay, R.	127
Ciara, E.	10
Cineus, M.	124
Clark, J.	199
Coello, A.	136
Cole, V.	89
Colon, A.	93
Constant, M.	157
Cordoba, R.	51
Corriolan, M.	8
Crespo, M.	71
Crespo, V.	150
Cruz, K.	201

D

Damis, N.	94
Davis, J.	212
de la Cruz, J.	239
de Leon, R.	226
Dello Buono, B.	243
Desouvre, M.	38
Desroches, R.	52
Desroches, R.	178
Dia, H.	172
Diaz, M.	5
Dominique, D.	100
Dominique, D.	191

Dorius, R.	52	H	
Dubon, W.	238		
Dudley-Newson, B.	220	Hagen, C.	242
		Hernandez, F.	17
E		Hislop, C.	23
Echevarria, L.	78	Holland, J.	213
Edwards, J.	173	Horne, N.	213
Eldridge, A.	83	Howell, J.	161
Ervin-Sturgis, L.	151	Huyhn-Hoa, D.	234
Espino, M.	223	Hyacinthe, J.	139
Espinoza, F.	181	Hyppie, R.	209
		I	
F		Intriago, F.	229
Fain, J.	204	Islas, M.	160
Fernandez, M.	165		
Fortunato, R.	184	J	
Fowler, S.	15	Jankowski, D.	26
Francis, T.	96	Jeune, G.	241
Freire, T.	225	Jewell, B.	133
Frierson, A.	205	Jiang, P.	74
Frietze, D.	53	Joharchi, M.	91
Fuentes, M.	42	Johnson, D.	54
		Johnson, K.	134
G		Joseph, J.	39
Gabriel, R.	185	Joseph, S.	43
Garcia, E.	81	Joseph, W.	98
Garou, L.	147	Joseph, A.	99
G.E.M.	190		
Goldsmith, O.	70	K	
Gomez, C.	97	Karimzadeh, H.	176
Gomez, L.	194	Kelly, M.	16
Gonzalez, J.	14	Kitagawa, K.	76
Gonzalez, M.	30	Kogan, V.	120
Grams, S.	121		
Groberio, D.	36	L	
Guarin, A.	226	Laguerre, J.	94
Guevara, S.	158	Lam, T.	6
Guevara, R.	170		

Land, K.	57	Molnar, A.	7
Lanham, J.	115	Monteagudo, J.	174
Lara, A.	129	Montejo, L.	161
Lemon, A.	17	Montiel, M.	176
Levatte-Church, L.	56	Moore, D.	37
Li, K.	5	Mora, M.	162
Lima, T.	135	Moreno, B.	187
Lipkey, I.	140		
Lockley, T.	110	N	
Lopes, L.	64		
Lopez, H.	232	Navaez, A.	73
Loretto, H.	116	Nelson, S.	85
Louis, M.	144	Nopal, M.	240
Louis, C.	146		
Louis-Juste, K.	112	O	
Luc, S.	58		
		Olade, T.	44
M		Oliva, T.	19
		Oliveira, F.	181
Macha, A.	104	Orellana, A.	180
Magalhaes, E.	82	Oriental, J.	228
Manriquez, R.	227	Orozco, I.	71
Marc, R.	177	Ortiz, R.	189
Marisol, J.	241	Osorio, N.	101
Marquez, R.	125		
Marrero, G.	3	P	
Martinez, A.	33		
Martinez, N.	42	Pascal, E.	137
Martinez, C.	148	Patterson, K.	55
Martinez, L.	236	Pech, L.	90
Martinez Lopez, N.	127	Pelenci, S.	102
Matarazzo, C.	149	Pena, N.	106
May, A.	130	Perez, M.	58
McMillan, D.	215	Persaud, J.	84
McNaughton, M.	92	Piang, J.	210
Melendez, S.	32	Pierre, R.	80
Mena, C.	66	Pierre, M.	166
Mendoza, L.	78		
Mendoza, A.	145	R	
Miranda, L.	165		
Mitchell, D.	200	Rendon, C.	113
Moise, M.	183	Rene, R.	59

Rincon, C.	65	Trejo, A.	188
Rivera, M.	31	Trompiz, K.	237
Rivera, G.	59	Tzarax, C.	150
Rivera, N.	73		
Robles, J.	45	U	
Rodriguez, S.	45	Unpierre, V.	87
Rodriguez, M.	116		
Rodriguez, M.	131	V	
Romero, K.	111	Valeus, S.	123
Romero, F.	119	Vancleve, M.	3
Ron, R.	103	Vawny, A.	46
Roney, K.	27	Vazquez, N.	34
Rouse, K.	147	Vazquez, M.	235
		Vega, R.	124
S		Velazquez, L.	211
Saenz, R.	2	Vernet, K.	40
Sanchez, S.	186	Vilfrant, A.	11
Santiago, L.	79	Villalobos, I.	142
Saraceni, G.	93	Villar, G.	175
Satchell, J.	217		
Sawiki-Cruise, K.	195	W	
Sebastian S., B.	108	Weller, T.	86
Servius, O.	60	White, M.	61
Shaw, N.	216	Williams, G.	197
Sherrod, P.	178		
Smithson, S.	19	Z	
Snyder, L.	29	Zajac, D.	25
Solarte, G.	163		
Solene, M.	199		
Spence, S.	219		
Stewart, S.	24		
Suiphonoi, U.	244		
T			
Tajjiani, R.	126		
Tarantino, L.	80		
Taylor, T.	193		
Thacker, D.	63		
Trampuz, S.	105		
Tranquille, W.	119		