

ON OUR WAY



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

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A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) promotes, supports, and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As a statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 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, ESOL, literacy, and family literacy programs throughout Florida were encouraged to submit essays. The imagination and creativity of these students shines through in their writing, reflecting a range of perspectives and life experiences that are as diverse as the authors themselves. As always, the editorial committee has chosen to minimize the editing of submissions, and therefore entries in the book appear largely as they were received. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the views of the Florida Literacy Coalition or any other affiliated organization.

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

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My Experience in Adult Education

My Experience as an MDC Student

My name is Anais Garcia, and I am from Cuba. I am a Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus student now experiencing a very important class in adult education. After 15 years, I started over as a student in ESOL, thanks to my children who motivated me.

I learned more English for new opportunities for a better job. I know other people and interact with them and have new friends from different nationalities. I feel good when I come to class every day. I have had different teachers, each one helping me learn more.

Anais Garcia is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. Her teacher is Janet Berger-Polsky.

A Beautiful Moment and Friendship

My name is Ana Munoz. I am from Guatemala. Being in the adult education class gives me a great opportunity to meet many people from different countries, to know more about their countries of origin, and to listen to their native languages when they speak among themselves. It is very difficult for me to learn English, but I am certain that I will succeed because of the tireless support that is given by my passionate teacher and caring friends in my class.

The reward for me when I am able to speak English is that it opens new doors for better jobs when I return to my country. It will also enable me to provide more for my family in terms of their educational and financial needs. It is interesting how this language has become a universal language in the world, how it connects people globally and allows us to communicate internationally.

I learn something every day when I attend the class and I also enjoy every moment with the group when we meet. Our ability

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to share this time together has made us into a great family in this class. I feel loved and cared for just like a little child. I will need a similar group when I return to my country. This beautiful moment and friendship will remain in my heart for a very long time.

I am grateful to everyone.

Ana Munoz attends the English class at Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

This Too Shall Pass

My name is Antoinise Portalus. I am from Haiti. I just arrived in Key West a month ago. My husband was here before me. I am so happy to reunite with him and my family in this country. It is not easy for me to live in United States because I do not know how to speak English. My husband has already brought me to register for the English class. Though it is difficult, I am going to give it a try.

Antoinise Portalus is studying English at the Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Speak Chinese

My name is Amy. I am from China. The United States is a strange and new world to me. First is the language, which has become the biggest obstacle in my life. Because I only speak Chinese in my country, I cannot speak English; I cannot communicate to people and handle everyday things. I am afraid to go out of my home, having inferiority complex. For a long time I am very confused and distressed. For the most basic survival, I must learn English. I asked myself in my heart, "Can I learn it?"

I took this question into the adult education school. Very lucky I met a very kind, enthusiastic teacher, as well as students from different countries. The atmosphere of learning here makes

me feel very happy, we get together like a big family to share celebrations and enjoy learning.

The teacher here is very amiable; she is like my “mother” and my friend. She guided me patiently and told me how to learn. She kept correcting my speech repeatedly and guiding me step by step. I studied slowly by listening, speaking and reading. I did not know anything from the beginning and can now speak simple English. These advances are inseparable from the teacher’s help to me. After this year’s study, I not only improved my ability to speak English, but also gained a lot of happiness.

Learning the English language is a long process, especially for us adults, accustomed to speaking our own native language. The beginning of the change is really a bit difficult to master. A new language is to: Listen, Practice, Speak it, Write it, and put it in a Sentence. Do not be afraid to say it wrong; we will practice. Many of our classmates speak Spanish and we learn from each other in English. After repeated non-stop practice, through continuous listening and speaking, I am truly learning. I believe that through unremitting efforts, I will see myself grow.

Hua “Amy” Xu is a student in Margo Scranton’s Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center located in Dade City, Florida. Amy was born in An Hui, China in March of 1973. She graduated from a technical secondary school and earned a career certificate in Accounting. She came to America in 2014.

My Experience in Adult Education

I would like to let you know about my contribution to the adult education world. I consider myself a common woman, born in New York City and grew up with my family in Puerto Rico. Oh... Puerto Rico a place called the “Island of The Charm”, a beauty in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean. I am the oldest sister and had to start working at a very young age. I learned to be productive in this world early. I was a mom at the age of 20. I always thought that ‘the sky is the limit’ and nothing will stop me from continuing to develop and reach my goals. As a former Human Resource professional for more than 40 years, I had the experience of working with people. Some with different kinds of

education, goals and needs. One day a good friend that I had met accidentally had asked me if I could help him at his English Institute, by facilitating English speaking classes to Spanish speaking adults and teens. Oh my God! What a challenge I was being offered! Wow, a Spanish speaker teaching other adults in another language-the English language? Hey, nothing stopped me and I accepted the new challenge.

The experience was wonderful! I enjoyed sharing skills and knowledge that I was blessed to learn. The satisfaction is priceless when you see the smiling faces and educational progress the students are making. Even students who thought that their age would limit their success, found out differently. Believe me... I learned too. I had to put into practice my computer skills to provide an effective source of communication. I used my talents and techniques to help them learn a language that they were always afraid to speak. We really had fun. They were focused on learning and valued what I was sharing with them. When we teach people, especially adults, we also learn from them. They bring their own experiences, culture and motivation to help them reach their goals. Teaching teens is more challenging. I can say that having adults and teens learning together compliments and accelerates their learning process. It is like working together to accomplish a complex project to get better results. If you have the opportunity, time and resources to help others, please take action! You can help their lives with good knowledge to flourish their talents. It will be a great gift for you too.. and never forget that “The Sky is the Limit!”

Evelyn Ortiz is a retired Human Resource Manager. She has 2 children and 3 grandchildren. She is a student in the Citrus County Literacy Program at Central Ridge Library in Beverly Hills. Her tutor is Hazel Benjamin.

My Fear Is Gone

I have always had the desire to speak English very well. In my country, Haiti, they teach us English in high school, but we just know some words or some grammar rules. As a nurse, I worked for a Non-Governmental Organization and after leaving that job, I worked in an orphanage; both were sponsored by people who

speak English. That's the reason that I started to learn English in my country a couple years ago. In spite of having graduated, I still had a lot of difficulties in listening to people when they talked to me.

When I arrived at the Adult Education Center, in 2016, I met a lot of people from other countries who had the same problem as me about speaking English. First of all, one of my purposes was to communicate with them, share ideas about our cultures and our countries. In the beginning, I didn't like having conversations with my classmates because I was scared of making mistakes. Listening to people was truly a big challenge for me, but I could write easily. My vocabulary was very poor and my pronunciation was very bad too. I was so confused when I wanted to talk to someone. Honestly my first day in class was very hard for me. When the teacher asked me a question for the first time, I couldn't understand, and the sentence went over my head.

Fortunately, at the AEC the teachers are very professional and qualified; they have a good method to teach us. They always do their best to find a way to improve our pronunciation, reading, speaking, writing, and listening. The teachers always stimulate us; in other words, they motivate us to study very hard. Through Idiom books and different articles, I have the chance to read, and I learn a lot of new words, to increase my knowledge. The conversation club every week is a good way to reduce the fear of communicating. Every day all students can review the courses via internet and the teacher always posts some exercises for helping us to expand our vocabulary.

In my opinion, if I want to be successful in life, I should never give up. I have to believe in myself, work very hard, and persevere with my dream. Even though I make mistakes, I must start again and again until I achieve my goal. Presently, the fear of speaking English is gone. I have the opportunity to exchange with my classmates, ideas about our countries, cultures, and many other interesting things.

Helene Jean Pierre is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness Class at the Adult Education in West Palm Beach.

My Experience in Adult Education

In August of 2017, I started taking an English class because I wanted to discover a new language. I continued learning more and looking forward to seeing how English works.

Now I have one more way to communicate with other people. ESOL was my best experience that I have had in my life because it opened my mind to see the world in a different language. This is a further step in my education level! I am really motivated! Learning is never-ending, and I am advancing.

Learning English is like breaking the borders of communication. It is the first spoken language worldwide, and is spoken in every country on this Earth. Now, I am understanding better when I hear someone speaking English, (like a Native English speaker!) That feels very good! I feel great because I have learned a lot and I am better at listening and writing in English.

I am proud to live in this country because it is the best in the world. This is why I have continued to learn about it.

ESOL class is a place where I have made friends. It is a place of learning. The classmates who I have met are all friendly. They are good people. Learning everyday has opened the door for more opportunities in this great country.

Anonymous Author

Come to This Class

My Experience in Adult Education has been amazing! I can see the change and progress I have made. Now, I am able to speak fluently with American English speakers. My grammar and vocabulary are so much richer, and I feel much more comfortable when I talk to someone in English. I have met a lot of nice people from some many different countries and cultures. The teachers are very caring about the students. I would recommend it to anyone who wants to improve their English.

Liz Munera attends the English class at Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

OMG! Learning English is Difficult

My name is Edelmira and I am from Mexico. I will tell you a little about me. My family and I now live in Dade City, Florida. When I am around my family, I am very happy. Living near them is the most important thing in my life. I like to work and earn my own money. I like to help my family and help others who may need my help.

I was worried, at first, I could not do both: work and school. I needed to better my education in order to have more opportunity and financial stability. Then, from the encouragement of my family, I made the decision to learn English. I registered at a nearby public school in adult education and started to learn English. Thanks to many classmates and Ms. Margo (teacher), I was on my way to learning to read, speak, and write in English.

Adult education has helped me in so many ways. English allows me to communicate better when ordering food from a restaurant, reading a book to my grandchildren, and to pronounce words correctly.

Why is it important to understand English and the history of this country?

I WANT TO BECOME A CITIZEN.

Eldemira Magana is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESL classes at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, Florida.

Challenges

My experience when I first arrived at school was very difficult. Everything seemed to be impossible and I felt as though I knew nothing. The second day was no better. I fell off the stairs in front of the classroom. I met some of my classmates and made friends with four of them. We would always help each other.

I tried very hard to learn English, but felt powerless at times to do so. I have not always understood what the meaning of so many new words were, but I am gradually learning little by little.

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I make sure that all my schoolwork is complete and on time.

My experience in school today is wonderful and I have had some special teachers. Going back to school has made me feel like a young girl again. I enjoy sharing what I have learned in class with others. I also enjoy contributing coffee and other things to share with my classmates.

Respect is important to me and now I especially can respect myself because of what I have accomplished. Being in class and by working hard, I am learning to master the computer.

My vocabulary has increased, but sometimes I do forget some words. I want to fulfill my dreams, become more responsible, and be happier in my school. I am currently helping others in our community and church with community affairs.

Cecilia Monge is a student in Margo Scranton's ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center in Dade City, Florida

Precious Experience

Before I learned English I thought it was very hard. My experience before I came to school was bad. I decided to move from Lehigh to Immokalee next to ITECH just to learn English. Honestly, my decision was great, because when you have an objective you must make sacrifices so that your dreams can become reality.

I used to live in a foreign country and have no family. If I don't learn to speak English very well I could become a victim from mistake and even go to the jail. Going online could be risky, when you don't know how to use the internet safely in English. For example, a Junk email message with a goal of stealing money can be dangerous. The con artist will inform you that you've "Won a prize," but to receive it you must send your bank account information. That is why you should never respond to those emails, because they are just cyber scams.

My specific moment in the USA was one day when I went to the clinic. The nurse asked me "Do you have kids?" I couldn't

answer the nurse because I didn't understand what "kids" meant. I responded "No." However, I actually have two babies. That day I felt really bad because I lied to that person. I learned that it's very important to understand others so you will be able to give a correct answer.

In order to learn English very well, I connect with English daily. For my hobby I use books, watch movies and listen to classical music when I'm relaxing. I chat only in English to reinforce my vocabulary. The result will be priceless because after all, I will be able to understand better and explain something.

My experience in class is helpful, to practice English daily. I like to participate in activities and work together with other students who help me. I ask questions when I don't understand something. I go to the blackboard to exchange ideas. I pay attention when the teacher explains things. Also my teacher is always available for us to create something new and take us to the library. In my class I often have a conversation with my classmates and my teacher.

If you are willing and determined to learn, no one can't stop you. Education is a career pathway and can be a challenging experience.

Myriam Britou is from Haiti. She came to the USA in 2015.

A Happy Experience

My name is Pierre Richard Jerissaint. I am from Haiti. I have a happy experience in the Adult Education class. People from all over the world come here to learn English, including me. Though we are different, we connect with each other beautifully. We all have one common goal - to be fluent in English. Furthermore, the respective people who manage this department, from the top - the director, down to the subordinates - the staff are wonderful, supportive, and kind.

Most importantly, my gratitude goes to the talented teachers who dedicate their time, effort, and love of teaching to all the

students of all nationalities who are desperate and eager to learn English in this class.

Pierre Richard Jerissaint attends Adult and Career Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Experience at the Adult Education Center

Three years ago, I arrived in Florida with many dreams and a lot of confusion in my mind. One of these was to learn English. I had the opportunity to start at the Adult Education Center. When I took the CASAS test, I was placed in Level 6. I was shocked about that because I wanted to begin in Level 1.

The first week, I tried to do the best that I could, but I couldn't understand any word that my teacher spoke. The second week, I wanted to quit school because I felt totally frustrated. Actually, I left the school in the third week but one email surprised me. It was by my teacher who asked me why I didn't come back to school. This was the beginning of my adventure at the AEC.

Then, last February 27th, was the International Friendship Celebration where all students and teachers celebrate their diverse cultures. I had the opportunity to participate holding the flag of my native country, Peru, in the Parade of Flags. It was such an exciting and amazing experience. This celebration expressed the love of the USA for other foreign countries because teachers transmit to us acceptance and inclusion in their American culture.

Every day I was so grateful to all the teachers because always they are alert with every student, and I felt so comfortable with all activities that they did trying to teach and improve our second language. Despite this, I felt no confidence, and always I was thinking about leaving school. I wonder if I only feel this way or why I cannot understand English or why I cannot talk fluently. What is the line between thinking something in Spanish and not translating it before talking? Step by step, I am improving my knowledge and my vocabulary making in practice the advice that my teacher gives me.

Nowadays, after three times of being in level 7, I am still in level 7. I am trying to be constant and persevere in order to reach my goals, which is to finish the ESOL program at the AEC. I feel more comfortable. I am so proud of my teacher for her dedication, order, and passion for teaching us.

Saby Ramirez is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

A Dream Come True

All my life, it was my dream to take one year off from school to learn languages. I have always been impressed by the people who speak many languages, and I have always wanted to be part of them. For me, the best way to learn a language is to go directly to the country. In the beginning, I wanted to learn three languages : Italian, German and English. However, my parents advised me against learning three languages all at once. Finally, I chose to learn only two languages: German and English.

Thanks to my aunt, who lives in Florida, I had the opportunity to come here to learn and practice English for six months. Right away, I took this opportunity without hesitation. I did not realize that it was going to be more difficult than I had previously thought. It was very tough to leave everything suddenly: my family, my habits, my friends, my language, my country, Switzerland. At this moment, I had to be brave. Even though it was only for six months, it was still hard to say goodbye.

I felt lucky and more secure because I lived with my aunt. I have only had positive experiences. I've met a lot of different people. In class, everyone is very friendly and open-minded. I am interested to learn more about different countries. We can make comparisons between our home country and the U.S.A. We talk about the different traditions and cultures that we have. The food is also different, and the taste is not the same as my country even if it is the same product.

I admit that sometimes it has not been easy because I was homesick for my family, my friends, and my country. The sad part is that you can't control everything. It is not easy to talk

only by text or by phone because it is better to see each other face-to-face. I think it was not easy for my parents because I am an only child. The house seemed empty for them without me.

I will never forget this experience and all the people that I have met. I've had a great time and I've really enjoyed it. Now, the second step is to fly away to Germany to live through another experience. I hope it goes as well as the one I had in America. I consider myself fortunate to be able to live this experience. This kind of opportunity appears once in a lifetime, so I took it.

Thymea Gauthey is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center.

My Experience in Adult Education

My experience in adult education has been excellent. It is because I am sixty five years old and still attending school from Monday to Thursday like a young woman. I feel young again and very optimistic. Here at mdc, my feelings are great because the teachers are excellent and the people in general are very friendly. Honestly, I feel like home.

Every week when I come to school, I learn new words to add to my vocabulary and I practice listening in the computer lab. This practice in the computer lab helps me to understand conversations and improve my pronunciation. Now, I am writing messages in English on the phone and I can speak to my neighbors in English.

When I come to learn English at mdc, I want to know more English and I want to come back the next day. I want to progress more and to feel part of U.S.

Xiomara Alvarez is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. Her teacher is Natasha Laria.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

Parent's Advice is the Best for Our Lives

My mother made me understand, from my childhood, that to win in life you must have discipline. She taught me that getting up early, making the bed, brushing my teeth, taking a shower, doing homework, and doing the other little tasks and appointments of the day at the proper time is discipline. This little advice, along with the will to serve the country, made me join the military career and succeed in it.

In 2014, many years after my mother's advice, during a lecture for the University of Texas graduates, Admiral William H. McRaven, an American Navy SEAL, mentioned that if you want to change the world, start making your bed in the morning. Admiral McRaven said: "By making the bed in the morning, you accomplish the first task of the day. It will give you a little pride and motivation to complete yet another task. And from that little task, you will complete many other larger tasks throughout your day."

Having discipline in small tasks reinforces the idea that small things are important and if you do not have discipline to do the small things right, it will be difficult to overcome the obstacles that life will put in your way. So, trust in yourself, have discipline to accomplish yours tasks, and start with the little details of your life. Do it the right way, the way that has to be done, even if you do not have the will to do and you will thrive, indeed.

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

Learning How to Cope With Negative Emotions

Many people are unhappy with what they have done in life, the things they have said, or the people they have hurt. Feeling bad about yourself is surely an issue for all of us from time to time. To some it may come often and others not so much, but it will undoubtedly come.

These things occur to almost everyone, and it may seem you can't do anything to control it. You may let the emotions get the best of you, and start procrastinating or stop doing the things you used to do daily. The emotions will always sneak up on you, ready to rain on your parade. As illogical as that is, it is a part of being human. I have gone through these troubling times in the past as well. That's when a good friend of mine gave me the best advice I have ever received.

My friend told me that if I wanted to be happier again - to be less stressed and to do the things I really wanted to do - I would need to take control of my emotions. You need to learn and use some coping skills. Coping skills can not only help you with your emotions, but they can also influence how you see a situation going on and how to react to it. For example, if you were really upset because of a situation between you and someone else, then you can try to think about what you both did and try to think more positively about the situation. You could even attempt to fix or correct the situation. This can have a big impact on how you feel and how you do things in your life. You can either take that wisdom with a grain of salt or take it to heart. If you are able to take it to heart, it might be some of the most beneficial knowledge you could obtain when you are feeling unsatisfactory.

When I started practicing these coping skills that my friend told me about, I started to feel better about myself and the position I was in at that time. I started to enjoy everything in life again; I started to have less anxiety about accidentally bumping into someone or saying the wrong thing. I also accepted where I was and knew the only place to go from there was up. Had I never been given that advice, I probably would have still been stressed about the little things.

Everyone is going to experience problems in life at some point. It is completely up to you to decide how you are going to handle these events, and how you are going to advance from there.

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

THE BEST ADVICE I HAVE EVER RECEIVED

In my life, I had a breaking point that turned my life 180 degrees. It was when I got “The Best Advice I Have Ever Received.”

During my entire life, I saw my father drinking alcohol every day and cheating on my mother. I saw a mother who was very submissive. As a child, it made me feel confused. That was part of the education that I got. Accordingly, I repeated it in my marriage and I thought it was normal. I thought women were to only follow men’s rules. This was all I knew as a child.

When I was 31 years old, I got married (9 years ago). In the first year of my marriage, it almost ended due to this, but I got the best advice. It was when I was able to “meet God”. A friend of mine told me that if I did not decide to include God in my life and in my marriage, that I would not go far.

Also, I used to be out of control in my life. I felt angry all the time. I complained often. I was unhappy, had fears and was very selfish. All of those things ended when I met God. Reading and seeing how God (through His son, Jesus) gave and loved us is teaching me every day to do it too. Because of Him, I can give this same love to my family, my friends and the rest who are around me. Six years ago, I realized that I needed God so I could gain control. As soon as I forgave him, I saw how it changed me for the worst.

Likewise, this advice made me see that my favorite place is my home with my family. My favorite day is each day that I live, because it is another day to be with them and friends. My bravest moments are also every day, because every day I have to keep doing what God did. I give love and I do not repeat what my father did (unfortunately due to ignorance).

Together with my wife, we are learning how to forgive. I forgive myself for my mistakes. We are very thankful every day and show each other appreciation and love.

With this history, I am not saying that I don’t get angry anymore. However, I do not let it last as long. We are humans and we have feelings. Only the bad feelings cannot be allowed to last long and the good feelings have to hold on longer.

Edgardo Nava is an ESOL student of Sarah Fairchild Place.

Good and Bad Advice

While I was growing up, I was given a lot of good advice by many different people. This included family members, friends, doctors, and teachers. One piece of advice I was given was to not try to change people from their religion. Also, I was told to be careful who you choose to truly love, and to always help others who need it. I would be lying if I said that I've never received bad advice as well, such as doing something I didn't want to do in order to be seen as one of the "cool kids," or being told to buy something that would promise to make my life better, when, in all honesty, I wouldn't need and most likely would never use that particular item.

Although the advice given to me was either good or bad, I would have to say that some of the better advice came from my parents. The advice my parents said to me was usually things to help me in life, such as how to save up money, and how to drive, or not to do things too risky. They taught me my rights and wrongs. Without them I might not be here to this day.

Like I said, I've had my fair share of good and bad advice. However, if I had to choose the best advice I have ever received, it would be that whatever religion you believe in, always follow it no matter what other people may think of you. As a Christian I know that some people will agree with me and others won't agree with me on my decision of belief. However, either way, whether they accept me or not, I will not change who I am.

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

Never Give Up!

The high school years can be a very defining point in life for many young people. When I found out that I could not obtain my high school diploma due to not passing the FCAT reading test, it was devastating.

Before graduating from high school, every student had to take what was called the FCAT test (Florida Comprehensive Assess-

ment Test) and pass the reading and math sections. Well, I had finished all my classes and credits except for that one test. I did not think much of it at that moment. Then there came a time when I was facing financial problems. It was then that I realized I needed to make a change and continue with my education. I went back to find out what I needed to finish in order to obtain my high school diploma. I contacted my counselor from my previous school to inquire about it. She instructed me that I needed to go to the Adult Education Center and register for the FCAT retake. I signed up and took the test; unfortunately, without refreshing what I had learned in high school, the end result was not good. It was a very disappointing moment for me because as a result, I ended up losing my job. I felt torn apart, and I stopped trying for a very long time. Many opportunities came along, and I was hired at Dade Medical College, and they did not ask for my high school diploma. That was a blessing. I went through the interview and was offered a position as a receptionist. My pay here would be a little bit higher than my previous job. At this point, my worries of attaining a high school diploma vanished.

Nevertheless, in winter of 2017, I signed up to take the ACT Reading Test. A passing score on the ACT test can replace the FCAT test. I had to practice a few lessons for the test, and finally went and took it. I missed the passing score by one point. Someone one day told me to “Never give up!” and I refuse to give up. Those words are giving me the courage to continue with my goals and ambition. I have now signed up to take the ACT Test one more time and hoping this will be my last. I’m determined and ready to take the challenge!

Patricia Cruz is a GED student at Forest Hill Comm. High School Adult Ed. Program in West Palm Beach, FL. Her teacher is Vivian Williams.

What My Grandma Told Me

I’m from Costa Rica, a tropical and beautiful country, with lush nature and wildlife.

When I was in high school I had English classes but I remember that my interest was zero since I did not have good

teachers. The classes were mostly reading and writing but no conversation.

My high school was very close to my grandmother's house so I visited her after school often. She was interested in my education and always wanted to know how I was doing in school.

When I was 15 years old, I remember talking to my grandma and she told me some wise advice. She said it is very important to have English as a second language because it would open up more opportunities for work and I'd even be able to communicate with English-speaking people from all over the world.

Even though her advice was good, like most teenagers, I put her words in the back my head and just did okay for the four years that I studied English. When I graduated from high school, I went to work at a business center at a large resort on the beach. It was here that I had contact with people that spoke English. This is when I started to fall in love with the language, but it was difficult for me to fully learn it because I spoke Spanish with my friends, family and people from my country.

During the eight years I worked at the resort, I met many interesting people from all over the world, including a man I was to marry many years later. It was frustrating not to know how to communicate well in English and even more when I met my future husband. We kept in contact for three years by email but we never talked due to not being able to communicate in person. My life moved on and working at the resort helped me with my English.

My life was now more in focus, and what my grandmother told me made more sense. Her encouraging me to concentrate on my English studies did open better job opportunities and even more, I did meet an American man. In 2015 we got married and I moved to United States. Living here and having to use English every day, makes me realize again that my grandmother's advice was true.

Steffani Cordoba is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas

A Turning Point In My Life

Never Back Down

My life in my country and my life in the United States are totally different. My life in my country was on par with who I am: my habits, my tastes, surrounded by maternal love, family love, and love for my friends. I enjoyed emotional stability. I could work and study at the same time. I could say that I knew what I wanted.

However, my life in the United States is totally different. I would say that changing a country changes everything. I say this because the country where I move is not going to change for me. I have had to adapt to certain customs and restrict or eliminate things that I like to do but are not possible here. Maternal love and family will never be like the love I received daily in my country. Your emotional stability changes because you arrive full of dreams, and it seems almost impossible to keep them. I can say that when I changed my country, I lost the notion of what I wanted to do at this moment.

This is something that is very clear; everything I have had to change is part of the way, and my goal has not changed but is now more difficult. I decided to move to the United States because I was missing something. There was a lack of money and there was no opportunity. It did not matter if I was a professional and that caused problems for me to execute every step that had to be done. I am here in search of a future for myself and my family.

Knowing that I will not be present at some important stages of my family and the uncertainty of whether the new life will be successful or not makes me feel sad, anxious, and even nervous. I keep thinking about what I left behind.

I feel that giving up my country will be worth it because it does not have the same opportunities. Every day we are poorer but, nevertheless, we love our people more every day. Despite being homesick all the time, we must remain firm and move forward.

Anabel Filpo Tejada is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Level 7 class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Adaptation: Learning To Be An American Mom

My name is Ana Chavarri. I am from Peru. Here is my story about how a Peruvian military family adapts to a new life in America. We arrived in Key West in February of 2017. I thought I was ready. I thought, "How hard can it be?" I naively thought I would have a lot of free time but in reality, I do not.

The first two months were very difficult. I had so much to do. It began with enrolling my daughters in school and daycare, domestic chores, and the challenge to communicate in English. "Oh my God," I thought. "I have to learn English right now!" In addition, my daughters were experiencing difficulties with the adaptation to school and talking with the teachers in English is so difficult for me!

I thought all people have different problems, conditions, cultures, and needs, but when we arrived in America, I found out that we have a common need: to communicate in English, to understand and learn from American people, and understand their culture. It is never too late to learn. We must learn English and learn to make new friends.

I took a drastic step to start studying English. I am pleased that my communication with the teachers is better now and so is my daughters' adaptation toward the school system. Then, I observe other American moms as to what they do as a mother and with their families. Some have many children and their children do not scream all the time. The women look calmer. They also have jobs. Their families have pets, and they seem happy.

Then, I made new friends with women like me, asked them about their families, and I learned a lot. Next, I implemented a cooperative work environment in my home. Even the youngest child can help with the housework. I learn to be simple and enjoy the simplest things. I clean and wash whenever it is necessary. I am more organized. I focus and spend more time on things I believe that are more essential in life: to learn and teach. It is important to pass on to my daughters all those good things that I am trying to learn so that they will be ready for their life as they grow up.

Sometimes it is difficult to face problems and learn at the same time, but I believe in trying and having a good attitude for everything. I do not think I want to have more children or pets, but I hope to return to my country with these values: stay simple, be organized, teach the children to be independent and collaborators, as well as any other things that I can learn until the last day of my time here.

Ana Chavarri attends the English class at Career and Adult Education, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Turning Point in my Life

I was born in Cuba, in an Eastern province named Holguin, in a time of turmoil which they called the “revolution”. The people were excited and full of hope for a better future. Among them, my family. When I was just a baby, my mother and her family moved to Havana, after Castro’s revolution promised a lot of good things to those who followed their Communist doctrine.

As I grew up, my family noticed that I loved going to school and also enjoyed everything about learning, even after school. When I was in the year of transition from elementary to secondary education, something happened that defined me as a human being. In those days, the government awarded the student who got the highest score in the entire elementary school a place in a much appreciated secondary school called Lenin. One student was chosen from every single elementary school in the country. I was chosen from my school to go there after summer break. They told me to go home and wait for a telegram with further instructions.

Summer was over and my mother, seeing that nothing had come, decided to go to the Department of Education to find out why they hadn’t sent me the notice. There, they gave her an excuse, and told her that because I didn’t present myself there, they sent another student. My mother left the office angry and went to see her brother, who was a high ranking navy official, to explain to him what was going on. He immediately went to the Department of Education. When he got out, he told my mother that he couldn’t do anything about it, not this time. He looked at me

and tried to explain that even though the revolution was made to achieve equality and justice for all, they still hadn't accomplished it yet. This was a case when one commander of the revolution decided to use his power to send his son to this school.

So I went to public school and started hating the government and its policies, especially when I first began to hear that there was a place 90 miles north of Cuba that offered freedom to its citizens, the U.S.A.

I dropped out of high school a year before graduation and went to work. In Cuba when you're 17, it is mandatory to do military service. That is when my Uncle decided to use his power to recruit me to his unit. He got me a fake high school diploma, as if I had finished it. This is the same diploma that I have been using all my life, but since I was confronted with the Bible, I don't want to lie anymore. I decided to get my G.E.D.

Aldo Mazanet is a student at A.C.E. His teacher is Anne Meisenzahl.

Teach Somebody Something

If I could teach somebody something, I would like to explain how we should love and honor our families.

My big turning around point was when I had my children. God showed me how beautiful it can be when you see new life come into the world. It made me feel so wonderful when I saw how good God is. I thanked God that they were healthy and not disabled. I thanked God for that because some babies have no arms and legs or had cancer. I thank God that I didn't have to go through what some people are going through. It was a blessing.

I have sat down and talked to people around 17 or 18 years old who have lost their mothers and grandmothers, and they told me how much they miss them and wish they had someone to talk to. I thank God I do have a mother who is alive and taught me cooking, sewing, babysitting, and washing clothes. She showed me different ways of working on the farm. We planted a garden together and worked together and talked a lot about men together.

Even though they went through hard times, my Mom was still there. This taught me to be there for my kids because she was there to care for us and to love them as she loved us.

I look back and thank God for my mother and father. Remember to appreciate your families while they are alive. Cherish them while they are living and honor them. Please treat them right.

Aline Mitchell is a student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida.

My Family is My Everything

Life is not easy, but we have to see the beauty in it. My life had a turning point that wasn't easy at all; however, it made me stronger. Almost fifteen years ago, on April 12, 2003, my oldest brother, Edgar, had a car accident which took his life. That was the worst day of my life. I was eleven years old then. Today, in my twenty-sixth year, he continues being a part of me every day.

I admire my mom! I know that day definitely affected the life of Edgar's family and friends; it completely destroyed me, but I admire my mom the most. Losing a son is not easy, and it was even harder in that we lost my grandma a year after because of cancer. Even with all these painful situations, my mom has been the strongest person that I have ever met. My mom, my two brothers and I had always been close, but after that, they became my everything as I realized how precious life is. It doesn't matter if my brother and my grandma are not physically here; they continue being a part of who I am and why I work hard in life.

I just love my family with all my heart, and I am thankful for having them. Even though my mom, my brother and I are living in different countries because of the difficult situation in Venezuela, we are still united. I just hope we can be together again soon.

Barbara Hernandez is a student in the College & Career Readiness course at Brewster Technical College. Her teacher is Kathryn H Niedbalec.

The Saddest Moment of My Life

A turning point in my life was in my adolescence. I thought it was the most beautiful stage of my life. However, something happened that changed everything and my life took another course.

When I was in my first year of high school, I thought my life was perfect. I had a lot of friends and enjoyed playing basketball. My parents worried a lot about my education, especially my mother. She was afraid that I would fall in love and quit school. I had always obeyed my mom and followed all her advice, until a boy captivated me with his outlook on life. He thought that it was not worth worrying about building a future because that stops you from living the present. I was secretly dating him, although I hadn't asked for my parents' permission. This was a big mistake because when my mom and my older brother found out, they were very angry. However, my mom accepted the relationship but not completely.

One day when I was talking with my boyfriend outside of my house, my brother suddenly appeared, angrily threatened him, and told him to get away from me. Since my boyfriend did not want problems, he asked my brother to calmly talk. Although we thought he was calm, he returned from the house with a knife. Immediately, I shouted, "run away please" but my brother came so fast. Paralyzed by fear, I fainted. When I finally opened my eyes again, I was already inside the house. Although confused, I went out to see my boyfriend. Surprisingly, my mom told me he was fine. Fortunately, someone had removed the knife from my brother in time. However, she prohibited me from seeing him again and told me that I had to forget him forever.

After that night, nothing was the same. I was emotionally traumatized and felt like a prisoner. I did not have permission to go anywhere. Moreover, my brother had not even been scolded for his actions. In protest, I decided to move to the U.S.A., sacrificing school, friends, and my dreams of achieving a career. It was difficult but nothing stopped me.

After all that I experienced in my youth and even though I disagree on many things with my family, I still love them as always. That has never changed. I know that my mom just wanted

the best for me. Now, I am very happy with my own beautiful family and the opportunity to study and fight to achieve my dreams.

Berta is a student at Immokalee Technical College. She is very grateful to have the best teacher, Ms. Katie.

The Turning Point in my Life...

I was on a bad road, where I saw my life flash before my eyes. Things happened that shouldn't have. My choices and reckless lifestyle resulted in me being put away for a whole year. It was devastating, but it only changed my life for the better. Only then, did I realized how strong of a woman I was and had to be, not only for me but for my mother as well. Although I don't like to talk about it much, I know everything happens for a reason.

I was released in 2015 with a fresh start, only to find out my mother was diagnosed with Carcinoma In Situ. In other words, pre-cancer on her left breast which was probably the worst news I received after everything I had already overcome. That was my automatic turning point! I knew then that life was fragile and things change in the blink of an eye. I had to put my big girl pants on and do better for her and myself. Even though I cannot put all the blame on myself, I felt that the stress I put her through with the lifestyle I led caused her cancer. All I ever want now is to do better so she can finally be happy and in peace. I know now my mom is a lot happier with the way my life is going now.

I got a good job where I'm doing what I love and am passionate about. Currently I'm a pet care specialist at PetSmart's pet hotel! We're actually the only PetSmart in Miami with a pet hotel and doggie day camp. I love what I do so much because I'm a full-on animal lover! I feel that I'm their voice! It reflects a lot on why I'm also getting my G.E.D, so that I can continue my career in veterinary technology. If there's anything I love more than food, it's my animals! Don't get me wrong, I love people, but animals just make me really happy. There's nothing like the loyalty and love they provide. I feel complete with where I am in my life as of now and I know my mom recognizes all the change and good I'm doing.

Honestly, I'm very proud of how far I have come. I know that I still have so much more in life to accomplish and live but right now I'm just happy all the darkness has finally brightened up. My choices reflected on a lot in my life, but they also taught me that God gives his hardest battles to his toughest soldiers, and if he thought I couldn't handle it, none of it would have ever happened. For that reason, I look at everything with a positive outlook. That made me the woman I am today!!!

Chelsy Betancourt is a student of Howard Camner at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus.

Stop Wishing and Start Doing

Decisions are the most important things in life. No one can go through a day without making a decision. Every decision brings some good, some bad, and some lessons. There isn't a manual to explain to you how or when we have to make a specific decision. Some decisions are easy to make because we don't have many choices or just because the situation doesn't deserve so much interest. Others, are so complicated that it can be stressful and turn your life forever. I would like to share one of the hardest decisions that I ever faced in my life, and how it changed my life.

Usually, I'm not the kind of person who hesitates a lot when I have to make a decision. However, 4 years ago, after graduating from university, my life took an unexpected turn. Five months married and pregnant, I just started a new life. Although it was one of the best and most joyful moments in my life, I was inundated by doubts and fear. I was wondering how I could figure out and reach my main goals. So, I had to decide my future. In order to have more opportunities, social, financial, and educational, I decided to move away from my home country, Haiti. I had a lot of options, and I had to decide which one was the best for me. After thinking long and hard, I decide to move to the Republic of Chile.

In July 2013, after flying for almost 12 hours, I finally landed in this new country where I don't have any relatives and friends. I felt like a kid lost in the middle of a jungle. Everything was different: the culture, the climate, the food, and the traditions. On

the one hand I felt happy, and on the other hand I felt nostalgic and fearful. Most of my concern was not about me, but the baby in my belly. I would have liked having my family close to me in this new phase, but it was impossible. Passing the days I was integrated gradually.

For me, it was a wonderful experience. Even though I had to face many bad situations, I also learned a lot. I overcame my fear. I learned to start again. My dream to have better opportunities came true. I got a job that I liked. Also, I had the privilege to continue with my studies. So, I think everyone should make their own decision and live with the outcome. Each decision can open or close doors of great opportunities.

France-Line Toussaint is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

The Teacher that Life Gave Me

When my little boy was born, it was an experience that today I can't find the words to describe.

Even with the days behind me, still I can't believe that I am a mom. My life has absolutely changed. My time wasn't only for me. All my time was for him, my little one.

He was an easy baby. He always woke up in a good mood and soon learned to do it with the most beautiful smile. When we went any place, the people looked at him and he made visual contact and gave them a smile, and they started to ask me questions about him. In other words, I always came back home with something that strangers gave him like: candies, balloons, stickers, fluffy animals, and other stuff.

Now he's grown up, and has started a new step, "school time." Now we learn together, sometimes like a teacher and others like a student. One example about how we have learned together is about language. At home, our first language is Spanish. I'm constantly trying to teach him new words and idioms and we practice reading and writing. At night, story time is in English most of the time; when it is my turn to read, he teaches me how

to pronounce correctly, syllable by syllable. At this moment, he is beside me, like my personal editor, and sometimes we have to use the dictionary for the new words and more clarity.

I have developed my male side too. Now I know how to play cars, build Lego things, play soccer and draw Spiderman.

He really changed my life. I learned and discovered many things about myself, a deeper knowledge about the traditions of this country. It's been another chance to see life from another perspective; to be more flexible, stay relaxed, not be complicated and discover how an empty plastic bottle has many uses to have fun. It's taught me the real value of the little things; how a kiss and a hug can fix anything in seconds, and if you add a song, that works too.

It's the most beautiful experience that you can live, the best thing that can happen to you, the best way to learn about unconditional love. Having a child is the perfect teacher that life gave you.

Iva Falcon is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. She became a U.S. citizen this year.

Determined to Move Forward

I have made many mistakes in life, but two of them have marked my future. To begin with, I didn't graduate from high school, something I regret so much. I also secretly got married when I had just turned 18 years old. Things have been very difficult in my life because of these two events. Nevertheless, I am also a strong believer that it is never too late to accomplish your goals in life.

Not finishing high school, for me, has been a torment. I was not able to graduate because I didn't have enough math credits. It was the saddest feeling I had ever experienced. I attempted to go back the following year, but I was too old to be accepted back into regular school. Through the help of a close friend, I was able to obtain a decent job; therefore, I didn't worry as much.

Knowing that I was married and that we were making substantial income, gave me a peace of mind. Little did I know the consequences I would have to face when I learned that nothing is guaranteed in life, such as your job and your relationships. When I moved to Florida, the wheels started turning in a different direction. Within four months after moving here, I was laid off from the company where I had worked for many years, and ever since then, I haven't been able to obtain a good paying job again.

I don't know what went through my mind when I decided to get married my boyfriend back then. The worst part about it was that I married him while he was incarcerated. My mother didn't approve of our relationship, so we agreed to get married and not tell any in my family. Well, the secret didn't last too long because rumors were floating around. Then, it got to my mom's ear. I'll tell you, it was not a pleasant confrontation, and I could see the disappointment in my mom's eyes. Time flew by and my husband was finally released from jail, and of course, I had to move in with him. I had two kids from that relationship, and my mother eventually learned to love him as a son. Unfortunately, we divorced because of alcohol issues that were way overdue, and I was tired of dealing with it, but that's a different story.

I realize now that I can't go back and change my actions. We all make mistakes in life and maybe some that we are not very proud of. Life has taught me a lot, and one thing that I know is that I am determined to get my G.E.D.

This is one of my goals this year, and I will not give up until I have fulfilled what I've set out to do. I trust in God that he will give me the courage to carry on.

Iris Maltez is a GED student at Forest Hill Community School Adult Ed. Program. Her teacher is Vivian Williams.

The Moment That Turned My Life Around

The major turnaround for me was when I found out I was going to be a father. I found out that I was going to be something I had never been, yet something I had always wanted. Honestly, I wasn't all that excited at first. I thought about everything

I could've done to change the outcome. I wasn't ready for that sort of responsibility; I still had a lot of years to be a teenager. But when I saw my child's tiny face on the ultrasound, I had that wake-up call.

That was the moment when I knew I had to start saving back the little bit of money I was making as a bus boy and put everything else on hold. After working as much as I could, I finally got an opportunity to work for a construction company making good money. I had to work ten times harder, but the outcome was beyond what I could've ever asked for. By myself, I can give myself and my daughter things that people only dream of when they become a parent at age 17. The following months flew by, and before I knew it, I laid eyes on my daughter. That was the turning point in my life.

I have the greatest responsibility that anyone can have. Every day that I wake up is for Laney Renee Gates. I know if I don't show up, she won't have a father, and she won't get the life I never had. Before her birth, I was throwing my life away one day at a time. I was not giving a second thought to what my actions caused or who they hurt, until I had no choice but to grow up or lose my daughter. Now Laney is almost 13 months old, and she has given me the drive to complete my education.

Today I am writing this essay to whoever ends up reading it, so that you know, even if it's only one step at a time, you can turn your life around. No matter how deep you are, there is always a point you can turn it around. With me now 18 years old, my daughter has given me things that people much older than me are just now experiencing. Only a step at a time, and I have set myself and my daughter up for success in life by making the decision to be the father I never had.

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

My Turning Point in Life

I remember exactly when I was only eight years old. This day I started to know my purpose in life. This day my mother changed,

my father changed, my sister and brother changed, my friends changed, and my mood changed. This day I changed with all of the people surrounding me. Starting this day, I became better in school and I started to learn musical instruments to become a better person. I wish this day could come back, because was so special. Every day starting from this day, I wake up so happy, so comfortable, stronger and a better singer with one big smile on my face. Every night is very special with every star in the sky. Wow it is so exciting to tell you about this day, because I wish every person could experience this day like me.

Before I tell you about this day, let me discuss how my life was before this day. I remember my parents always fighting. I was rebellious. In school, I received bad notes all the time and I would always fight with my class mates and with my brothers. I didn't have friends. In this young age, I didn't have a reason to be. I did not like to go to school. I had no respect for people. In conclusion, before this day I was not a good person, and my thoughts were not good.

It makes me happy to say the BIG day in my life is when I took the bravest change to put "JESUS" in my heart. When I started this day, I understood if I put all my actions in Him, everything was perfect, everything, everything, no worries, no angers, no sadness only happiness. Everyone could see the change in my life. It is for that reason, when I have a difficult moment I know God is with me and I am feeling comfortable. I start the day feeling that everything is perfect for me. I have a problems like a regular person, but He makes me feel like a "Super Man" - Invincible!!!

I invited everyone to know my friend "JESUS." He loves you.

Javier is a student in Palm Beach County. His teacher is Sarah Fairchild Place.

Making Changes

Growing up, I didn't have all the finer things in life. Sometime after my little sister was born, my parents started going downhill. When I was younger, I didn't understand what was going on. Then a

couple years went by, and the older I got, the more into the drug life I fell. I don't regret anything that I went through when I was younger, and I don't blame my parents. If it wasn't for everything I've been through, then I wouldn't know what I know today.

A few months after I turned 18, I was arrested for the second time, but this time I was an adult and all my charges were felonies. I was bonded out, and of course, went right back a few more times, catching new charges each time, all for the same thing. Finally, I was put in drug court and then I failed a few drug tests for alcohol. By this time, I knew I wanted to do something different. I was tired of what I was doing, but it was too late. I was sentenced to a six-month inpatient rehab. I wasn't sure how to feel about that, but I wasn't mad about it. I was ready to change. I wanted to take as much help as I could.

This rehab was called CRC, it is down south in New Port Richey, Florida. This was my first time going to a place like this so I didn't know what to expect because I didn't know a thing about recovery. When I got there, I didn't really want to be there and I was really shy. I didn't want to open up to anyone. I didn't know how to ask for help. After a few weeks, all that changed. I went through many obstacles with my peers.

We were all very comfortable with each other and eventually became one big family. We got to share our lives with one another and were able to work through the drastic things in our lives which led us to our drug use. When I first got to rehab, they kept saying that miracles happened there, and at that time it was hard to believe, but then I was able to experience it for myself.

I would never think that such a tiny place would be able to change my life as much as it did. I've never had such a positive effect in my life and my way of thinking. I've also never known how much my family means to me and how much they are actually there for me. CRC was the most positive turning point in my life that I could have ever had I'm very grateful for that.

Kristen McKinney is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Weeki Wachee. She is a young 21 years old and is still trying to be successful in life. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class facilitated by ITA Tracy Adams and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

My Immortal

What is perfection?

Is it something we strive for but never obtain?

Why do we as humans struggle to find it within ourselves? In the words of Marilyn Monroe “Imperfection is Beauty.” Life matters in every shape and in every form. Through my experience I’ve come to a realization that it’s okay not to be okay.

When a child is born every mother naturally counts 10 fingers and 10 toes searching for any type of flaw.

On December 23rd, 2016, on a cold busy night, my perfection was born from an imperfect life. In the 5th hour of that evening my world came to a point of collision. I was the driver causing a tragic accident and in the back seat was my 5 month old daughter. In just 5 months, I was sentenced to 8 years for a DUI causing serious bodily injury. In 2024, I will be released from captivity, but there are some things you cannot escape. Because memory is immortal.

Not only am I incarcerated, but my flesh and blood child whom I was to nurture and console, will struggle with daily activities for the rest of her life. There are many reasons to dismay, but even more to be of courage. In this journey, I found the meaning of life. It’s the joy in her voice as she laughs through the phone. It is striving to become complete each and every single day. My daughter is touching and changing the lives of everyone she comes in contact with.

Value your freedom. Value your family. Most importantly value your life. Every moment that passes is another chance to turn it all around.

Mary Hammond is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of St. Cloud. She is a young 28 years old. She is a student in the GED class facilitated by ITA Sharon Goff and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

A Turning Point in My Life

Almost everybody has a turning point in his or her life. Mine just happened to have happened in my mid-twenties. I've always known something was wrong with me. I just always brushed it off and figured I'd get over it. Until the day my wife, of 3 years, approached me and said that she wanted a divorce.

To most people a divorce commonly is harsh and they start to wonder what exactly lead to that point. I, on the other hand, was given a wife who happened to create a list of exactly what I was doing wrong. My constant drinking and drug use got to the point that it was affecting the ones I loved the most. It made me really look myself in the mirror and see someone who was in pain and has been masking it for so long. It just became part of who I was.

So I decided that I needed to fix myself before I can fix my marriage. I started seeking therapy and actually let somebody in for once and experience what I was going through. I got diagnosed with PTSD, depression, and a learning disability. Finally it all started making sense. It took me awhile to adjust to this new lifestyle, but I'm glad it happened to be because if it didn't, I wouldn't ever had gotten the courage to better myself and get back into school, fix my issues that I've ignored my whole life, and become a better husband and father to my wife and daughter.

Just goes to show you a negative thing in your life doesn't always have to get you down. It's all about how you approach it and make it better yourself, and everything else will just fall into place.

Raymond Martinez is a student at Fort Myers Technical College in Darlene Carrillo's classroom.

Rock Bottom

It took me reaching rock bottom before I truly felt change within myself. Currently prison is where I sit, but today I am more free than I have ever been. The chain of events that led me to be free from the slavery I once lived, has brought me to the turning point in my life. It was the end to a new beginning.

Starting with the people that were in my life, including my closest family; the ones that were suppose to protect and shelter me. They ended up taking every piece of virtue and innocence I had early in my childhood. Ripping my spirit from me and leaving me without a healthy life style.

Then the odds being against me, from the system to the falling economy, made it more challenging for me to cope in society with school, employment, and not having family or support system. Being so damaged I could not face every day life without running away from such problems. It caused me loss of work, education, relationships and freedom.

After all that it, I felt it took me to a place of no return. My addiction began turning me into an empty shell of self-medication. I used money, drugs, and sex to cope with life, until it took me to a place of emptiness and loss. I was alone and on the verge of ending all the pain and my life. Feeling I had nothing more to live for, I gave up on everything including my health and freedom.

Finally, here I sit in prison, a true blessing in disguise. I was taken into custody just before I was going to take my own life. This was my intervention which helped me to realize all I have been running from my entire life. Today I am no longer a victim or product of my environment. Taken out of my comfort zone has placed me in a position to see all I was blinded to.

As a result from all the unfortunate events of my life, I am finally free. Using the pain and suffering to my advantage, I'm creating tools to use to make better situations in the future. I'm learning coping skills to be a better person. Now knowing this wall was meant to happen just the way it did, I have been able to climb from under my rock and today the sun shines upon me.

Serina Hamilton is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Pensacola. She confesses to be a changed person. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class facilitated by ITA Tracey Adams and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

Last Chance With Love

To begin, I want to share with you my bittersweet experience with love. It caused an emotional trauma until I met someone who changed the course of my life.

First my bad experience began when, at only 15 years old, I felt love for the first time. At first, everything was beautiful. However, two years later everything changed drastically as betrayals and lies damaged our relationship. He got another woman pregnant while we were engaged. Disappointed, I broke up with him because he had completely overstepped the limit. I gave him all my love and my respect, but he didn't value it. Heartbroken, I decided to freeze my heart and never love again. Finally, I tried other relationships, but those didn't work either. That confirmed that men are all treacherous liars. As a result, I declared that love was not made for me.

The process to forget my first love was tough because we really loved each other. We already had a perfect plan for the future, but his unforgivable mistakes destroyed everything. I thought that without him my life was worthless. I even wanted to kill myself. My life was full of hate, depression, and bitterness.

When I finally met the special person in my life, it was a bit weird since we met by accident. In his eyes, there was a different transparency that I liked a lot. However, I was afraid of hurting my heart again. When we became friends, I told him clearly it was only as a friend. After a year of friendship, he asked me to be his girlfriend. I said no because I didn't feel ready to begin a new relationship. I had an empty heart. Nevertheless, he insisted and ask me for a chance to demonstrate that he is a different man. Although unconvinced, I said "Yes, but on one condition. No lies or betrayal and never play with my heart!" From there on, my life began to change. Daily, his goal was to make me laugh. He often surprised me with small gifts like a rose, a card or candy unexpectedly.

As result of his loving personality, he changed my heart in an important turning pointing in my life. His love made me regain confidence in love again. There are still good men in the world. Thank you, my love, for being the sweetness of my life.

After all, God restored my heart, healed my wounds and made me understand that forgiveness is necessary to start again. Life is worth much more than a man and there are will always be a light of hope at the end of the process.

Claudia Tzarax is an English student in Immokalee, Florida. She is happily married to her beloved husband, Rosemberg L. Her excellent teacher is Katie Mominee.

My Bravest Moment

Dauntless

My bravest moment was a moment of fear; fear for a person who was a complete stranger about to lose her life. She was held by her seat belt dangling in a burning car overturned on the road.

It was in the middle of January 2009 about 11.30 p.m. My son and I were traveling from Cleveland, Ohio, on our way home to Florida. We were traveling home after working in the north for three weeks. We always take highway 71 to 77, which is mostly a hilly terrain.

That night was distinct as it was snowing and there were also intervals of icy rain. We thought about stopping but decided to keep going until we passed through the bad weather. The visibility had deteriorated; although it had stopped snowing, it was still raining ice and was foggy. We had just crossed over the state line from West Virginia into Virginia, and started to go over a grade that was about a mile long when I could see the other vehicles coming down the hill heading in the opposite direction.

Suddenly, a car came across from the oncoming traffic to my side of the road. I had to stop to avoid being hit. The car continued to come across, fell into a ditch, turned over and rested on its roof. I got out of my car and ran to the other vehicle where I saw a lady dangling upside down trapped by her seat belt. By that time, there was dust and smoke all over, and I was frantically trying to get the lady out. I had to cut her seatbelt and, as a result, she fell on the roof of the car. Then I took her to safety with the help of my son. After I got her out of the car, I noticed there was another man standing around all the time just looking and not helping which I thought was strange.

The paramedic came and took over so I had a chance to ask the man who was standing and looking why he did not help; he said he did not want to be sued if something had happened to the lady while he was trying to help.

I thought about what he had said for about a minute and remembered stories I had heard, so I decided to leave without giving our names or taking the name of the lady. You could say I got scared or I was smart; I am not sure which it was but that was “My Bravest Moment.”

Arthur Coore is an ABE Language student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. He attended school in his home country of Jamaica. Is married, has 5 sons and 1 daughter. Arthur has been repairing cars for 35 years. His goal is to get his GED and start college to study Automotive Engineering. His teacher is Silvia Giovanardi.

The Egyptian Revolution

In Egypt, the 25th of January is a national holiday celebrating the police forces. In 2011, the Egyptian political activists called for protests about poverty, bad economic conditions, and police brutality on the same day. The calls for protests started in the social media like Facebook and Twitter. Millions of protesters filled streets and main squares. The police used excessive force to disperse the protest. They used tear gas, bombs, and fired guns which resulted in over 800 killed and thousands injured.

I have good and bad memories during these days. In the first day of protests, I was at home watching the news to understand what was happening in the street. My daughter was at her grandfather's house. He happened to live next door to a local police station. She called me screaming, “Dad help us please! I can't breathe.” There were some angry protesters trying to break into the station. The police responded by firing tear gas and rubber bullets. The tear gas was causing my daughter to have difficulty breathing. After I hung up with her, I rushed to my car to get her home. On my way, I saw that the street was full of protesters demanding justice and freedom for all. When I reached my father-in-law's building, I found a lot of empty gas canisters and bullet cartridges. Security forces had left the place, and the protesters took over the police station and were protecting civilians. Fortunately, my daughter was safe, and I took her back my home.

At the end of the day, the police lost the battle and the country was left with no police. Egyptians took responsibility to maintain security of their own country. My neighbors and I took security

shifts to secure our families and homes. Although it was terrifying at that moment, I'm proud that I helped keep my family and my country safe. It also was an opportunity to meet my neighbors and spend time with them. Finally, the dream came true with electing a president in a free election.

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

My Bravest Moment

My bravest moment is getting my GED. One reason why I'm brave is because it took me a very long time to make up my mind to go to class to achieve my GED because I felt I wasn't ready to take it.

Now, I'm ready to go to class and work on getting my GED. I feel like I accomplished something that I really need to get in my life. Really, to tell you the truth, I'm very happy that I made the right move to accomplish what I need.

The good thing about getting my GED is getting a good job. I believe a GED can take you a long way in life. A lot of people don't know that a GED can take you places that you have not ever been and that's why I decided to go get my GED.

There's one other thing. I didn't finish high school. I tried to go back to school but it was too hard for me because I had a baby at the age of 17 to take care of. So my mother told me it is better that I drop out of high school for now because my mother was afraid that the girls might push me down the hallway stairs to make me lose my baby.

Well, I felt in my heart that my mother was right about me dropping out of high school. I decided to get my GED because now my children are grown. So now I can do me! I can achieve my GED. I'm proud that I took that one step to get my GED. It is my bravest moment.

Adrian Anderson is a student at Adult and Community Education. She loves to write books about herself. She also loves science as well.

My Bravest Moment

My bravest moment was when I left my mother's house in 1963; I was 22 years old. In those days, leaving home without being married was not the norm. My mother cried and said to me, "You are going to Kingston to mess up yourself." She did not want me to leave my home town in the countryside of Mount James, Jamaica to live in Kingston, Jamaica– the big city, all by myself. I replied, "Don't worry about me, everything will be alright."

I lived in Kingston for 11 years, where I worked as a babysitter, a domestic assistant and finally as a ward assistant in a rehabilitation center. In 1972, I got married and two years later, I immigrated to Miami, Florida. This is where I learned to drive and bought my first car, a 1979 Chevy Malibu.

Being brave is very simple. If you try and keep trying, you will get what you want. But, you must never give up trying! That is the only way to get better. If you step out from fear and step in faith, believing that you can do what you set out to do, and being who you want to be, then you will succeed.

Mrs. Morgan lives in Miami, Florida and in December, 2017 she completed one year in Project L.E.A.D. Mrs. Morgan is retired and enjoys volunteering at her church.

THE BRAVEST MOMENT

It's a great pleasure and great honor for me to tell you my personal story that I consider the bravest moment of my life: The earthquake of January 12, 2010 in Haiti.

I was in the hotel, which is located in Petion Ville, with a friend. We were having dinner when we heard a loud noise. At first, I thought it was an explosion that came from the kitchens, and then I realized it was an earthquake. I immediately went out into the yard and lay down on the floor.

There were sixty interminable seconds when I felt that it would not only never finish, but that the ground could open. It's

enormous. One has the feeling that the earth becomes a sheet of paper. There's no more density, you don't feel anything, and the ground is totally soft. After we got up, we said we had to get away from the hotel, which is a tall building. Two or three minutes later, we started to hear screams near the hotel, where there was huge damage. There were small buildings in the yard where people lived year-around; all were collapsed. There were 25 deaths. I got up to start helping people. An enormous silence fell on the city.

I saw people running around, covered in dust, missing feet, hands, or other serious injuries as their homes collapsed with people inside.

I saw a refugee camp, as we see on TV, people who pray, alive but not really. I saw a baby half dead, covered with plasters. I saw more than thousands of people on the ground. There were dead everywhere in the streets and on the sidewalks. It was really sad and shocking.

I saw fathers and mothers looking at their sons and daughters who are suffering, but they could not do anything. I saw the oldest and most beautiful house reduced to nothing, I saw students from my university, people I knew lying down on the ground.

I learned the deaths of people, relatives or friends every minute or hour. Banks closed, schools, universities too...it makes you crazy. You become paranoid, you can no longer go into darkness alone, you cry for no reason. You can hear the voice of your shadow, as in horror movies. The more time passes, the more I have to get used to the fact this reality will not change. It's not a dream. You cannot think the same way as before, you're not allowed to have the same priorities as before. Now you know what really matters in life. Love your brother more than anything else, have the people you love near you, or just to be alive, to be able to eat, sleep. All else is vanity.

I don't really know if this is the bravest moment of my life, but I know it's my personal story.

Charles Herbert is a student in Teri Buckler's and Sharon Ring's class at South Tech Academy.

A Childhood Cannot Be Returned

This is my story. I got married in Guatemala at 16 years ago. My first baby was born in 2002. My husband and I decided to come to the United States. My husband came first, and one year later I came, but I left my baby with my parents. It was the worst decision I have made. It took 15 days to come to this country crossing Mexico's border. Two weeks later, I started missing him.

Every day I cried and cried. Then I started to work hard and I thought it might help to distract my mind, but it wasn't like that. God had a different plan for me. One day during my job as a cashier at a check-cashing store, I was working alone. Two men came in that I believe were regular customers. I asked one of them, "How can I help you?" The guy didn't say anything. He just ran to me, and he told me, "Don't say anything. This is a stick-up!" Oh my God! I stayed in shock for four hours, but at the moment, I didn't feel afraid. I just prayed and prayed. I had \$20,000 in the trashcan. The guys didn't find the money because I didn't tell them. They just took the money which was in the register. It was around \$3,000.

The officer who was on my case asked me if I was legally in this country. Of course, I wasn't. He told me that I could apply for a "U" visa. Then, I started looking for a lawyer who would take my case. I applied and got my legal documents. After that, I applied for my son's visa. Two years later, my son arrived. Oh my God! It was amazing for me.

When he came to me he was eight years old, and I left him when he was a baby. I realized all the things I had lost. All his childhood, I had lost. I didn't see when he started to pronounce his first words or when he started school. It was so hard for me. That's why I say, "childhood cannot be returned." It was a hard decision leaving my son in my country. However, I am pleased with the outcome because my son had the opportunity to come to this country legally and not across the border as I came. Now my son is fifteen years old and he is very happy studying in this country. It was a pleasure to share my experience with you.

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

MY BRAVEST MOMENT

I had spent nights with my eyes wide open thinking about a way out. A way out that would help me with my needs. The only option that I had was to emigrate to the United States of America. The hardest moment came when I had to tell my parents the decision that I had made.

Once I made up my mind to leave I to tell my mom and dad. I could see in their faces the immense sadness. I smiled and gave them a huge hug as I said, "I will be fine." My heart was broken into pieces.

The adventure had begun even though I had never been to far from home. I had only had one place in mind, but the path would not be easy. I traveled hundreds of miles on bus. Afterwards I cross the Rio Bravo, the border wall, and finally walked through the fiery wild desert. Crossing the desert, I suffered hunger, thirst, and cold nights.

After all those experiences I reached my destination to start a dream that goes on and on...

Jesus Montejo Hernandez is a student at Jupiter Community High School,- ESOL- Adult & Community Education. His teacher is Dielma Eusebio

My Bravest Moment

Five months ago, I left my family and moved to United States of America to live with an American family. I was able to accomplish this through an exchange program which facilitates learning English. I have always dreamed of traveling. My family has been of great support and their support helped me to carry out my dreams. Specially my mom. She's a great mother and I can't remember a day in my life in which she has not been part of my life. My boyfriend of seven years, has also supported me in my decision making.

Leaving my mom and my boyfriend was not easy. My mom's name is Monica she is my best friend. We love to go out to the

mall, beach, restaurants, and exchanging our thoughts and ideas. Although culinary arts are not her best facet, she does her best to prepare all of my favorite meals. She always finds time for me. My boyfriend, Petrious is an amazing man. For the past seven years, I have lived spending my weekends with him. These weekends have been the most loving, adventurous, romantic, and fulfilling that any women would have life to have enjoyed. A simple movie with him makes my day happy. His hugs provide the best refuge for me. He is my best half I have never felt lonely. However, the adventurous side of me decided to leave them for one year and a half in order to have a better and brighter future when I return to Brazil.

When I chose my exchange program one of the things that worried about was the fact I would be living with an American family. The idea of interacting with a family of a different culture scared me. My family and friends all shared stories about Americans. These stories were totally different than my Brazilian culture. They would tell me, "They don't eat the same food as we do. Especially for breakfast and lunch." I'm not used to eating bacon for breakfast and sandwich for lunch, I like fruit and bread for breakfast and rice, meat and beans for lunch and dinner. I also heard the Americans are not warm people, Brazilians loves hugs and stay together. I decided to be open minded for a new culture, custom and language.

Americans speak a different language it is not easy, sometimes the words just fade away from my brain and I am not able to express myself clearly. A simple order from a restaurant menu or engaging in a conversation with natives is not easy for me.

Leaving my family to go live with a family of a different culture and custom in a foreign country which the native language is different than mine, has made my bravest moment. My bravest moment began five months ago, when I boarded the airplane. However, I believe this will be a good experience for me. Learning a new language and living in a different and beautiful country is a great experience.

Ludmyla Fernandis is a student at Jupiter Community High School,- ESOL- Adult & Community Education. Her teacher is Dielma Eusebio.

My Bravest Moment

Being brave means that one is ready to face and endure danger or pain. It also requires a lot of courage. I think that one of the bravest moments of my life was when I had to make the decision to leave my home country and move to the United States. This meant leaving my three kids and husband behind. June 14, 2000, was a day that I will never forget.

I arrived scared, with two bags, a broken heart. I had no clue what I was going to face in an unknown country, with a new language, nor how I was going to try to accomplish my biggest goal so far. I must admit, it was not easy as I had left behind a successful and wonderful life. As months went by, so did the holidays that were not spent with my family. It was depressing and extremely hard to deal with. I looked for many jobs until I found a babysitting job during the week, and a weekend job in a furniture store warehouse. After months of paperwork, I was able to obtain my political asylum on August 13, 2001.

Finally, after twenty very long months apart, my kids and husband were able to join me in this wonderful country on February 22, 2002. This was by far one of the happiest moments in my life. I couldn't believe they were with me. One of my biggest goals - legally bringing my family to the US with me - had been met. When we were apart, I only had the opportunity to communicate via phone on a daily basis, and send some letters. Back then, there weren't as many outlets for communications as we have now. When I picked up my kids, I was so surprised at how big they were! We gave each other a very long and tight hug as a family and cried tears of joy.

From that moment on, we began a new chapter in this country with goals and new ideas in mind. My kids learned English quickly and I watched them grow into mature and successful adults. This has been my greatest reward from the pain I endured during those twenty months. The hard work was worth it in the end. I thank this wonderful country today for protecting us and allowing us to succeed as a family. When you want to be successful in life, you have to be able to be brave and endure the pain through the hard moments. It will be one of the best decisions in your life.

Maria Gama is a student in Palm Beach county. Her teacher is Sereatha Beamon-Steward.

My Bravest Moment

I decided to move to Jupiter, Florida after Hurricane Maria destroyed most of my island, Puerto Rico on September 20, 2017. It was a category 4 storm!

After the hurricane, I began to feel very sad. Perhaps the words that best describe my emotions are depressed, lost, and lonely.

Two months after settling into my new home with my daughter Delancey, I registered at Jupiter Community High School in an effort to improve my English and begin a new life with Delancey. Deep inside my heart I felt lonely. I miss my husband. I also miss what I considered to be my life in Ciales, Puerto Rico my native country. Angel my husband is my only support and the engine to my life. Angel keeps me going. I have some family members here in Jupiter who were kind enough to open their hearts and homes in order to assist me and Delancey, but I feel broken.

My goal is to perfect my English, to get my certification of Expanded Functions Dental Assisting, in an attempt to find continuity to what was my previous life in Puerto Rico. I decided to study and renew my Dental Assistance certification here in the states because that has been my profession for the last six years in Puerto Rico. I love my profession; it is my passion.

My purpose is to get my certification to pursue my passion in oral health.

Marisela Genera is a student at Jupiter Community High School. Her teacher is Dielma Eusebio.

The Fantastic Twins

I got married to a man from a different country than my own. We went to live in his country. One month later, I got pregnant. At the beginning, when I realized I was pregnant, I felt happy. However, when I made my first sonogram, and the doctor said, "I hear two hearts; let me hear if there are more!" In months of

pregnancy, I felt very sick, but later I started feeling better. The last month my belly grew so big; I barely could walk. I gave birth by cesarean because one of my babies wasn't the right position to be born. But finally, all went well. It was a crazy time when they were babies because both of them cried at the same time, and ate at the same time. They wanted to do almost everything at the same time. It wasn't good for me because I am just one. When my twins were one-year-old, my husband had to go to war for seven months. After that he had to be deployed at least two more times. I felt alone in a foreign country without my husband, and my family.

One of the unforgettable episodes was when they were eight years old, one of them was very ill. He got pneumonia. He had to stay in the hospital for two weeks. I had to live practically in a hospital with him. Meanwhile, my husband took care of the other twin. Now, when I remember all the hard things I went through, I realize mothers are very brave. Being the mother of twins is a challenge, but is gratifying at the same time. Now they are ten years old. They are happy and very active boys. They love to have fun. They are more independent each day. When I pray, I ask God for wisdom to raise my kids in this world that unfortunately is less kind each day. I love my life with my boys; they are my world. I think I am a very special woman because not all women have the privilege of being the mother of twins. I don't know if I have done a good job as mother so far, but the only thing I am sure of is despite my mistakes, I have given, and I will give the best of me to them until my last breath.

Erica Padilla is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Goals and Ambitions

To Make a Dream Come True

As a human, from a baby to a kid and from a kid to an adult, everybody has a determination and goal for life--to make a dream come true. Some people have many goals but they do not have the ambition to go for it and accomplish them.

Since 2000, I have had a lot of goals. Some are coming true already, but I still have a lot to go for. I am no longer worried about getting married, and having kids or making a new family. These are some of the big goals I already accomplished in the past few years. That does not mean I'm done.

Before the end of the year, I have the ambition to get my ESOL diploma. At the same time, I really need my GED diploma, to get a better job so I can buy a new house. I would like to have more income so I can help my country and help my community construct a big church. I pray to God to give me strength not to get sick, to take care of my family, and to accomplish my ambitions and goals.

Sometimes the world feels so unfair. A lot of people accomplish their goals fast because they have money and relationships. Some are not able to because they don't have money and relationships; instead, they work more and it takes more time for them to accomplish their goals. I pray to God every day to help me accomplish my goals and to help my dreams come true.

Ange Lucie Collot is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Marisela or the Possible Venezuela

“Up, Marisela! The water in the well is fresh. It was cooled by the stars that were spending all night on the curb. There are still some in the background. Come on Remove them with the

pitcher and pour them on top. They will leave you clean, as they always are.”

- Rómulo Gallegos

Marisela is a character from the novel *Doña Bárbara* by the award-winning Venezuelan writer Rómulo Gallegos. She is a humble girl born in the rural flat lands of Venezuela, totally illiterate, uncouth and sweet at the same time, who discovers her beauty by seeing her face reflected in the puddle where she washes her face for the first time.

The character’s magic is precisely its transformation. Marisela is a diamond in the rough that must be carved in order to dazzle with her hidden beauty. Venezuela looks a lot like Marisela.

In Latin America, there have been several cases of popular revolutions that, with the aim of achieving economic independence from the country with respect to foreign monopolies, have implemented failed economic models. The last of these is the well-known Bolivarian Revolution of Venezuela.

We Venezuelans could have avoided such a destiny. In 1998, a platform of Venezuelans without political affiliation, based on their successful management as a regional government, offered the country a third option against the worn-out national governments and the uncertain revolution promoted by a former military man who had attempted a coup d’état. They called themselves PROYECTO VENEZUELA to imply that the Possible Venezuela was achievable.

They travelled the entire country organizing Tupperware-type meetings to share the successes of their regional management. The facilitators of the meetings had only a VCR and a videotape that documented the social programs that had returned the joy to their state. The tape remained at the place of the meetings and, thus, the meetings grew exponentially.

Inspired by Martin Luther King Jr’s speech, *I Have a Dream*, the leader of PROYECTO VENEZUELA asked a renowned singer to compose the anthem for the campaign. “I have a dream, a beautiful dream, I want to see my country happy again,” which ended up becoming his central electoral offer: “Give back the joy

to Venezuela.” The same singer also composed the musical theme “Marisela” for the campaign, in which he made an analogy of Marisela from Gallegos to the Possible Venezuela.

PROYECTO VENEZUELA reached second place in the elections of 1998. We Venezuelans took the wrong path that year, but the underlying vision continues in the collective memory that there is a Possible Venezuela and, like Marisela, we will soon discover it.

The American Dream has its replica in this South American country that was once the receiving land of thousands of immigrants who came to it with the hope of a better future for their families. We call it the Possible Venezuela.

Abdón Vivas O'Connor was born in Venezuela in 1960. He worked as an Electrical Engineer and Real Estate Developer in his country, as well as a fighter for civil rights and democracy. He relocated to Orlando in July 2017 and studies English with Teege Braune at the Adult Literacy League.

Pursuing My Dreams

I was born in Colombia, and I consider myself a responsible, persevering, generous, righteous, and independent woman. I have been a physician for 5 years. When I started my career, I did my practice year in the Army in the emergency room. It was a difficult year because my family was living far away, so I had to do everything alone. I think that was the hardest part, but I learned to value smaller things that my parents did for me. When I finished my practice year, I came back home, and I continued working with the Army. I started working in a cardiology hospital and that was the most fabulous experience in my life.

Working there, I understood that it was the specialization that I wanted. I had to save money. In my country, it is difficult to do a specialization, so I was looking in some other countries. I have friends living in Germany. They are doing their specialization, and I got very good references. The most important thing was that the country paid them during their schooling, so my husband and I started to search for a university to accept a transfer to Germany for him. Unfortunately, we could not accomplish it.

The second option was to study in the U.S. I have to be honest, I really didn't like this option because, I didn't enjoy learning the English language, but I didn't want to live far away from my husband. Therefore, I made the decision to live in the United States.

I have been living in the U.S for a year. The first months I was scared because my English was very bad, and I never liked it. I thought that English was my biggest obstacle. I felt that I had taken the wrong path. I suffered, cried, got depressed, missed my job, and my family. However, it was a step that all immigrants have to live, but it is important to understand two things. The first is that you can be pessimistic and cry all the time, regret your decision, and think that you might not be able to accomplish things. The second is to be optimistic, understand, accept, face your fears, and fight to achieve your dreams. This last decision was the option that I decided to take.

For the time being, I am studying at the AEC in Level 7. I am going to start my validation process in three months. I am excited because I know it is a long and hard process, but I only ask God for life, health, patience, and perseverance to reach my dreams and the opportunity to continue my life with my husband and family.

Adriana Salcedo is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Level 7 class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Must Be Fluent in English

My main objective and ambition is to be able to speak English in a clearer and more fluid way. The reason is that it will give me new opportunities for new positions when I return to my country. I am a commander in the Peruvian Navy, and I need to be in contact with other people in the world. I need to ascend to other levels and relate to other countries. Being able to communicate in English will open the doors for me to have other commissions and be able to converse better. Learning English fluently at age 45 is not easy but that is my main focus. For the sake of my profession and my family, I will continue this mission until I achieve it. I believe that nothing is impossi-

ble. When I return to my country, I hope that I have improved my English and I can speak it very well.

Alejandro Carnero studies English at Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Laugh To Be Happy

The day of our arrival in this world, my first expression was to cry. However, I felt that is not the purpose of my new life. I asked myself, “Is this true?” With growth we are experiencing different feelings and shaping our characters. Some choose to be unhappy, selfish, depressed, while others are successful. Overall, we are obsessive to something. In short, there are many feelings to describe.

One day while sitting in one place, I watched every person and every gesture take place. I was waiting in a doctor’s office and watched people come and go with many concerns. Many of them had lists of medications they took. Some received unpleasant news. Even though this is difficult to deal with, we know that life goes on. During that occasion, I decided to break chains and try to be happy despite the problems of life. I preferred to turn my worries into jokes and take care of myself while eliminating personal stress. It was a bit difficult to change my attitude. However, it has always been said that laughter is the best medicine in the human body. “Laugh out loud” is the statement that comes to mind. They say this has many benefits for our health, and I want to believe it 100%. I want to believe laughter is the best therapy.

To be happy, you have to discard friends and toxic people from your life. You must feed on good things. So I said to myself, “What do I need?”

*A funny friend

*A friend where laughing together is funnier than any joke alone

*A sometimes silly and clumsy friend

*A friend who celebrates everything and does not regret any thing

These are four types of friends you can find within yourself.

How do you know? When you begin to laugh at yourself, you will be ready to LAUGH TO BE HAPPY. People say life is short but not as short as your paycheck. If you smiled with this phrase, then I managed to finish my story.

The author is an adult English language learner that attends class at Royal Palm Beach Community High School. Her teachers are Sereatha Beamon-Steward and Bozena Lack-Barkley.

Helping People Who Are Less Fortunate

I may say I am more fortunate than other people are. This is because when I came to this wonderful country, U.S.A., I was able to work and earn enough money to help people less fortunate. Growing up, my family was very poor. We had no shoes, one or two dresses, and very little to eat. Because of that poor background, I started doing what I am doing now.

First, I have been helping children in Uganda orphaned due to war or HIV/AIDS. I pay for their education, accommodations, food and clothing. Education has been my goal. It will help these children have a better future. In 1996, I started with 24 students, most of whom are now grown up and working with their own families. However, I still have eight more students in school.

Secondly, I have been helping build a church “Safe Haven” for the community in Apala, which is in northern Uganda. The church feeds and provides shelter for refugees and homeless people, both local and from countries like south Sudan, Congo, etc. Recently, many refugees arrived from Juba in southern Sudan where there is ongoing civil war. At church, we have several meetings that we can attend including adult education, hospitality, worshiping, weddings, and community services. There are three schools affiliated with the church and that is where my students attend classes.

Thirdly, I have been volunteering at different levels in my community here in Florida, such as at my children’s schools, assisted living facilities, homeless shelters and at my church. The activities include organizing, preparing and serving meals. Sometimes, I just accompany lonely elderly people at their homes.

In conclusion, I would like to mention that I would continue helping those in need, for example I just signed up to volunteer at the Pasco County Fair for the first time to encourage others to learn English. My ambition will not end here; I intend to help HIV/AIDS, Cancer etc. patients both young and old, as well as victims of the war turned countries.

Betty Akoli is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center located in Dade City, Florida. She was born in Lira, Uganda. She went to the University of Habana and have a degree in Pharmacy. In 1999, She came to Wesley Chapel from Miami, FL.

To Be Successful in Life

To be successful in life, you need to study. Growing up, my parents never talked to me about the importance of studying. I always had the desire that my daughter would become a professional in the health area. During my pregnancy with my daughter, I touched my belly and spoke about the future, and called her my "Little Doctor."

When she was born, I continued to call her my little doctor. I decided to guide her with life and talk about how important it is to become a professional. As she was growing up, she always asked me for a doctor's kit so she could play with her cousins.

After high school, she chose to go the University of South Florida for her studies in nursing. Therefore, I realized that everything I had done worked; this was my goal. She wanted to be a professional. She loves what she is doing and is very successful as a nurse in Tampa General Intensive Care.

Flor Isaza was born in Pereira, Colombia in 1954 of August. In 1989, she came to the United States. She is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL class at James Irvin Education Center located in Dade City, Florida.

Putting My Best Foot Forward

My name is Gertha Louis. I'm a student in Level 5 at Village Readers. My main goal is putting my best foot forward to begin something in my life. However, my short-term goals are to improve my English, especially speaking and writing correctly so that I can move up to the GED class to get my GED certificate.

My ambitions are to learn and speak English fluently. I would like to go to college some day. I also want to become an elementary school teacher. I used to do this already in my home country, but here I need to start again from the beginning. Maybe I will need to start out as a substitute teacher. This will also help me work in better places and increase my income. Now, I still come to English class every night. I'm trying to keep my eye on the ball to achieve my ambition, because my final goal is to teach children at an elementary school.

Teaching is my preferred subject because I love working with the kids so much. I would like to see the kids every day and then help them to do their school work.

Gertha Louis is from a big family in Haiti with two sisters and three brothers. She is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Striving for my Goals

In life you should have goals and ambitions if you want to succeed. My goals and ambitions include learning English, becoming a nurse in the USA, and having a family.

When I first came to the USA, I could not understand when someone spoke to me. I had decided then to concentrate on learning English. To do this, I followed many steps. First, I bought a lot of English books with CDs and started listening to music and watching TV. I tried to read English books even if sometimes I did not understand them. I made new friends who spoke only English and I stopped speaking my native language. At home I would speak English with my husband, since he speaks it well.

I was a nurse in my country of Haiti. When I came over to the USA, I would continue my education as a nurse. I consulted with the Board of Nursing and they told me to improve my English and then take the Toelf test to prove my proficiency in English. Next, I will register for the nursing test, take and pass the test, and then get my license. Finally, I will volunteer as a nurse at a hospital or clinic to get some nursing experience for a future job.

After establishing my nursing career, I would like to have two children, a big house, a new car, and spend time with my family by planning vacations together to other countries. I also want to save money for my retirement.

In conclusion, my goals and ambitions are to study English, be a nurse in the USA, and plan my future with my family. I will strive to reach my goals - God willing.

Jeanne E. Sanon is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

My Best Life Ahead

My main goal is to achieve my GED so I could either become a fireman or join the military. I'm not exactly sure which career I'm going to do yet, but those are my future goals and ambitions. I'm 21 now, and I really need to earn my GED, so I can move on and accomplish my goals and ambitions. I'm currently unemployed and without a high school diploma, you can get a job, but not always the best career. I aim to do better things in my life, and having my education will get me started. I have a lot to prove to myself, and I won't give up on it. I know it's very important.

I've never seemed to like school work, and I believe that had a lot to do with me failing to graduate high school. Having self-confidence is something I struggle with all the time, but earning a GED might help to build my confidence. Having a reason to live, goals and ambitions are very similar. Without both, you won't be as happy as you want. I get discouraged; I want an easy way out, but there isn't one. I'm going to have to work harder than ever to get my GED and succeed in life. I strongly believe

that once I graduate, I will dedicate my life to my work and earn enough money to help my family and provide for myself.

I get the most enjoyment in my life when I'm helping people when they really need it the most. That is why I believe that I can make a career out of being a firefighter. I can do anything I really want to do, and this career is something I really see myself doing after graduating. I have a strong mind and body, so I believe that I could succeed in this career choice. A GED is now the only thing I need to graduate and begin this exciting new life. I'm not trying to be a famous superhero, although I've always dreamed of saving people. I would love to do my part and join the firefighters in saving people in danger.

On the other hand, I'm also seriously considering joining the military, despite how dangerous this ambition is right now. I'm not afraid and I believe that fighting for the United States of America would turn my life around for the better. I've been talking to active and retired veterans from different branches of the military and I've set the Marines as my first choice of branch to serve.

To sum it all up, both of my future career choices will give me the chance I deserve to live my best life. So, whether I end up fighting fires or enemies of my country, I look forward to my future.

This anonymous writer is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His instructor is Rhonda Currier.

My Goal and Ambition

My name is Janett Allen. I was born in Jamaica about 40 years ago. My family, including my mother, father, brother, and sister were happy, and life was good until my father died when I was eleven. My life changed from happiness to struggling for survival, and eventually to one of hope for a future as a nurse in the United States. My father's death caused my sister and me to drop out of school and start jobs to help my mother pay our bills. The struggle to survive prevented us from completing our education in Jamaica.

In 1995, my mother met an American citizen who was vacationing in Jamaica. They fell in love and married the next year. My mother moved to the U.S. while my sister and I stayed in Jamaica with other family. My mother began saving money so my sister and I would be able to relocate to the United States. I began to see a light at the end of the tunnel of my dream to become a nurse.

In 2015, my dream started to become a reality because I was finally able to join my mother and sister in the United States. March 2016, I enrolled in the East Area Adult School to prepare to take my GED, which is key to opening a door for me to continue studying to become a nurse and make my dream a reality.

Obtaining a GED is a significant milestone in my pursuit to become a nurse and I am working hard to achieve that goal by the end of next year. By the grace of God and help from my teachers and friends, I will be successful. Eventually in 2020, I plan to enroll in college to start my career to become a nurse. This would take me about three years. In 2024, I definitely will be employed in a hospital.

Hooray! Hooray! I will start a career that I could not even pay for in my birth country.

Janett Allen is a student at East Area Adult School, Auburndale, FL, Polk County Schools. She attends the Lake Wales ABE/GED class. Her teachers, Mrs. Carlisle, Mrs. B. Smith, Mr. Barney Lopez, and Mr. Duprey, have all made a great impact on her life. She loves learning.

Nursing is my Life

I have set many different goals in my life. Some more important than others, but that are ultimately personal goals which distinguish us from the people around us.

My lifetime goal has always been to become a nurse practitioner. Ever since I was eighteen, I have worked in the healthcare field; for five years I have been working with wonderful registered nurses at a nursing facilities for Alzheimer patients. I have

also have been providing care for patients at their own private homes.

I love working in the medical field because I'm very compassionate and love providing health care to others. I would like to further my education in order to earn a degree in nursing, work as a registered nurse, and eventually get a master's degree as a nurse practitioner.

Working with registered nurses and taking on the task of helping patients with ambulation, change of incontinent patients, checking vital signs, and assisting with daily living made me feel very proud of myself. It also definitely inspires me to further my education to become a nurse practitioner, because I am convinced that it is my calling. I would love to experience this same exact feeling each and every day, and know that I am helping someone in need.

I would like to have a job where people look up to me as a professional in my field, where I feel intellectually and emotionally challenged, and that allows me to be there when people need a hug or someone to dry their tears. My desire is that people under my care know above all that I am their friend.

These are just some of the reasons that have attracted me to the nursing profession, and I hope that those reading this essay feel inspired to join this wonderful nursing career.

Eltha Jorcilien is an ABE Language student at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach. She has a passion for nursing and works hard to reach her goal. Her teacher is Silvia Giovanardi.

My Goals and My Ambitions

I am so happy to have the opportunity to write about my goals and my ambitions. My goal is to continue to learn more English. I want to speak more English because I want to earn my G.E.D and go to college. My ambition is to be a nurse and make a lot of money. I need to buy a house, car, and make my family happy.

I remember being eleven years old, and my parents bought me a nurse set with things like a stethoscope. I want to be a nurse

and work with young children. I want to help them when they feel sick.

I know it will be difficult because it will not be easy seeing people sick or having a hard time. My patients will be important, and I will spend time with them.

I hope that I can meet this goal in about ten years. I feel happy to be learning the English language. It is good for me. I feel excited to be able to have an opportunity to work and help pay for the things my family needs.

Lissa is a student in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Sarah Fairchild Place.

An Unexpected Vocation

I came from an educated family in Medellin, Colombia. I worked many years in a big farm of cows, bulls, fish and coffee. Every day my life was a challenge. When I became pregnant with my son, I stopped working and I stayed home as a housewife. Since then, my son has been my biggest priority in life. When my son turned three years old, I began to work part-time as a waitress at an elderly club. That was a different experience for me.

When I finally moved to United States, I tried looking for a job pertaining to my college background but wasn't successful. One of the jobs I applied for was at a veterinarian's office but I wasn't qualified because I lacked the experience. Finally, I was able to find a job at a factory working in the labeling department. After I worked there for a year and a half, I decided to go to school.

After doubting myself and other people that I could become a certified nurse assistant, I gave it a try and went to school. Never say "no." I passed my test after a lot of studying and hard work. After two months I was able to find employment thanks to a very nice director of nursing that I had the opportunity to meet.

On my first day of working as a CNA, I was scared because I didn't know how things would turn out. It turned out to be so sad seeing how my trainer treated a few of the residents. In-

stead of getting discouraged, I was inspired by this situation to be compassionate, respectful and loving to my residents. I have now been a CNA for nine years and have been blessed with an unexpected vocation because I love my job and my peers. I am really passionate about what I do and love making a difference. It is so rewarding to receive so much love and happiness from my residents every day of my life while at the same time being able to make a living to support my family.

Maria is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.

Fight to Have Something You Want

I was born in big family of nine children. My older sister was a dressmaker, and early on I helped her often to design dresses. When I was eight years old, I felt my sister focused on the thing I did. I tried to show her and others in my house my talent.

We lived in a large house with a big yard with a special place built for parties. For each of our birthdays, there was a party, but the size of the party depended how each of us worked at school. It was a challenge to work better. If your work was excellent, you would have a big party.

One year, a week before we were to have a party, I asked my sister, "What do you think of decorating the place of the party?" She said, "Good idea - you can show our guests who's Malaine." They call me Malaine. I said, "I will show them my talent."

It was wonderful. Everyone, including my parents, was surprised; I was only ten years old. After that, I continued to decorate the party room with table and window coverings. I thought of becoming a stylist. Friends of my parents and my sister asked me to design the decorations for their weddings, churches, parties, etc. My sister bought a dressmaker machine for me.

Every day after school, after my homework was done, the only thing I did was prepare the decorations using tissue paper or other materials for ornaments. To make decorations I needed to go out and visit the place where the party would be, but how could I do that? My father said, "No and no, you are too young to go out by yourself." He stopped me. My friends and my parents loved my

designs. My father loved it too, but he didn't want me to go out.

I gave up, but decorations stay and sleep in my life. Although I have other certificates, I never feel the same way as when I worked as a designer. For this reason, I say never quit on your dreams.

Marie Couloute is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Ambitions

My name is Mary Lyles. Most people think that I should be settled in my life, but I'm not. I still have strong ambitions to do lots of things in my life. First of all, I would like to become even stronger in Christ. One way to do that is reading the word of God. Another way is visiting the sick and visiting those in nursing homes who don't have family to visit them.

I also would like to meet someone who I can share my life with and my love for the Lord. Someone to share my ambitions with for the rest of my life. I have the desire to travel more also and to spend time with my family and friends.

Because my mother wasn't able to go to school because she had to raise her children, I was determined to go to school. I did go but I would also like to further my education because it helps tell every child that they can do it. My greatgran was so happy about me going to school. My ambitions are not much but they are mine.

Mary Lyles is a student at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. Her tutor is Amy Durand.

Determination and Effort

We plan and set goals in our lives. With me it is not different. I have some goals and ambitions. They include: to speak English, to go to a University, and to get a professional career.

My first goal is to speak English well. In this country it is very important to be able to learn English. For example, to be able to solve your own problems by yourself, to have good communication with people, and to be able to go to college and get a good job.

My second goal after learning English is to go to a university. This is my dream to be a civil engineer. I choose this profession because I love and have skills in mathematics and everything involving calculations.

My ambition is to have a professional career and be a good professional through my dedication and effort. I know that for this I need to overcome some obstacles and challenges. I need to have determination and develop a plan.

To conclude, my most important goals and ambitions are to speak English and to go to a university. With this in mind, I am trying to reach my goals every day. All that we conquer in life is with effort and determination.

Paula Cristina Lima Costa Martins is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Small Goals Lead to Lifelong Goals

January is the start of a new year. However, it is also the moment to set your goals in order to accomplish them. I had not thought about the importance of setting my goals until this year and the impact of planning them out early in the year. As if the goals were the laid out directions of where I plan to go with my life. I definitely became more mature in 2017. Wow! I now see my goals and ambitions as the engine that keeps me going and never allows me to give up.

One of my goals is to finish my English classes with high qualifications. In my heart, I believe I have what it takes to one day pass on to others what I am learning today. I see myself as an educator. I have a dream to teach what I have learned to those who do not know how to speak English.

Another one of my goals is to become an architect. That is my lifelong dream. I may have had to take a detour by having to take an English class. However, I know in my soul that I will accomplish my dream of becoming an architect.

The greatest ambition that I have longed for since I was a child is to make a lot of money. Of course! I feel a need to help people that are less fortunate. There are people that could not finish their goals because they did not have enough money. So that is why I would like to be there for them.

As a young man, I did not think about the future, even if I had dreams that I wanted to accomplish. I now know that in order to make dreams come true, I must visualize them. I must see myself in the future and visualize my goals. It is important to see my goals accomplished. I live day by day to the fullest and carry out all of my tasks and duties to get me closer to my goal. I see my goals as small dreams in the short term. I am working to make them a reality and as stepping stone for my ultimate goal.

Accomplishing my dreams and remaining ambitious is the key to attain the result of your efforts, we must never stop dreaming. Life is just one and we have to take advantage of the opportunities that are create for us.

Eduardo Ruiz is an ESOL student at Jupiter Community High School.

My Goal!!!

I remember the moment when I decided to be a doctor. I arrived at my house and I sat down to talk with my father, he always gives me the best advice. I did not know if to be a doctor or a psychologist, he only told me: do you want to cure by talking? Or do you also want to use medication and save lives in a more active way? We did not talk more about that topic, with two questions clarified all my doubts. I started studying medicine and from that day I fell in love with the career: anatomy, biochemistry, every suture, every cry of a child in pediatrics, every tear when it helped to save a life.

Second important moment: what specialty to study? At that time my stepfather (my second father) had a subarachnoid hemorrhage and was in intensive care, when I first entered I knew that this would be what I wanted in my life. In the emergency room dealing with death gives you adrenaline and many times it is painful but there is nothing more rewarding than saving the life of another person, nothing more beautiful than seeing how you return Joy where there was only sadness.

I came to this country after fleeing from Venezuela and now I am a coder but I need to improve my English. I still have a lot to study again, but my dream is to be a doctor and my plan is fulfilled when I take the exams, thanks to ESOL for giving me the opportunity to continue growing and showing me that every day is good to improve and that what I propose I can achieve !! Medical exams I'm going for it!!!

Yohana Arronte is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. Her teacher is Janet Berger-Polsky.

My Future

I am Yva Brutus. I was born in a beautiful country named Haiti. In April of 2013, I came to the USA. Three months later, I started English classes in Miami. One year later, I moved to Immokalee. I came to USA to follow my goals and ambitions. My goal is improving my English, become a nurse, and work in a team.

First, I will improve my English for my dreams to come true. I have to work hard, focus, and be determined. I make sacrifices, I get off work at five o'clock in the morning. I come home and get dressed before school. I have to sacrifice sleeping late in order to come on time to school. I do not give up.

Second, I would like to go to nursing school to help people. I would like to assist my patients. It is my dream to be a nurse. I will follow instructions from the doctor, insert a catheter, fix the bed, and at the same time be the voice of the patient. I work with them to take care of their back, go to the park with patients.

I would like for people to feel better, happy, and get well soon. Most of all, other people need help because they are sick and require the necessary assistance. Nurses help them take medications, take their temperature, and control their blood pressure. God help me too, I feel happy, after I help others.

Lastly, I would like to work on a team. I am friendly therefore I don't like to work alone. When I work with a Team it is interesting. Before I would like to be friends with my team, since I would like to participate and then work in a group. One benefit of teamwork is that somebody can give help at work when you feel bad when necessary.

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. Because I want to make my God, my family and myself proud. 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.

Yva Brutus is the single mother of three child Weurslyse, Weurslyndz, and Weurslee. She is a student in the ESOL program at the Adult iTECH. Her teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

My Favorite Day

Tuesday, the Number Two, and the Beach

My favorite day is every day because I am alive. We only live once. Although every day is significant, there are days that are more special to me. Tuesdays, the number two, and the beach are my most favorite days.

Tuesday is special because my three children were born on a Tuesday at noon. It was not a planned date or time. All three were born with the number two in their birth date. My oldest was born on the 22nd, the middle child was born on the 29th, and the youngest girl was born on the 2nd. However, the weirdest thing is that my husband was born on the 24th and I was born on the 20th. I do not know the meaning of this, but I hope to one day solve it.

Another favorite day is when I have my beach day because I like the sun and the freedom I feel at the beach. I like the sky, water, and the fear of not knowing what exists under the great ocean. However, what I like the most is fishing. I enjoy waiting and guessing what size the fish will be when I reel it up out of the water. I love that!

To conclude, my favorite day is every day I am living. I will always enjoy my Tuesdays, the number two, and my beach days. These will be my favorite things forever and ever.

Angelica Saldana is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

The Birth of Dana

Before, every day for me was the same. One day was no more important than the other. In the end, they were all the same. Things began to change when my husband and I decided that we needed to expand our family. We kept our fingers crossed while we worked daily, with lots of love, until our precious daughter

was born. She was born on June 7. We welcomed her with great joy and gratitude. We named her Dana, and she is seven years old now.

Dana is funny, intelligent, beautiful and kind. She is a perfect companion for me. She has a lot of friends, and she likes challenging adventures. On her birthday, our family celebrates differently. For example, we go kayaking, canoeing, surfing or simply fishing. Additionally, my daughter has skill at singing skill. She can play the violin and guitar, too. I am so grateful to God for that wonderful day.

Alba Gonzalez attends English classes at the Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Favorite Day

My favorite day of the year is when I get to celebrate my birthday. It is a happy day for me because I enjoy it with my family and friends. My four children and husband are together with me on my birthday. My kids and friends get together and cook. They always make it a surprise party at a different place.

My favorite birthday so far was my 50th birthday which was last December 8th. My friends surprised me, put a blindfold on me, and took me to a special place.

Everyone was quiet and then played music. We danced, ate, drank, had desserts and so much fun! We took so many special pictures of all my friends. I received flowers, too. My grandkids were also there to celebrate. They cheered and clapped.

My birthday is important to me because it celebrates my life.

This anonymous author is a student of Sarah Fairchild Place.

My Favorite Day

Sunday is a day that I am together with my family. I get to spend time with my husband, my two children (a daughter who

is 8, and my son who is 5 years old). We always go to church in the morning as a family. We do this because we want our children to be good, respectful people, now and in the future.

After church, we always try to go to a park or go to a restaurant together. We love to eat Mexican food or food from Honduras. This is the time we get to talk about the important things in life. We talk about school, what the kids like and things that make us happy. It is a day when we do not talk about our problems in life. It is important to be together as a family.

For example, one Sunday that I loved most was August 2nd 2009, when my daughter was born. It was so exciting and I could not believe it! After having had Avery with a complicated pregnancy, my girl was born in perfect condition!

In honor of this blessing of my daughter, we decided as a family to celebrate every Sunday.

Anonymous author

Rara, A River of Joy

Haiti has a variety of traditional culture offerings like dance, songs, and games, but there is an old traditional form of music which is Rara that I would like to present to you. It is a custom that has existed for a long time and is passed from one generation to another. Even though the Rara is an old tradition, it still exists nowadays. That form of music is one of the most popular traditions practiced in Port-au-Prince, the capital, and all over the country, but especially in Leogane called the City of Rara. This is why the citizens from Leogane love Rara music. The music of Rara is always performed with old instruments like, bamboo, graj, vaksin, kone, tambour and drums. But nowadays the musicians in some cities introduce modern instruments like trumpets and saxophones.

A Rara group has a band leader. The leader is not necessarily the maestro but the founder; most of the time he is a voodoo priest. The founder provides the band with instruments and looks for traditional musicians who know the basics of music.

Before the performance, a Rara band has several rehearsal sessions, in order to give a pleasant performance.

Rara music is usually performed in the street during the feast days (Chanpet), in the national carnival around the country, but one of the most popular times of the Rara is Easter week. These days, Rara is also performed on Independence Day, Flag Day, in political marches, and in some block parties in the summer.

In modern days, many things have changed in the music of Rara in Haiti. In the 2000s, particularly in Port-au-Prince, some Rara bands had the chance to go to a music recording studio. I can mention, for example, Raram No Limit, Shabba Rara, and Bourara. As the Rara groups recorded their music, it became possible to store music so that the fans could listen at home and on the radio. As new things happen in the music industry, it has become possible to buy Rara music online, in stores, and the fans can also download their selection from the Internet. The musicians nowadays have a chance to make money because the market has become wider. They also video record their music so that people can watch Rara videos on TV too.

With the evolution of Rara music, some Rara bands began to participate in some concerts, festivals, conferences and even performed abroad in Miami, New York, Paris and the Caribbean countries. But most of the time the Rara is performed in the streets. All the people are walking while they are dancing. It is always a river of joy.

Josue Jean Denis is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

Ferragosto

I think there is nothing more enjoyable than planning a vacation. My family is half Italian, and we used to say Ferragosto, “August’ Vacation Moment.” As a matter of fact, years later I understood that this is the height of the Italian vacation season and the holy day of obligation in the Catholic Church. This national holiday in Italy, also called the Ferae Augusti (Latin), has a history that goes back centuries to the founding of ancient Rome

itself. It celebrates the victory of the first roman emperor Octavius Augustus over his rival Marc Antony at the Battle of Actium.

I can't decide where to go next year. I'm thinking of taking a biking trip or going to some interesting place in the world. Even better, I'd like to visit an island located in northern Venezuela, which is my country of origin, called Archipelago Los Roques. I've always wanted to go there but never had the chance, nor the money. My friend, Alissa, went to Los Roques last year. She had a great time and didn't have any complaints! She said, "I would go to Los Roques every year.

Los Roques islands are calm, quiet, and usually deserted, which make it great to be with your family or alone. It has the main island, Gran Roque, which has a collection of villa-style hotels (posadas) which are small but comfortable. Los Roques is full of natural pools and beautiful fish.

Alissa told me the easiest way to get there is by plane. It's about 40-minute flight from Caracas. There aren't hotels available, but I can reserve a room in a posada, which are small houses with several rooms to be rented. Besides, I can do snorkeling, diving, windsurfing and visit the turtle sanctuary where the Spanish-speaking staff will give an introduction to the station's work, which is breeding several different types of marine turtles.

Now that I have all this information, I am seriously thinking of going to Los Roques, but I have to save money and continue planning my trip. Certainly, there are expenses ahead that I have to work out before purchasing the flight tickets.

I am looking forward to sharing this experience with my daughters, Isabella and Maria, for at least three days of having fun, talking, swimming, eating fresh seafood, and enjoying the view.

Javier Verdecia is in the Level 7 ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Home Town on New Year's Eve

My family likes the specific day, December 31, because for us, we get together and create a big party at midnight. Starting in the afternoon on New Year's Eve, we get ready to choose the new clothes that we bought for that particular day. Everyone wants to dress up to receive the new year in good shape and be ready for the party after midnight.

There are two things that are never to be missed: first, it is the local cuisine. It can be chicken, pork loin or turkey that we serve to close neighbors and family at midnight on December 31. To make sure our meals get cooked, we hand it over to the local bakery close to us. It gets so busy that sometimes we need to get our appointment set up a few days ahead.

The second is the "Monigote" a paper doll, that could be a representation of someone famous or celebrities of that year. To create the Monigote, we need a wood skeleton, a lot of newspaper, and starch which is used like glue. Any Monigote represents the family life during that period year. Ten minutes before midnight everyone from the neighborhood gets together and walks towards the street with your Monigote in hand to burn and hit them. The tradition says, hitting the Monigote releases all the bad situations that you and your family lived through that year, and burning the Monigote cleans every bad situation and welcomes in the new year.

After that tradition, everyone returns home to start the dinner. Some others, like my sister, have their own tradition to run around the block with a suitcase to make sure the next year they can accomplish a trip. Others wear colorful underwear depending on their desires that they want for the next year. Red means love, and yellow means prosperity.

Normally the party is extended until 5am or 6am the next morning, dancing and drinking in your own home or in the courtyard with neighbors next door.

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

My Favorite Day

Every country has different traditions to celebrate the New Year. In my country, Viet Nam, we follow a lunar calendar to mark the New Year. In Vietnamese, the New Year is “Tet.” The holiday for this year will be coming soon. First, you will see all the people who live in a big city return home for a reunion with their families. A lot of people travelling home at the same time causes horrible traffic, which is a challenge to anyone who wants to get out the town. Second, you can see a lot of interesting things like how people decorate their homes or streets. They first must sweep away the old year by cleaning the streets and their houses, after which they will decorate them with beautiful flowers.

At this time, people like using the colors yellow and red, which are the colors on the Vietnamese flag. It is very exciting when you see the color of flowers combining with blinking lights on the road on New Year’s Eve. We call our New Year Eve “Giao thua.” On New Year’s Eve, families will meet together to welcome in the New Year while they pray for luck and happiness for everybody in the family.

The next day, people visit friends to wish them luck and health in the new year. Children are really excited to receive gifts. Inside an envelope is just a little money, but they are still very happy about this. As I am living in the USA, I am sorry that I will miss my favorite day.

Duy Nguyen is a student of Kathryn Niedbalec at College & Career Readiness at Brewster Technical College.

My Favorite Day

It does not matter if it’s December, April, or August the month of my birthday, neither if it’s Monday, Wednesday or Sunday. I can be working or resting. My favorite day does not belong to any season. My favorite day is today!

Yesterday is gone, and it is a day that will not come back. I can’t change it. Life goes on! The future is uncertain. No one knows how and where we will be tomorrow, but today is different. I can influence today to make my life better. Today is the

ideal day to strive, to do good things, to try to be a great human being and to enjoy work. Today is the day to create unforgettable moments, to share with family and friends, and to remember others too. Today is the best day to believe, to thank, to smile, to love, and to be happy. So, do not wait for tomorrow for these things. Everything is easier today. The present day is a blessing because to breathe, to be alive, it is already enough. So, for all these reasons I choose TODAY as my favorite day!

Onelio Padron is a student at Miami Dade College Continuing Education in Hialeah. His teacher is Zulema Rosello.

My Favorite Day

Everyone has a favorite day. My favorite day happens to be Christmas Day. Christmas is by far the best holiday in terms of spirit and presents, which is just a few of the many reasons I love Christmas. One of the reasons I love Christmas would have to be the decorations. I always love seeing the decorations and passing by a house to see all the different types of lights and colors. Even as I grow older, I get to see that childlike joy in my little sister as she asks me to help her with her Christmas list and makes sure to leave cookies for Santa.

I have noticed that over the years and as I age, Christmas Day means something completely different as it did when I was a child. To me, now what is important is getting to be around all of my family on a special holiday. Yes, the gifts are great, but it is not a priority now in my life as it once used to be. What I enjoy now is making my little sister happy and making sure she has great Christmases that she will remember like I do.

My family has always been very close and we try to come together as much as we can given our hectic schedules. On Christmas Day, we have a family gathering and we all open our gifts together as a family. I can't wait for Christmas Day next year and I am sure it is going to be great just like the rest of them have always been.

Claudia Sirvent Granados is a student of Zulema Rosello at Miami Dade College - Hialeah - Continuing Education ESOL LEVEL 3.

My Favorite Place

Memories of my Favorite Places

I have many special memories from my favorite places. I remember going to my grandma's house, walking on the beach and playing at the park. I think about these favorite places often and they make me laugh.

On my first vacation, I remember going to my grandma's house with my cousins Alex and Joel. We played a prank on our little cousin Louis, who had arrived from the U.S.A. We went to the backyard to show him a pig because he had never seen one. My cousins Alex and Joel told me, "Why not push him inside the corral of pigs." My cousin fell inside the corral and the pigs shoved him with their snouts. He jumped into the air, and we laughed. When my grandma came to check us, she got angry with us.

A vacation place I like going to now is the beach because it relaxes my family and me. I enjoy watching my kids swimming and playing around the beach. We love hearing the ocean waves and watching the sunset. My kids and I make sand castles together. I remember one time my son caught a fish with a bucket.

Another place we like to visit is the park. I like to see my kids jumping, walking, and running in the park. I play with my children, and we laugh. I push the swing harder and harder. We go to the spiderweb rope and climb together to see who can be the first to the top.

In conclusion, I have many special memories from my favorite places, such as, visiting my grandma's house, going on vacation, and playing outside. They are all memories that bring a smile to my face when I think of them. I hope to create more future memories for my children when we visit our favorite places.

Arelis Lebron is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Unforgettable Memories

There are so many places people would love to go and visit but, in my case, I love going back to my home country of Cuba. I still have a lot of family there, and Cuba is filled with beautiful landscapes. I left when I was just 4 years old but I always make time to go and visit.

To begin, every time I think about Cuba and being with my family, I think about seeing my Abuela cooking her delicious rice and beans. I also think about sitting on my Abuela's lap and asking her how she is doing and helping her with the laundry. I can hear my cousin's voice ringing in my ears calling me to watch movies, staying up until 5 in the morning, talking about random things, and watching scary movies. I really miss my cousin and my Tia. I imagine myself there and having my Tia calling to my cousin and me and laughing at us loudly when we did something obnoxious. My other cousin that I call Roxy lets me in on all the new gossips that are going on since I last saw her. Roxy also introduces me to new people who have moved to our neighborhood in the last few years.

Another reason why Cuba is my favorite place is because I can take my family to the pool, beach, and around the countryside to admire the gorgeous mountains. I can remember one trip when there were so many people in the car. When someone mentioned there was a trip, everyone ran to the car! My little cousin and big cousin fought to get a seat. When we reached the beach, we stayed for an entire day. We took so much food that it would have filled ten refrigerators! Scuba diving is something else that my cousins and I do when we go to the beach to see the fish.

Those are just a few of the many reasons why I would go and visit my favorite place, my beautiful home country, Cuba. To see my wonderful, loving, loud family, and to hear all their voices again makes my heart soar. Being with my family while enjoying the beauty of Cuba's landscapes makes me a very blessed young girl.

Abigail Cuello is a GED student at Forest Hill Comm. High School Adult Ed. Program in West Palm Beach, FL. Her teacher is Vivian Williams.

Rio de Janeiro

I do not know the whole world, but I'm sure if you knew me, you would know my favorite place would still be Rio de Janeiro, my hometown. I have lived in another city, Angra dos Reis, but no matter where I go, Rio de Janeiro will always be my safe haven. The whole city of Angra enchants me, but Rio de Janeiro gives me something extra special, a feeling of comfort and tranquility. With the dazzling beaches; dramatic mountains; and samba and bossa nova as a soundtrack, it is easy to fall in love with Rio de Janeiro. Eternized by music, Ipanema Beach remains an incredible place to stroll, sunbathe and sightsee. The world's Art Deco statue, Christ the Redeemer, welcomes those who visit Corcovado. The annual carnival celebration is an exuberant party with an extravaganza of music, dance, and fantasies. I love Rio de Janeiro.

Bianco Figueira attends the English class at the Career and Adult Education, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Sweet Bed

Do you know that one of the best places could be is your own bed? For example, my favorite place is my bed. It is one of the most beautiful places in the world. Every time I lay down on it, I have a wonderful moment in my life. When I close my beautiful eyes, I feel the wind blowing on my body. I smell the air like strawberries inside my nose. I hear the trees breathing in my ears. I feel like I am in the sky playing with the angels. I see the white birds flying and the stars are shining.

The reason why my bed is my favorite place is because it provides comfort to me. Sleeping on it is like sleeping on a soft cloud with smooth pillows. This is the place where I have good dreams and my place of relaxing after a long day from work. It is very peaceful. My bed is also where I spend time with my wife and the kids.

As you can see, my bed is one of the most beautiful places in the world. I love my bed so much.

Cliford Birotte is a nice and funny person. He is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. His teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Childhood in the 80's

When I was growing up, the world that we knew then was very different. We weren't in the Internet and technology era. I remember when all my friends called me to go outside of my house and play jump rope. "Evelyn jump!" they said.

I grew up in Puerto Cortes, a small beautiful city. We were a family of five. I'm the second child of three. My mom was a hard working woman, so my older sister took care of us when my mom was at work. We woke up every morning with a different idea of what game we could play later after school. At the time, there were a lot of kids of the same age living in our neighborhood, so when we arrived home from school, we ate lunch, and as soon as we were finished, we started hearing all our friends calling us to come outside and play hide and seek, hopscotch, and many more games.

We didn't have the Internet, so everything was different. The way we learned at school and did homework was a little bit harder. Everybody had to go through a lot of books and dictionaries to find answers. So there was a disadvantage, but after all, we did have a great childhood. Missing the Internet and technology gave us the opportunity to enjoy our times as little kids. I always remember when we lost power, we all went outside and started looking for dried leaves and wood to burn and make a wood fire. Then we sat and made a circle around it. We all started to tell stories and jokes; it was like camping in front of our house, with the best company, all my friends. I can say that growing up in the 80's was the best!

Evelyn Lopez Perdomo is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Fiancé's Arms

My favorite place is my fiancé's arms. I love when I'm in my fiancé's arms because she is the one I like sharing time with. Whenever I take a rest in her arms, it feels like I'm in Heaven. She is an angel. Every time I see her, I'm shaking like a leaf because I'm so excited. I like when I'm touching her smooth

beautiful light skin and her kisses leave a sweet taste on my lips. Every hug makes my stress run away. When my life is empty and there's nothing left for tomorrow, she fills me up. She gives me a smile to carry on my face. My favorite place is my fiancé's arms because how wonderful she is.

Fener Dorsainvil is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. His teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is not a place, it's a memory. It's a small memory about my home. It's a feeling that begins with my mother in the kitchen, with her tired hands that smell like dirt and coffee.

She is her own hands, so hot and hardened by work. She is the hands that make arepas and they give hugs. She is the hands that open the windows so that the sound of the rain enters.

In this place the hands of my mother are so big, and so strong. She can hold me, hold my dreams between her fingers. Her hands are a prodigality of life.

In this place, my mother's hands never need help. Her hands are the help, the house, one place. And most importantly, in this place my mother's hands never say goodbye.

Ingrid Krilewski is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. Her teacher is Janet Berger-Polsky.

A Bite From Mexico

My favorite place is the downtown in Huetamo, Michoacan. It is a small city, but it is beautiful. I like to see the people selling or buying things like tacos, bread, esquites (corn in a cup), raspados (smoothies), fruit juices, ice cream, and paletas (popsicles). I like to walk around the place and I enjoy looking at the clothes. I like to eat tacos, drink fruit juices, and smell the flowers that the merchants sell on the sidewalk. Also I like to hear the clock from

the church giving the time and the bell that sounds like it's telling you to come, come, come.

Irais Rosales is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers. Her favorite thing is to be with her family.

The Country House

My favorite family place is Marbo, New York. Our family had a small house that we called the "country house." It was a white house with big pine trees and a big maple tree in the front yard.

On Thursdays, Dad would tell us that we were going to the country house. Mom would help us pack our clothes for the trip. Dad worked the day shift from 4:30 p.m. to 12:30 a.m. He would call home to make sure the children were ready. When Dad got home from work, we were still sleeping, so we were not ready to travel. He would flip down the back seat of the station wagon, and Mom would gather extra blankets and pillows to create a bed for us in the back of the car.

Dad would load us one by one into the station wagon. On the ride there, some of us would wake up only to fall back asleep again. There were times when we would wake up and enjoy the 3 hours' ride to our country home. We lived on Staten Island; that's why the trip took so long.

Once we arrived at the house, everyone would help unload the packed station wagon and Mom, plus a couple of kids, would go shopping for food. Upon our return, Dad would whip up breakfast for everyone. We all did our assigned chores and then we would sit by the fireplace and play games, or we would go hiking or fishing at Copper Head Hole, a great pond for fishing. On hot days, Dad would take the family to Long Pond Park to swim, or we would take leisurely walks in Tilson Lake State Park for the day. To everyone's delight, Dad hung a huge swing from one of our trees. That simple swing provided the children with countless hours of fun. It was my favorite spot at the country house. We had lots of trees and great views of the mountains on that property. It was God's country because it was so peaceful. For that

reason, we always had aunts, uncles, and cousins visiting us to go apple picking or go on hayrides.

I love the family memories created at our “country house.”

Darryl Knauf is a GED student at Forest Hill Community High School Adult Ed. Program in West Palm Beach, FL. His teacher is Vivian Williams.

Lakeland

My favorite place is the city where I live, Lakeland. It has many beautiful places to discover like the garden, animals, and lakes. I will now describe a specific place where I enjoy spending time-Hollis Garden.

First, let me tell you about Hollis Garden. It is located on Lake Mirror. It is a wonderful place that has awesome flowers like purple, orange, white, red, and yellow. When I go there I enjoy a specific area with green grass where I can sit and observe everything around me. I can also lie down on the grass and take pictures too. I especially love the red flowers that are around Hollis Garden.

Located near Hollis Garden are my two, favorite special animals that are in the lake. One is a small mandarin duck. The mandarin duck has many beautiful colors. The other one is a bird called a blue heron. I learned that blue herons build stick nests in trees alongside other water birds. In the U.S. their populations have been declining since the mid-twentieth century.

Looking out from Hollis Garden is Lake Mirror. I can walk around the lake at any time. I like to see how the sun rises in the morning. However, my favorite time to go is at night because I can see how the city lights look. It is very romantic. The lake also has a pretty wall around it that makes it look spectacular.

There are many things that we can see and enjoy at Hollis Garden, but the time and the amount of space on this paper is not enough to describe it. I can only invite you to visit this small paradise in downtown Lakeland.

Luz Miriam Leon is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

The Hills

When I was a child, my dad used to take me to hike in the hills near my city, Santiago. The experience was very difficult for me because I was young and very small. After several years when I was 14 years old my dad passed away; then from that point on I had no one to go with.

I attended the University of Autonomia De Chile to study to be a Physical Education teacher. The professor had a class that was for indoor and outdoor activities. There were many activities related to hiking and I remember that I did this with my dad as a child. This marked me for the rest of my life. At that moment, I fell in love with beautiful and impressive hills of my city.

Since then, I began to walk the hills of The Provincia, The Cruz, The Ramon, Punta De Damas, and others. When I started the climb, it was like a process. What was each hill teaching me? Each hill meant a different learning. Now this is part of my life. The effort is so great that every step you take is like crossing barriers that make you stronger not only physically but also emotionally and spiritually. My father loved the hills as much as I love them and after many years, I understood that my father wanted to convey something very important to my life. I do not know if he did it consciously, but from this wonderful thing, I learned that in life I must be consistent, I must focus; I must be strong if I want to achieve my goals, just like when you climb a hill and you want to reach the top.

Margarita 'Maggie' Reyes is a student in Margo Scranton's ESOL class at James Irvin Education Center in located in Dade City, Florida. She was born in Santiago, Chile in June of 1970. Her first two years of studies at the college was in physical trainer. She went on to earn two Bachelor degrees, one as a Physical Education Teacher and the other in Education. She has a daughter that attends a Pasco County High School in Honors and A.P. classes.

El Mercado

My favorite place is El Mercado in Michoacan, Mexico. I like it because all the people there are nice. All fruits, flowers and vegetables are fresh. I see different colors and different kinds

of flowers. I smell different kinds of typical food. For example, “aporreado” is beef with egg and green or red salsa. A lot of people like “iguana” in salsa or in soup. I smell “chorizo” which is pork. It is delicious! I always hear people say in El Mercado that they have delicious and hot “toqueres.” These are my favorite. It a fresh corn tortilla mixed with salt and a little pork grease. If you want, you can add fresh cheese and salsa.

A lot of people sell fresh cheese, milk, meat and fish. I like to taste the cheese because sometimes it is salty. The people sell fruit and vegetables that they grow themselves. The music is very loud, and some people play salsa songs, merengue and mariachi. Other people play the news on the radio. In El Mercado you can buy sombreros, piñatas, natural smoothies and much more. Other people make different gold rings, bracelets and necklaces. I like to watch when people make big beautiful bunches of flowers in different shapes.

El Mercado is close to a beautiful old church with a big bell and old clock. All the people are friendly and nice. This is why I like El Mercado.

Maria Garcia is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Beautiful Place is Jacmel

My favorite place is Jacmel, Haiti. It’s a place tourist people like. It is a pleasure when I go to Jacmel. It’s a big city. It has a beautiful park and everybody likes to go to the beach. The ocean has a loud sound.

When I was young, every summer I went to Jacmel for vacation. My whole family was born in the same city I was born in. When I was growing up, I went on vacation with my sister and my brother. Jacmel has a big river, a beautiful spring, and many mountains. It’s green with mangos, bananas, avocados, sapodillas, and mandarins. People plant corn, potatoes, cane sugar, and beans, etc. I like to look at the river between the mountains and listen to the sounds of the birds.

I enjoy visiting my family. My aunties, my uncles, and my cousins would play with me when I return to Jacmel. I visit other friends too and go to the beach because I like to listen to the sound of the sea when the waves come up. It's a loud sound of seagulls. I feel the rough sand between my toes. It's a beautiful moment.

Marianne Marcelus has 5 children. She likes to go to church. She is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

On Top of the Mountain of the Three Crosses

Hello everyone reading! I am from Colombia and want to share these lines with you. This piece is about a fabulous place in the mountains of my country.

It is a special place for me because I enjoyed many Sundays there with my family or friends breathing in the pure air. If you ever get the opportunity to go there, you have to climb 480 meters. It is perfect for exercise!

There are three crosses on top of the mountain, and it was built eighty years ago. They made it first with wood and then in cement, and called it a monument. It was done as a sign of faith. I am feeling melancholy and at the same time fortunate for having been there so many times in my life. I was able to enjoy my free time when I was younger.

It is for this reason that we should value every day of our lives. I also had the happiness of being surrounded with much nature, with a lot of trees and different kinds of flowers. There are dahlias, daisies, carnations and more (that at the moment I cannot remember). I think the most important is the peace that you can feel and smell. Seeing a lot of grass everywhere in each step you take is relaxing.

Another reason I love this place is because it is a comfortable temperature: not too cold, and not too hot. It is very nice and pleasant to walk for a long time. Don't forget to take your time,

take a break, and sit on a chair (or maybe on a rock that is on top). You can enjoy the view, drinking a delicious orange juice!

Anonymous Author

My Favorite Place is Gonaïves, Haiti

My favorite place is Gonaïves, Haiti. Gonaïves is in northern Haiti, and the capital of the Artibonite region of Haiti that I was born in. Gonaïves is the birthplace of Haitian independence. On January 1st, a lot of people celebrate Independence Day there. On January 1st, every Haitian has to cook squash soup as a symbol so that we never forget about that date when we were the first black nation who took independence.

When you enter in the street in Gonaïves, you will see a big cathedral and vendors selling different things. The restaurants are selling foods like rice and beans, fried fish, okra, and lalo. Everything is delicious. Restaurants are the best in Gonaïves.

On November 4th, we celebrate the patron saint of Gonaïves and a lot of people come to celebrate. There are many kids, people dancing, different bands, and many artists participate. Gonaïves is the best place to visit.

Pierrette Brutus is a single mother of three kids: Sabrina, Leone, and Tedson. She likes to cook. She is a student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

MY FAVORITE PLACE

It is summer, the sun is shining and hot. The luggage and all of us are ready, the vacation has begun. Everyone is walking to the car, the suitcases are placed in the trunk of the car and we driving to the airport. WOW! I see a lots of airplanes: there are airplanes with the national logo representing the United Nations. There are jumbo planes, small commercial planes, and private jets different sizes and colors. A lot of people wearing shorts, sandals and “pamelas” (straw hats). The pilot is ready and so are we. We were ready to take off to Punta Cana. Punta Cana where

the sun rays warm up the clear waters of the shores. I know that the crystal clear beaches and sun are waiting for us. After a short thirty-minute flight we arrived.

Oh my God, look at that hotel, the Memory Splash is amazing! The lobby has a lot of plants and flowers. Flowers of all the colors...white, yellow, orange, red and violet, all smell so sweet. The hotel has other adjoining buildings that are four stories tall. The room...the room is so big, it is like a gigantic suite with white walls, a huge wall to wall mirror and the bed sheets must be at least 800 thread count. The view!!! I can see the ocean for miles and the lake in the front of the balcony.

I walk to the beach, the sugar sand is so soft and white and when I touch it, it's very hot. The water is warm and clear. It's so transparent that I can see the sky reflected in the ocean. I also can see the fishes through it.

Is time to eat, I can smell the food, Seafood, Mexican, Italian and Dominican food. All the food tastes so good, but my favorite one is the Italian restaurant. The service in this place is awesome, the people are so friendly and helpful.

I can't believe that the time here will pass so quickly, I hope to be able to return soon.

Paula Vega is a student at Jupiter Community High School. Her teacher is Dielma Eusibeo.

Poor Rich Country

Colombia, a beautiful and a rich country, is located in the northwest corner of South America, connecting with Central America. If you imagine it like a square, two edges are Ocean: the Atlantic and the Pacific. It has an incredible and diverse geography going through all thermal floors, islands, beaches, deserts, valleys, jungles and mountains that are born very close to the sea reaching almost 6,000 meters (around 20,000 ft.)

The weather is the same all the year. Because of its position in reference to the equator, it doesn't really have seasons. The water from the rivers run from the top of the mountains and down to the sea. Colombia has a diverse landscape, as diverse as its geography.

All the conditions described above, make Colombia one of the countries with the most biological diversity and natural resources and the conditions for all kinds of agriculture and livestock; it is also very rich in minerals (oil, gold, nickel, silver, gas, emeralds, etc.)

In such an incredible situation, anyone must expect a country with a high standard of living and education, a strong and solid economy, great roads and development, large industries with good working conditions, and health coverage for all.

But it is not the case. Colombia is a poor country, with a lot of problems. Some of them, the big ones, are internationally known like drugs and guerrillas. However, there are others like unemployment, underdevelopment, bad quality in health and education, low investment in science and technology, bad infrastructure, poor industrial development and low competitiveness, insecurity, violence, corruption, impunity.

There is an established political class, a really small group of people, clinging to the power and the wealth of the state. Without interest to change their perverse way of governing, there is no longer any shame or embarrassment. Corruption is heard every day and nothing happens or will happen. There's no left wing. There's no right wing. There only exists one kind of wing. They use corruption to seize everything, including consciences, and hide behind the impunity orchestrated from the judicial apparatus.

Little children are dying in Guajira next to the large coal mining, and nobody cares. They created false contracts to take the money from the schools. They steal money for road development, leaving unfinished works, condemning the backwardness of an entire nation. The list of examples is endless. Just a few days ago, the president inaugurated a really important and big bridge, the next day the bridge fell down.

While the interest of some predominates over the general good, it seems that there is no way out, no possibility to fix the country, and give the possibility to new generations to live in a country with a future.

Ricardo Galindo is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

American Samoa

My favorite place is my father's home, American Samoa. When people ask me if I'm Spanish or Indian and I tell them no, I'm Samoan. They have a puzzled look on their faces like they have never heard of it. But if they ever went there, they would never forget it.

The water is so blue you can see through it. The sky is so blue too. It can rain even when there is not a cloud in the sky. The first time you come to our island I know you will want to stay. We have a waterfall behind our house that has clear cold water. It was a bonus growing up there. The island is 96 miles from one end to the other end. It's not that big but the people there have such big hearts they make you feel at home.

I can still remember waking up on Saturdays and smelling barbecues. Everyone on the island barbecues and the aroma is so amazing. You can stop on any side of the road and buy a plate for \$3.00 and it will keep you full all day! Our speed limit is only 25 mph. That's the fastest you can go on the whole island, because there are so many curves in the road. We have many great shops and beautiful mountains. We also have two of the biggest tuna factories around. One is Starkist. That's where most of the jobs come from.

I grew up in my dad's village of Leone. We also have our own language. Our alphabet has only 14 letters in it. All our vegetables and fruits grow in our backyard. We have breadfruit trees, papaya trees, mango trees and taro root. Most of our meat comes from New Zealand. Lamb is our cheapest meat. Our greeting for hello and goodbye is "Talofa." Our

capital is Pago Pago - so nice, we named it twice. So come to my favorite place and maybe it will become your favorite place too!

Susan Meredith is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Chipley. Her desire is to experience life on an island. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III facilitated by ITA Tracey Adams and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

A Paradise Called the Rosario Islands

Considering taking a small vacation? Do you want to get away from the noise, the monotony, or fast-paced life? Welcome to Rosario Islands, a place full of beauty, marine life, and extraordinary relaxation. A place you should visit before you die. But where is this picturesque paradise located? Let me tell you how was my dazzling experience there.

The Rosario Islands are an archipelago located off the coast of Colombia. To get there you have to go to the city of Cartagena and then take a boat to the islands. It will take about forty-five minutes to arrive. There are twenty eight heavenly small islands to choose from. This natural national park is a protected area; the goal is to protect and preserve one of the most important coral reefs and ecosystems of the Colombian Caribbean Coast. Those reefs serve as a shelter to a massive variety of colorful animals that add to a magic architectonic environment.

When I was there, you can see the splendor of the crystal clear waters. You can listen to the gentle lapping of the waves, walk into the silken sands and delight with the natural landscaping. It's definitely a place to indulge in total rest and just observe the blissful waters.

However, if what you want is marine action, there are plenty of activities to do. I went snorkeling, and it was glorious. Also there is a colorful and amazing world under those waters to explore. You don't have to be a veteran swimmer to do that. Also always there is a guide that will be with you to help you. You can't imagine what show is down there. My words can't express that sublime experience. Moreover, you can enjoy kayaks, water bikes, diving, windsurf and more.

Now let's talk about the exquisite food. The islands offer a variety of seafood dishes, one of them is fried whole fish accompanied with green plantains, coconut rice, and fresh salad. Nevertheless, if you are looking for something aphrodisiac, they have lobsters dipped in coconut sauce or seafood stew filled with shrimp, clams, prawns and white wine. Yummy!

This magical place offers everything to enjoy a memorable vacation alone or with the whole family. You have to contemplate this experience. These are virgin beaches with extremely clean and quiet atmosphere. In addition, in low season, where there are almost no tourists, and you can have the joy and privilege of having the beaches for yourself. I hope to return some day to live it again.

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

Barcelona, the Architecture Museum

Have you ever been in an art museum? Even if you haven't, everyone knows that you can find works of art. In the same museum may coexist famous paintings, old-style and modern pieces of art; or even paintings from various time-periods, all together within the same building. However, it's not necessary to go to a museum to feel and see so much art. There is a city called Barcelona where architecture is a living art and is everywhere.

Barcelona is located on the northeast coast of Spain. Back in the year 15 B.C and for many years, this city was part of the Roman empire, so you can still find today part of Roman walls and ruins among the streets of the most ancient neighborhoods. As a European city, the history is reflected mostly in the downtown area. There are old buildings with high-detailed windows and portals, sometime sculptures on tops and with stretch balconies surrounded by iron-made fences. Those buildings are between four and six floors high and were built side by side with no space between them. It all seems like books in a library, however the details made each of them unique and necessary to form a smooth view with so much history on them.

Besides the historical part that can carry you back in time,

there is also modern architecture that can be seen in different areas of Barcelona. The Aigues de Barcelona building, The Arts Hotel and Mapfre Tower are some more examples. New architects have found the way to introduce modernism in contrast with historical architecture.

There is still something missing. When you walk through a museum you may find a mind-blowing painting that you were not prepared to see. Well, the same happens in Barcelona with all the creations made by Antoni Gaudi. Nothing can compare with the imagination built by this genius. In Passeig de Gracia, like 5th Avenue in NYC, you can see a crazy building with curved windows and a colored snake skin roof named Casa Batllo. On the same street and nearby, there is La Pedrera, a building with a balcony on top with towers that resembles metal knight's heads. Not to mention the Sagrada Familia Cathedral which is Gaudi's masterpiece. This original cathedral is still being made since its beginnings in 1882, and is based on nature and the Bible. You can see columns in the form of trees, stairs in snail's form or the main aspect of the Bible on its facades.

Sometimes there is no need to go into a museum to see amazing things. In my opinion, Barcelona is like an open museum where art is all around.

Valentina Caceres is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Why Voting is Important to Me

The Vote Is the Voice

One of the most important things in the lives of the citizens in all countries is electing their leaders and representatives. For this reason, it is very important to vote.

For me, it is very significant to vote because that gives me the opportunity to elect not only the president and representatives, but also to choose a life in liberty, peace, and progress.

My vote represents my voice. Thus, it is important that I know the history of the country and structure of the government in which I am living. Also, it is very important to learn about who are the people that want to lead the country.

My vote counts. That means that I can, with my vote, elect the future of my country. Also, it is a way to participate in the society. For example, we can ask our representatives how the resources of the community are managed. We can demand them to work for all the people equally because all citizens share the same rights.

Carmen Weiser is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Level 7 ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

How Life in My Home Country Differs From Life in the US

The USA and Haiti, why so different?

Having success in your life often depends on where you live. All countries differ from each other. Undoubtedly, it is easy to see the differences between Haiti, an underdeveloped country, and the USA, the greatest power in the world. Haiti is the first black country to gain its independence, and it even helped the USA gain its independence. Many aspects cause differences between the two countries including opportunities such as education, justice and security, as well as the geography.

The first difference is that in America, a variety of opportunities are offered to people including education. Everyone has access to attend free public school. In most states, it is compulsory for children to attend school until at least the age of 16. In other states, schooling is mandatory until the end of high school. School in the US is very organized and, therefore, students can practice different sports since they have enough space. However, in Haiti people have less access to school and most public schools do not have appropriate resources. Most activities provided to the youth are fun but not educational. In other words, Haiti is a country with much illiteracy.

Regarding justice and security, American justice is balanced regardless of your economic status. There is a reliable and well equipped security system to allow people to live calmly. By calling 911, you can get a response from police, rescue squad, or ambulance in a hurry, 24/7. People follow rules by pulling over for emergencies vehicles. Conversely, in Haiti they don't have sufficient human, material, nor economic resources to meet the needs of the population. The worse problem that affects the justice and security in Haiti is the wealthy, government workers, and politicians. They do not follow the rules and receive impunity. As a result of the lack of security and justice, Haiti suffers from unemployment because international companies are afraid to invest.

A second difference is the geography. According to Wikipedia, the USA is one of the largest countries with a total area of 9,833,520 km². Divided into 50 states, each varies in size and temperature. The climates also vary due to differences in altitudes and geographical features, including mountains and desert. Bordered by two countries, Canada to the north and Mexico to the south, the climate ranges from subtropical to arctic with a corresponding breadth of flora and fauna. Whereas, Haiti is primarily tropical and semiarid in the east with a total area of 27,750 km². The Dominican Republic forms its eastern and only land border.

In summary, comparing Haiti and the USA remains something incredible. Considering illiteracy, the imbalance of justice, insecurity and the geography, the differences of Haiti and the USA are huge. A turning point in the way Haitian politicians and foreign relations work in Haiti is necessary to allow people to live a secure and educated life.

Alaindy Colas, from Leogane, Haiti, is a student at ITECH. His teacher is Ms. Katie Mominee.

How My Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in The United States

I came to the United States from El Salvador when I was 14 years old. My country was totally different than the United States. There was a lot of violence every day in the streets and children were suffering from hunger. They also lacked good hygiene. Children were dirty and only went to school sometimes.

When I was growing up, we had no refrigerator. We also had no electricity, no lights, no heat, no air conditioning or TV. I did like having the supermarkets outside because it was nice to walk around. I miss all of the fruits, the fields, the vegetables and the countryside. It is just a big difference from here.

I love life in the United States, which is why I asked God to arrange my status here. I feel like here in the U.S., women can work and get paid to get anything they would want and need. In El Salvador, women work but they do not receive money for it or if they work they make only five dollars or so in a day.

In the United States, there is safety and laws. I feel safe here. When I was in El Salvador, it was corrupt and was not a safe culture.

I am thankful for everything in this country. My life is better here. I have a house and I can go to school to learn English. Also, my children were born in this country. They are my life and my heart.

This author is an ESOL student. Her teacher is Sarah Fairchild Place.

3 Cultural Differences

It is quite interesting to learn about cultures. I want to share something about the culture of Pakistan and compare it to the culture of the United States of America. Pakistan is a developing country in south Asia while the United States is a developed country in another corner of the world. They have two different cultures.

First, in the United States of America, people are more independent and can freely make their own decisions. In Pakistan, society is mostly dependent on elders due to a joint family system. In Pakistan, when you are making a decision, you should discuss it with your parents and friends for consideration. You might think you have the best decision for your self-interest, but if your parents and friends are not happy, you should give up on your decision. It may seem wrong to us for the time being, but mostly their opinion is best for our future.

Second, meal etiquette, or table manners, are different. In the United States of America, people use forks, knives, and spoons during their meal. In Pakistan, using fingers is common and we have lot of spices in our foods. Usually all family members or friends sit together on the floor for a meal. Although this trend is now changing in the major cities, laying a tablecloth or mat called “dastar-khwan” on the floor for a meal is famous in towns and villages.

Third, time is highly valued in the United States of America. In Pakistan, people take life very easy in general. It is ok if you are 20-30 minutes late for a meeting, marriage ceremony or party; even one to two hours late is acceptable.

The other thing I learned is that dating is different. Dating is a part of United States culture. If a man likes a lady, they usually start dating and may get into a relationship. The relationship usually leads to romance and marriage. However, in Pakistan, dating is considered taboo due to social disapproval as well as religious restrictions. Mostly, marriages are arranged, and the decision to marry is taken after consulting parents. The approval of family and friends is a major step for a couple to get married. If one's parents do not agree, then you have to give up your consent.

These are some differences between the United States of America and Pakistani cultures.

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

Comparing Haiti and the USA

There are differences concerning my old way of life in Haiti and the one I'm living here. For example, the lack of resources and the difference between the two lifestyles.

Life in my home country is very different especially economically speaking. In Haiti when students get a diploma, it is not reassuring because after graduation not all can attend college. I think the government should preserve the future, the country's youth. Economically speaking, the President should create ways to resolve the lack of resources by finding a relationship with a contractor to invest.

Also, the rate of the unemployment is high. In the U.S., the situation isn't the same because the American youth have more opportunities to learn and receive resources to get loans. The second difference is that without a high school diploma, students can study HHA and can work in Haiti. In the U.S., without effort, there is no success.

Nevertheless, people organize their lifestyles completely different in the U.S. than in Haiti. Haitians are less busy than Ameri-

cans are and have more time for a relaxing lifestyle. In addition, Haitians spend more time with friends (neighbors) and family. However, young Americans have more privilege than Haitians do. Americans try to get a good job or a more expensive car and house. They gain these things through working harder and longer hours.

Likewise, my old house didn't have plenty of space but was comfortable. Every room in the house is separated by a door. The kitchen and bathroom are not in the house. However, American houses are completely different. They have plenty of space, with a garage, large bathrooms, living rooms, and a backyard.

Regarding the weather, Haiti is a tropical country that varies depending on altitude. According to my research in Wikipedia, in January, we have a minimum of 23 degrees Celsius and a maximum 31 degrees. The U.S. varies in climates because certain states are colder than others. For example, the daytime highs range from 80 to 90 degrees Fahrenheit (27 to 32 degrees Celsius) in the summer and from 35 to 50 degrees Fahrenheit (2 to 10 degrees Celsius) in winter. Lows range from the 60 degrees Fahrenheit (16 degrees Celsius) in summer to 25 to 35 degrees Fahrenheit (-4 to 2 degrees Celsius) in the winter in states like New York, Virginia, and Ohio.

In fact, I know life in U.S. offers more opportunity than Haiti. People can get success with the sacrifice of working hard. The U.S. is my new stage of life. I will always miss the place where I grew up, but I will do my best in order to adapt to life here.

Adza B. Larose is a student at Immokalee Technical College. She is working to complete her ELL class to get a GED. Her teacher is Katie Mominee.

How life in Panama differs from life in the US

My home country is Panama. It is a beautiful place to live but one of the biggest differences between Panama and the United States is the economy. A lot of people in Panama lose their jobs because the economy is not very good. If you live in the US you have more chances to get a job and a better salary to support your family for a long time. In Panama many people lose their jobs every year. This causes more poverty and unemployment.

Another big difference are the hospitals. In the US, hospitals have better service than in Panama. They care more for the patients. Also the doctors have better education and more experience. Hospitals are cleaner, bigger and more organized. In Panama you have to wait a long time to get a doctor appointment because the healthcare system isn't organized and people that are working there don't worry about what happens with the patients.

The weather is another difference between Panama and the US. Panama's weather is a lot hotter than the US and Panama only has two seasons during the entire year. These are summer and winter. Last baseball season was my first season in cold weather when I played in Iowa for the Quad Cities River Bandits. I never played in cold weather before because in Panama there is never cold weather.

Transportation in the US is different than Panama too, because there are many types of transportation in the US like cars, buses, trains, and airplanes, which make it easier to get to and from places. Panama's transportation is worse because they only have the train in the capital and some small airports around the country.

Finally, another difference is the type of food. In the US people don't like to cook their own food. Most of the time they like to eat fast food and buy food that is already cooked. In Panama people like to make traditional food. They like to eat fresh food that doesn't come canned. You can buy fresh food like beans, rice, chicken, meat, vegetables. When Americans visit Panama, they love our food and the Latin flavor because they never tried something so good. Some retired Americans choose Panama to live not only for the food, but also because of the great people living there and beautiful places to visit.

I love my little country of Panama. It is known as the bridge of the world and heart of the universe, but the United States offers a better quality of life for me and my family.

Abdiel Saldana is a pitcher and professional baseball player with the Houston Astros Baseball Club. He is a great student in their language, acculturation and literacy program and is probably graduating this year. He is from David, Panama. His teacher in Florida is Doris Gonzalez.

Yugoslavian Exile

I was born in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. Yugoslavia does not exist anymore as national and ethnic tensions led into war and divided it into six republics: Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, and Slovenia. Years of war and political instability forced a majority of the Yugoslavian population to leave the country. Growing up, I experienced sadness along with my friends and family as we were refugees of war. Our lives were broken because our homes and the infrastructure of many cities were devastated. Luckily, the collaboration of many organizations, including the United Nations, sent us all over the world to have a fresh start.

Growing up in a post-communism war country, I felt locked into a very restricted society. My parents believed that playing sports would teach me to be brave, stand up if I fall, and always be a team player in life. I will never forget my first trip out of Yugoslavia with my basketball team to Sweden. I was so excited to see what developments the country had. An unforgettable moment for me was on the first night when I walked into a Swedish market. The products it had were so new to me, which caused me to be excited and very confused.

I was amazed with the Swedish culture and the citizens' behaviors as they were extremely respectful and polite compared to the culture I knew as a child. I realized how much audacity there was in my culture compared to the more civilized and modern Sweden. The simplicity of someone saying "hi" and smiling at me in a local park caused me to feel extremely joyful, for in my country, that would rarely happen.

I left Sweden and upon landing in Belgrade, the reality of my Serbian culture slapped me in the face; I felt nothing but pain. I wanted to be a more civilized and respectable individual. As a young girl, I feared that my dreams and visions would not be realized if I were to stay in Serbia. My dreams came true; I am proudly an American citizen today. I love the typical food and music of Serbia, as well as all of my family and friends. I just know in my heart that I no longer want to live there as I appreciate my newfound freedoms.

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

I Want to Be a Girl Again

I was born in a small village of Hidalgo Mexico where there were no roads or lights and in a town away from the city where the alarm clock was the song of the roosters. When night came, we knew that it was time to sleep.

My father had a small radio and only turned it on to listen for the time. But at times, he left it on and I liked to listen to the music. I learned the songs by heart and when I was walking in the fields, I sang them. The mountains made the songs echo.

We had pigs, sheep, goats, and chickens and every day before going to school I had to feed the animals. When the time came for the corn harvest, we went with my dad to bring in the corn, loading it on our backs. But, more than going to work, it was like going on a picnic. My dad made a campfire and we heated the food that my mom had prepared. We went out at five in the morning before sunrise so that we would not get sunburned. We would come back when the sun came down. Walking home, I began to sing loudly. Soon, I saw the house in the distance. It was starting to smoke as my mother prepared the fire to make tortillas. She waited for us with dinner ready.

At night time, we went to sleep all together. We had no beds. We slept on the ground because we did not have a floor, but we slept very well. When we were cold, my mom covered us with the petates of palms. I was not cold even though we did not have blankets.

We did not know what a brush was because my grandmother used to comb our hair with a plant called lechuguilla. They cut it, let it dry and carved the leaves to be bristles and with that she combed our hair.

When it rained, I liked to get wet and play with the water. In my town, we did not have drinking water. Water only came from the small rivers that we bathed in, but the water is very cold. We cooked and washed with that water. People say that I speak quietly. I think maybe it's because in my town, you only heard the noise of the wind, the birds, and animals in the field. I did not know that behind the mountains was another town. I did not even imagine that there were cities, countries or borders. Now,

my town has more communication and technology. They even have cars there. It is more civilized. But, now that I am grown up, I just want to be a girl again.

Dorotea Chavez is a student of Carol Kennedy at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas

From Poland to The USA

I came to the USA in July, 2010 with my husband. He has been a citizen of the USA for thirty years. I am now a legal resident of the USA. I came to the USA when I was pregnant with my lovely daughter Julia. It was a beautiful and very difficult time for me. Beautiful because I was waiting for the birth of my first and only child and difficult because I did not understand anything in English. I had never in my life studied English and I never thought I would be living in the USA. The USA became a reality in my life during my pregnancy. My husband wanted for his child to be born in America.

When I came to the USA, I had four goals. First, I wanted to give birth to a healthy child and be able to be a stay at home mother for my daughter until she started school. Next, I wanted to have a little time for me, and work on my skills to be able to return to the work force. I started adult education classes at Forest Hill High School to learn English. Finally, when I am able to communicate in English effectively, I will be seeking a job.

My life in the USA is different from my life in Poland; my home country. In Poland I worked fulltime as a Registered Nurse in a State Occupational Medical Center and I was also a part-time Social Appointed Guardian in the District Court. I had two jobs and I had really good insurance. Every year I studied something new to deepen my knowledge. I was living near my mother, sister, brother, and my cousins. I had very good friends. I had a great life filled with social activities and was very happy living in Poland.

My daughter is now in first grade. I am still a homemaker. I still do not have a job or insurance in the USA. I do study English even though I have very little time. My family is far away

and my loving mother died from cancer two years ago. I've lost contact with my Polish friends. We live in different countries and different time zones. Every one of us has very different family lives. In the USA I have only one friend, Basia, my dear daughter, Julia and my husband. We try to spend as much time as possible together. This is good for my daughter Julia. My life in the USA is happy otherwise.

I see how difficult it is for people who do not speak English. It is difficult living here without extended family and a circle of friends. It is hard to find a job and a sense of security.

Now I have some long term goals. I want to work to so my daughter will one day be able to go to college. To do this, I need to get a good legal job and become a citizen of the USA. I want to someday achieve my dream of returning to Poland where I have a home. Sometimes I think this is a long way off for my Julia but a very short way off for my husband and me because of our ages. Sometimes we plan our life, but life surprises us and so do people.

Ewa Einstein is a student at Forrest Hill High School in West Palm Beach. Her teacher is Ms. Hodgkiss.

How Life in my Home Country Differs from Life in the United States

In this paper, I am going to tell you about how my life in the United States is different than my life in Guatemala. I am very happy in this country because it is a country of opportunities where I can fulfill my dreams. My dream was to become a doctor.

I lived in Guatemala alone for about five years when I was 14-19 years old. I came to the United States in 2009, when I was 9 years old. I started off in the state of Kentucky. I spoke no English and I was sad because no one spoke Spanish where I lived. I lived in an apartment with friends. In 2012, I moved to Orlando Florida to be with my mother and sister. I met my husband here, and now we live in Lake Worth.

My country of Guatemala is a country where I did not work and I did not have opportunities to work. My dream was to study, but I never had an opportunity because my parents told me that I could not study because I was a girl. Only boys and men have the opportunity to study in Guatemala. This is a country where women are considered to be less than men, and I was told that I needed to stay at the house and have a daughter.

Now, I am studying English to be able to work anywhere and to be able to help my family and other people who are like me, that come here for a better future.

Gregoria is a student in Sarah Fairchild Place's class in Palm Beach county.

How Life in my Home Country Differs from Life in the USA

Arriving in this country marked a before and after in my life. I am from Pinar del Rio, Cuba and I'm only 25 years old. My dream since I could think and reason, was to live in the United States. I had family who lived in the United States and were visiting Cuba and they told me how wonderful this country was and that's how my curiosity began to get to know it.

My life in Cuba was not very exciting. I was just a simple university student with dreams and illusions. I graduated from Civil Engineering and those were the five most intense years of my life. When I graduated, I broke the glass bubble in which I lived. I did not have anywhere to use everything I had learned in five long years. I was extremely disappointed. Finally, my dream came true and I was able to come to the United States. Everything was new and interesting. It was like being born again, but of mind and knowledge. It was something that exceeded all my expectations. A place where I can let my imagination fly and reach everything that I purposed in my life. For the first time, I started to work and lived off the fruit of my hands. Now I also know the taste of liberty.

In the end, my life in Cuba was completely different from the life I have here. In Cuba it was only a young woman with hope

that some day my dreams would be realized. Now in this county, I am a woman living her own dreams.

Ivania Hernandez is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College – Hialeah. Her teacher is Zuly Rosello.

Would You Really Like to Live in the United States?

Hello, my name is Karen. I'm from Mexico. I'm going to talk about the differences between Mexico and the United States. The language and the laws are totally different, as well as the food, parties, and the climate.

To begin, the language is different. In Mexico, we speak Spanish and here the main language is English. Although English is not the only one. There are many more because in the United States, there are immigrants from many countries. It is difficult when you arrive in a country where you don't speak their language.

Something that I admire about this country are the laws. It is one of the biggest differences between Mexico and the United States. I feel safer here than in Mexico. For example, if something happens here the police arrive immediately. On the contrary, in my native country, the laws are not fair because the government is corrupt. I feel that the laws are a little exaggerated but I understand that it is for our safety.

The flavor of the food is also different. Most of the food here contains chemicals especially the cereal, yogurt and pickles. The food looks pretty and good, but they don't have much flavor. When I came here, I didn't eat anything because the flavor wasn't the same as in Mexico. Then, little by little I got used to the taste.

Another difference is the parties. I still miss the parties in Mexico where the people really enjoyed parties until dawn with loud music and dances. However here the parties seem like a simple dinner, all the people are with their cell phones chatting or in their social networks and of course the parties finish at midnight or our neighbors can call the police.

I have lived in Florida for 4 years I love the weather. We have meteorologist who warns us to be prepared because the weather changes frequently. However, in Mexico the forecasters are always wrong.

In conclusion, the two countries are totally different. Every country has different laws and languages. We need to respect each other. I love this country because I've met many people from different countries. Of course Mexico is beautiful too, I feel proud to be Mexican.

Karen Rodriguez is a student at Immokalee Technical college. She's from Durango Mexico. Her instructor Ms. Katie Mominee.

How Life in My Home Country Differs from Life in the United States

I am happy for the opportunity to be here in the United States. It is very different than in Guatemala. I thank God that my children were born here in the United States because here there are many opportunities for them, especially for education. I did not have the opportunity to study in Guatemala because my father was an alcoholic from the time that I was a child. He still lives in Guatemala with my mother and my brothers and sisters. My brothers also have drinking problems. I couldn't go to school because my father would take me to work starting when I was only six years old.

Life was also different in Guatemala because there was less work, more crime and violence, very few police and laws, and we did not have electricity. Also, when we were sick, we did not go to the doctor and there was not medicine for us. When women work, they get paid very little.

I came to the United States in 2002 when I was about 15 years old. I came to live with a friend. My happiest day was when I got married in the United States two years ago. I enjoy Saturday and Sunday (the weekends) most because it is the time we can go to church as a family and be together. It is nice to be with family and to go for a walk as well.

The United States makes me feel good. I can work, I can study, and my husband can also work. Here, I have a doctor for my family. I get medicine when I need it. There are good and bad people here in the United States, but there are police that can help.

Marina Aguilar is a student in Sarah Fairchild Place's class in Palm Beach county.

My New Sweet Home

I will start by saying our life is full of changes and challenges.

I left my beautiful home and family in the country that saw me being born. When people ask me where I am from, I feel so proud and happy to say I'm from Honduras. One year ago, I moved to the USA, and it was the biggest and best decision I have made for my future and my life. Now I'm here in my new sweet home as I call the United States of America, and I'm so glad to be here.

This is a country of advantages that unfortunately in my country I can not get. I'm grateful to God for being here making my dreams come true in the "Land of opportunities." This phrase has a great meaning for me because I'm living it now. It's my first time at a school here in America, and I'm enjoying my learning experience at the Adult Education Center with my teacher who every day is teaching me something new. My next big step and goal is to get my high school diploma by passing the GED Test, and the most important is for me to go to the university and study what I love.

Although I know it's something that's going to take time and effort, one day I just want to say, "I made it!" After all the struggle of moving to another country and learning a new language, I will make everyone in my family proud. Every small step I take is important for my success. As my previous teacher said, "Step by step, little by little."

Melisa Madrid is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Japanese and American Culture

Food always plays a huge part in any culture, but this would be the culture transition for me. I have struggled a lot with this change when I moved from Japan to the United States. First, I noticed that the food served in restaurants here are huge portions compared to those in Japan. Also, I definitely feel that there is less variety in food here than in Japan. For example, in this country, people are familiar with spaghetti with meatballs, hot dogs and simple salads served for school lunch. Whereas in Japan we have what is called a “bento” which is basically a lunch box with a few different foods that create a colorful, nutritional balance overall.

Next, in many cultures, no tipping is the norm and in some cultures, tipping is even considered rude. In this country, it is the source of income for many servers and it is rude not to tip. I always have difficulty on how much tip to leave for the server. I blame it on my upbringing when I say I don’t believe in tipping. When I pay my bill and the server ask if I need my change (of course I need my change), I never fail to say “Yes.” I worked as a server in Japan and have been tipped twice and that was a big surprise for me! I assume that maybe the customers might have thought that my uniform looked so old and I needed to buy a new one.

Third, instead of shaking hands, Japanese people bow in many situations, not just in greetings. They bow to ask for an apology or to say thank you. Bowing is a sign of respect and is common among strangers. During my earlier years in the United States, I always bowed. The people here reacted by touching my head or by taking a few steps away from me. Now I understand that these people thought maybe I was trying to tell them to be cautious. That was funny.

So, those are some of the main differences between Japanese and American culture.

Monica Oestreich attends the English class at the Career and Adult Education Center, Key West, FL 33040. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Someone or Something I Admire

I Want To Be Like Him

Each moment of my life, even when I felt really terrible, my grandfather, Miguel, was always there for me, and, consequently, I was always right there for him. I remember how extraordinary it was to talk with him; without exception, his calming words could magically change my mood. He was without a doubt admired by many because of his behavior, good manners, honesty, sense of humor, and above all the way he loved his family.

I have to say that I have learned a lot from him, the most important lesson being to take care of people whom I love, no matter what. Unconditional love was the way he supported me; my adorable grandpa always made me feel special.

When he passed away, I believed nothing could help me mitigate the pain I experienced, but when I suddenly started to recollect things about him, I closed my eyes and in that special moment I felt something really incredible, like a fire in my heart, and I knew he was there as he always was and always will be.

We never forget someone whom we have truly loved. One of the most important things someone can do is to leave a positive mark on others, which is the reason why he is my admirable person. He has impacted each person in our family.

In conclusion, I would like to say in this fast-paced world where many of us are too busy to stop and just share really important things with our special people, if we are interested in leaving markson others' lives then we have much work to do. Change begins in ourselves, so I am doing that which my beloved grandfather taught me -- spreading love.

Paula Ramirez is a Colombian student in Brewster Technical College attending the College & Career Readiness program in Tampa, FL.

My Dad, My Hero

Most have a person whom they admire, that person who inspires them and pushes them to be better. For me that person is my father, Onisis. My father is a very strong person, and I am not talking about physical strength, I am talking about his feelings and his attitude. My Daddy (my name for him) is my idea of a successful person who can do a lot of amazing things with great ease.

Even since I was a little girl, I have always seen him as my hero, my big challenge, and the person whom I wanted to imitate when I grew up. One time I read the following quote, whose author I do not remember, which said, “You do not know how prosperous I am because you do not know where I came from.” And it is true in my father’s case, having been born in a little town in Cuba, just a few people know exactly where this place is located, he grew up far from technology, big buildings or cities. My father’s parents were really poor people; their highest level of education was the 6th, grade, so they couldn’t teach my father very much. He is a self-made man.

He is a really good person, always giving his best and trying to make my family and I better. My father is very supportive whether I am happy or sad. He has taught me how to build my character, how to be strong and independent, and how to deal with my problems seriously and responsibly. One of his favorite phrases is “Losing a fight is not losing a war.”

Carolina Aguiar Olivera, from Cuba, is a student of ESOL at Brewster Technical College.

Someone I Admire

On January 1st, 1951, my grandmother was born. She was a good and sweet person. She is one of the people I have loved most in my life. On February 19, 2010, she went physically, but she did not leave my heart and I want to dedicate this essay to her. She is a great example of dedication without rest and she is worthy to be admired.

My grandmother demonstrated an entrepreneurial attitude, since she was young because she had to raise and educate my mother. She worked tirelessly until she was able to get a beauty salon, which was her greatest passion. Over the years, my mother was growing up and joined her mom as a team in the salon. This team was inseparable. Both of them were something unique... something special. Years later, my mom brought me into this world. Then my mother decided to have another child. My little brother whom I love with all my heart. Now we were four! My grandmother taught me many things and even some lessons I will never forget. My grandmother was my best teacher.

As I write these words, I feel that she still lives in me. Her love guides me and helps me face day to day problems. I believe her example and her teachings will always guide me. These may not be the most eloquent words ever, but as I sit here writing with tears filled eyes, I will never be embarrassed to say that my grandmother is the person I admire the most.

Eduardo Moreno is a Level 3 – ESOL student of Zuly Rosello at Miami Dade College – Hialeah.

Michelinah

We met by chance at a museum. The museum's name is Mupanah, which is located in my country of Haiti. At the time, I was having a difficult time in my life. When I met Michelinah, my life changed that day. She has become my advisor and second mom. I admire her values.

I was an angry man and I was angry every day. She put in my mind a positive ideology in saying to me that you should think before you speak. She told me to pray every day for my anger. She said to pretend to be deaf when others annoy me. Little by little I began to change. I understood this and I thought that I could change. She helped me with this, and now I am cool and I can control my anger.

As Michelinah is an advisor to me, she is also my second mom. She is very different because she is simple and does not like going to parties. She is a Christian woman. She told me if you pray

On Our Way

every day you are going to be a simple man and be very different too. She helps me every day like my mother. I admire her a lot.

I have many friends, but Michelinah is who I most admire. My friends are important, but she is the most important to me. She is always present in my life to advise me. If you have not figured out by now, Michelinah is my wonderful girlfriend!

Mackenley Fils is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Pope Francisco: An Example of Love

Jorge Mario Bergoglio was born in Buenos Aires. He is the current head of the Catholic Church in Vatican. He is the first Latin American pope. He chooses the name Francisco because of his devotion to St. Francisco of Assis.

I admire him because he has a sincere way of leading the Catholic Church. It is always with great humility, simplicity and care. Pope Francis is known for his position in favor of social justice, protecting the environment, and especially love for everyone. In one of his greatest speeches, Pope Francis mentions that solidarity is the true treasure of man and the cult of money produces inequalities and injustices.

I believe that Pope Francis is able to face the challenges of the Catholic Church. I also believe that he is an example for all humanity and independents of religion. He teaches love of neighbor, simplicity in the way of living and detachment to material goods. One of his messages that enchants me is when he says that the true religion is love: "Who is the light does not show his religion, but his love".

Isabel Oliveira is a student at the Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. Her Teacher is Ms. Josephson.

TRUTH

I'd like to share an experience that occurred to me back home in Argentina. While I was taking classes on the subject of "the battered woman", I had to take three busses to get to the hospital where the classes were held. One day, as I was riding on the second bus, it stopped at another hospital that was half the distance to my destination. A lady got on the bus and she sat next to me.

We engaged in a conversation. She said she was a volunteer at the hospital. Then we got to a point in our chat when we started wondering about Truth, and she said to me, "There is not one Truth, there are many Truths."

At this precise point, she had to get off the bus so, we said goodbye. I never saw her again. I remember her to this day. She marked me. She inspired me. She enlightened me. She was a volunteer. Since then, I've thought about all the volunteers that offer so much to us. So, to all you volunteers – thank you very much!

Ines Garay is a student at the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas. Her tutor is Jan Demers.

SOMEONE I ADMIRE

The one person I admire is my aunt Carmen Benitez. She is a special person filled with love and dedication toward her family. She is a very hard worker and an optimistic person. She has a happy personality and is the soul of the party.

She is caring and very dedicated to her family. You can especially notice the love she has for my grandparents. She gets up and cooks breakfast every day for all of us. I am not talking about just a cup of coffee; because she cooks egg, fruits, hot chocolate, and milk. At night she reads short stories to us. Her presence fills the air with love.

She is a very good role model. She is very demanding of herself when it comes to her job. Her energy never seems to cease when it comes to finishing something. You can see her behind the computer for hours and hours. She is one of those people that, with effort, always achieves her purpose.

She lives for celebrating good times. Anything can be a motive to celebrate. I personally think that she just loves to see people smile around her. Coming together for a celebration is very important to her and it does not matter if the occasion is something major or something insignificant. What matters to her is that we come together to dance, eat and enjoy each other's company. She loves to coordinate and organize everything for the get together, same color dishes and glasses, multicolored light, 70's music, Cuban's food. She also makes invitations for the get together and mails them out to every family member.

She is my aunty, and I admire her so much because despite being an immigrant, she has achieved many of her goals in this country. She is my example to follow. In spite of all the obstacles that she has had along her journey, she never stops being loving and kind to everyone. Her great sense of humor makes her a star in my eyes. For this and many other reasons, she is someone I admire.

Idalys Reyes is a student at Jupiter Community High School. Her teacher is Dielma Eusebio.

A Superhero Without a Cape

Someone I admire is my mom! I admire my mom for many reasons. Anytime I need her she is there for me, she never gives up on me, and she helps me anyway she can.

Since I didn't really have a dad growing up, my mom played both roles of mom and dad. Growing up, I wasn't exactly a perfect child. She had to deal with my acting out, not wanting to go to school, or not wanting to do my homework, like most kids. My mom stood by me and was there for me when I needed her.

Another reason I look up to her is she never gives up on me. In 9th grade, I decided to drop out of high school because it got way too hard. She helped me find this GED program so that I could finish school and be successful in life. I've been in this program off and on for years, and she still pushes me every day to finish and go to college. Even though I've been off and on, I've made a lot of progress from when I first started. Most people would have quit by now, but because of my mom I'm not giving up.

A third reason my mom is my hero is she helps me anyway she can. I struggle with a learning disability, which means my brain doesn't work as fast as other people. My mom helped me with that by helping me do my homework when I needed her to, even if she didn't know what something was. For instance, when I did algebra, not knowing how to do it, she still was willing to try and help me. She would try to learn it herself from the book and then teach me.

In conclusion, my mom is my superhero not only because she does all these things, but she does them with love and care.

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

SOMEONE I ADMIRE

I am asked to write about a person admire and all I can think of is a tribute to you. I want to show my gratitude for your love and I am thankful for all of me that is you.

I admire you, my beloved grandmother. Thank you for everything you have taught me, for the values that you have instilled in me and for your wise advice. Thank you for your wonderful stories that woke up my imagination and my fantasy. Thanks for having been my perfect refuge and the person who always understood me.

Thank you for your time, unconditional love and infinite dedication. Thank you for always trusting me, despite my mistakes. You have shared with me all the values that make you special and you helped me grow. When I was little, I thought you were the best grandmother in the world. Now, I know that you are also one of the most important people in my life.

You are an unquestionable example of strength. Thank for all the good lessons that you have given me in life and filling me with peace and wisdom. How can you condense in a sentence all the love, devotion and gratitude to you, dear grandmother? Thank you for always being there when I needed you the most. Thanks for everything. Thanks for the life, love and soul you instilled in me.

Elianis Fernández is an ESOL Level 3 student of Zuly Rosello Miami Dade College - Hialeah - Continuing Education.

Because It Is Not Perfect, Does Not Mean It Is Not Amazing

There is one beating heart in this world that I admire the most. She was born on the first day of Summer in 1951. Her eyes are the palest blue, her heart seems as if it's made of solid gold, and she has the ability to love beyond measure.

She began showing off how much of a hard worker she could be at age 13. She sacrificed being a young lady, enjoying time with her friends and chatting about boys and dolls. She gave up her childhood to work, so she could contribute to the household. After years of hard work and constant dedication, she finally found herself the proud owner of her very own restaurant. She became very popular with locals and known for her great food with excellent prices. Plus, she has an addictive personality nearly everyone is drawn to. She maintained a high standing in the community and was always an excellent role model for her young daughter. Being a single parent is never easy. Even though there were hiccups, every situation was a learning experience.

In 1988, cancer began to take over her body. The doctors told her that Christmas would be her last with her 8-year-old daughter. Miracles do happen because her body went into remission. In 2012, cancer began to invade her body yet again. They say lightning doesn't strike twice in the same place, but miracles can happen twice to the same person. With God's healing hands and amazing doctors, the cancer left her body again. Despite her doubts and sleepless nights plagued with worry, she did an excellent job teaching her daughter that not every battle is meant to be won and not everyone is going to like you. You should love with all your heart and, sometimes, we have to learn life's lessons the hard way. Life isn't always fair, and when life is rough on you, it's never okay to give up or take the easy road. When mistakes are made, learn from them and grow. I think about the lemons life threw at her and how strong she was to get through those situations, like she was a soldier on the frontline. This person is someone that I admire the most. This woman is my mother.

Ellaina Baker is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Clearwater. She is a mother, sister, daughter and engaged to be married. She is a student in the GED class facilitated by ITA Sharon Goff and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

The 21st Child

When I was young, every morning I had to wake up at 6 a.m. to do some work in the house or backyard like sweep, water the plants, and bring water into the house. I lived with my grandmother. She was a farmer. Every morning I had to feed the chickens, the dogs, and goats. Sometimes I didn't feel like waking up early, but I had to. I was the first boy that was born on my mother's side. She wanted me to be a hardworking man. I loved her so much because she cared for me and always made sure I took a shower, ate, and did my homework even though she couldn't help me with my homework.

My dad has 22 kids from five different mothers; I'm the 21st. We didn't live together. Some were in Tomazo, some in St. Marc, which is a large port town surrounded by the mountains, and the rest are in Port-au-Prince, which is the capital and most populous city of Haiti.

The first time I visited Tomazo, I made a girlfriend. She was so cute and respectable. For four days we went out to swim in a river. We spent a few hours there. We even kissed. On my way back, I saw a young guy. He said "Hi. I think I know you who your dad is?" I replied, "Eliciene Desire." He said, "You're my cousin. My dad and your dad are brothers." I told him I didn't know that. We kept talking about how I got here. I told him I came with my dad, mom, brothers, and sisters. I told him I had to go and that I'd see him tomorrow and he left.

On my sixth day there, my dad decided to visit the rest of the family before we went back home. Guess where my dad took us?! To my girlfriend's house. My girlfriend's dad is my uncle. I didn't know that she was my cousin. What a coincidence?!

I have a big family. In 2003, my grandma passed away at the age of 110. My dad is 85, and my mom is 54. Many years ago, my dad came to the United States. He doesn't work now, but he tried his best to bring some of us to America. And now my life is totally different. Every year on December 25th, which is my dad's birthday, we celebrate together and have a party for him. I'm so excited to have my family here with me.

Dynel Desire is a student in Leslie McBride-Salmon's Level 7 ESOL class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Brave Soul

A couple years ago, I had a wonderful experience of becoming a mother and I suddenly understood the great work my mom had done and is still doing.

Being a widow of seven children, she had to educate us and raise us by herself. She has always been and continues to be in each stage of our difficult and happy lives. My mom is really wise and strong. I do not have enough words to describe her. She is an exceptional mother and friend, and we will always need her and she will always be there for us.

I don't know how or where she draws strength to keep herself up in difficult situations that we have experienced as a family. Two very strong events that marked our lives were the death of my father and then the illness of my sister. She had breast cancer, and after two years fighting against this disease, my lovely sister lost her battle, and died from a stroke.

My mother is my example to follow, day by day. I try to remember what she taught me and put her teachings to practice with my children, carrying with me all her good tips into my life. My mom is my hero. I cannot imagine my way without my soul-mate; I just love her.

A mother's love has no boundaries and is greater than anything we can ever imagine.

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

A Mothers Love

The person that I admire the most is my mother. The amount of strength and courage she has inspires me every day to keep pushing toward the things I want out of life and to never give up hope on accomplishing my dreams. My mother has endured so many trials and tribulations in her life and she is still able to stand tall. She is the most amazing mother, wife, and grandmother she can be. My mother has never given up on me, our family, or life in general

when times have gotten hard. I honestly don't know what I would do without her or where I would be. I look up to her in so many ways. My mother has truly become my hero.

Since being incarcerated, my mother has taken on the responsibility of raising my two children. Without my mother, I wouldn't have a relationship with my children. Even though I've put her through so much pain and I've hurt her numerous amounts of times, she's never given up hope on me and she's always been there to support me mentally, physically, emotionally, and financially. My mother has always told me that even though I'm in prison, there's absolutely no reason why I can't accomplish my goals and dreams. At the end of the day, she's always told me that my dreams are her dreams and together we can make them a reality.

The amount of admiration I have for my mother is completely unexplainable at times. Without her love, support and inspirational words, I wouldn't be the woman I am today. I wouldn't have the knowledge I have and I wouldn't strive to do the best that I can do. My mother is the one person in particular in my life, other than my children, who will always, no matter what, remain constant. I know without a doubt that when everybody else in my life has failed me, my mother will remain standing strong. The courage that my mother has is what I admire most overall.

Debra Burge is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Pensacola. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education III class facilitated by ITA Tracey Adams and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

My Daughter, the Person Who I Admire

Everybody has that person in their life that they admire. For me, that person is my daughter Astrid Sophia. Why? Because she is friendly, a great mother and a great daughter.

She is very friendly. She is always willing to help anyone whenever possible. In everything she does, she keeps in mind

the people around her and her family as well. Sophia is very kind and always willing to help other people to achieve their goal. It is thanks to her that we are in this country. Even though she is far away from where I live, she always tries to help me and her brothers. She is the most humble person I have ever met in my life.

Astrid Sophia has been a great mother. She has always prioritized the education of her children. Thanks to her dedication, today, her boys are good and they are professionals. She made sure they did their homework. She taught them to help with the housework and now they help their wives in their own homes.

My daughter is a person who supports me, listens to me and shares with me the good and bad moments. I can trust her and talk openly about my problems and the thoughts that come to my mind. When my marriage ended, she was the person who most supported me. She also helped me with her brothers. Sophia, as we affectionately call her, has been my rock during all these years. Every time that I have to do anything, she is the one who takes care of it. Whatever document I have to fill out or get, she tries to solve it for me. She initiates communication between the members of my family, so we discuss and solve our problems together. I am so proud of her.

In conclusion, everybody has different reasons why they admire someone. I admire my daughter for who she is: a daughter, a great mother, and most of all for the humble, kind and friendly person that she is. She is one in a million!

Ana Barrios is a student at Miami Dade College - Hialeah Campus, where her teacher is Zuly Rosello.

SOMEONE I ADMIRE

How good that this opportunity has presented itself, so I am able to express my admiration for the son of my soul. His name is Jean Carlos Moya. My son is a person of goals and achievements. When he was five years old, he said he wanted to be a doctor. Later on, he started to set goals in his studies, sport and professional life.

When he was studying in high school, my son decided to play volleyball for the Aragua Venezuela team. He was chubby and a bit short for the demands of that sport. He was worried because he ran the risk of having to leave the team, He decided to lose weight and do stretching exercises. He worked hard to achieve his goal. He got two gold medals for the state that he represented. At the age of 15, he graduated from high school and got a volleyball scholarship to the university to study medicine.

In the third year of his career, he suffered a very serious automobile accident. He was in intensive care for 15 days and spent a total of 30 days in the clinic where they performed more than four operations in both his brain and his leg. The doctors said he could not study any more nor play sports.

About three months after being home, he decided to go back to the university in a wheelchair. Later on, he went to classes with crutches until he was able to walk and fend for himself. The doctors said he could not do these things, but he said, "I can." He got his degree as surgeon and continued playing volleyball for the university. He believed that "to want is power." This is a saying in my country. He has achieved three more specialties: internist, allergist and immunologist and a master's in allergies. He sacrificed and studied a lot. At night, he went to his gym and managed to become a personal trainer.

Nowadays, he is a caring, well-known doctor in Venezuela. One day he said, "I am going to be famous Mom." Again, he did it! He appears on five television stations in Venezuela and on the radio giving medical advice and helping people with their health.

I can firmly say that I admire my son because he has achieved everything he has purposed in life. He believed "I CAN" and he demolished every obstacle in his way with perseverance and dedication. I am very proud of my son. As I look over my son's life, I have found two things to be true. First, as it says in Philippians 4:13, "I can do all things in Christ who strengthens me." Second, "to want is power."

Betsy Molina is a student at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus. Her teacher is Zulema Rosello.

My Superwoman

As a parent, it was one of the most difficult decisions I ever had to make. With encouragement, support, and dedication, I overcame the burden of guilt and depression. The pain a mother has for her children has no comparison to any other pain that she may feel in any other circumstances. My mother, Evelyn Walker, is the most admired person in my life and will always be. She is one of my closest friends and my confidant.

On May 5, 2006, I had to leave Kingston, Jamaica. I left my seven-year old son behind. I was given this chance because my mother encouraged and reassured me that a better life was waiting for me and to reach out and take it. She told me that the one I left behind would be there when I came back. She brought out the stronger woman in me. She believed in me and jump-started my confidence. "The world is yours," she would say. "Just accept it, and God will lead the way."

My mother had seven children, and she single handedly took care of them. My dad was around but not really around. We all have the same parents but have seven different personalities. She was the only one who knew how to bring peace to the family when there was a disagreement. She has over twenty grandchildren and some great-grandchildren, most of whom grew up around her. The kids never called her grandma. It was always "Mammy," as if she were their mom. She was one of the most independent women I had ever known.

My mom, Miss Walker, never married, never had a full-time job, but she still put food on the table and sent all her children to school when she could. My mother would sell sweets, oranges, and other snacks out of her stall, as it is called in Jamaica, in front of the neighborhood where we lived. This was her bread and butter until she saved up enough money to lease some land and build a three- bedroom house with a shop where she could sell her oranges, sweets, and other dry goods. She has the heart of a lion and the endurance of time. She is my rock. Without her, I am nothing. She is Evelyn Walker, and she will always be my angel.

Angelita Brown is a GED student at Forest Hill Comm. High School Adult Ed. Program in West Palm Beach, FL. Her teacher is Vivian Williams.

What the American Dream Means to Me

My Thoughts on the Dreamers

A lot of people have negative and positive thoughts about the American dream. Some say, “they should have thought about the consequences, so let them pay for it” while others say, “they deserve a chance for a different lifestyle than the one they had before.” Everyone has a different way of thinking and seeing things. Here is my opinion on what I think about “the American Dream.”

I have a different background. My parents were raised in a humble county called Honduras, where the people might be humble, but they will never stop offering you whatever help you need. Living in Honduras is nothing compared to living here. We have computers, tablets, etc. while in Honduras there is rarely any technology. The only thing they have are books, that is if a miracle happens. You have to pay to even have an education in Honduras, while here the schools are free unless it is a private school.

Some people don't understand that the life the dreamers have or had before coming here is not easy: there is a lot of crime, drugs, and rarely any security. They think life is easy but yet they don't know the struggles people go through to even survive and bring food every night to their families or to even have an education. The only reason people/children cross the border is to have a better future and a better life. Yes, I'm not going to lie; some people come here for drug business. However, not everyone is the same. People have different thoughts about life and how they do things. Some people think the immigrants are here to hurt, rape, or bring drugs but it's the opposite of that. The number of children illegally crossing the border went up 1,200% between 2011 and 2014.

Life for an immigrant is not easy. The struggles they go through to even get a job or to even get an education are very difficult. Everyone deserves an education or a chance to work even if they are legal or illegal. Some of the illegal immigrants go through the worst, just by not feeling welcomed. They are being

told mean and hurtful things such as “go back to your county” or “you’re not welcomed here.” There are approximately 11.2 million immigrants in the United States. To some people, the illegal immigrants are rapists, drug dealers, stealers, etc., but not everyone is the same. Some actually want a better future and a better education than they received while they lived in their country. This is my opinion of the American dream.

Ana Alvarado is a student at ACE of Lee County, where her teacher is Darlene Carrillo.

Latina Looking for an American Dream

Many people have had to abandon their country, leaving their life behind. Searching for opportunities and accepting challenges can introduce oneself to the strength needed to conquer future goals. That is me, an Ecuadorian, a Latina looking for an American Dream. I may change my strategies, but not my goal.

I arrived in the USA three months ago with my own purpose: study “medicina.” I wish to become a doctor. I will work in the hospital and heal and help a lot of people. I will reach what I want one day. Working with passion and love, I want to fill my life with experiences.

I am in a country where all is different, starting with the language. However, I have decided to be here. I have learned something important. I have met people from other countries. They have been living more than ten years here and they have not studied English. Now these people are studying. So it is never too late to start learning.

Despite the challenges, my two supports are faith in God and my family. Without God I would not have gotten to where I am now. With faith in God, I know I can do anything. Second, I thank God that I have a family. They will always be with me. They will be glad of my achievements and help me to get up from my falls.

In conclusion, in America time is money. It is a country that offers me many opportunities to fulfill my dream, but my effort

and perseverance help me to achieve it. Medicine is not an easy career, but it is my accepted dream. It is the reason why I am here. All dreams are possible if you believe. Sometimes you win, sometimes you learn, but you never get lost. Nothing worthwhile comes easy.

Maria Gabriela Jimenez is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Turn My Life Around

My name is Jean Frantzy Gaston. I am from Haiti. To me, the American Dream means that I would turn my life around so that my family and I would have a better life. Presently, I am applying to become a permanent resident. Without the permanent resident card, I have to pay a lot in order to get a work permit which is very expensive. When I receive my permanent resident card, I would like to help my little sister. I am anxious to be legal in this country. It is my dream to go for higher learning because many jobs require a bachelor's degree. Also, I want to speak English well so that I won't have to face any problems talking with anyone and at any place. Unfortunately, the immigrants are in the midst of problematic situation in this country. But I am striving to make my dream come true, no matter what.

Jean Franzy Gaston attends the English class at the Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. He is a very ambitious person. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What the American Dream Means to Me

I was born at the end of the 80s in a beautiful and rich country of South America called Venezuela. Since I was a child, I watched movies and read books that told me about the "American Dream", about how men and women achieved all their dreams and goals with perseverance, effort and hard work. I dreamed of achieving my own "American Dream" but in the country where I was born, Venezuela. To do this, I had the help of my parents, and began my long educational cycle to become a good citizen

and a useful professional for the world. However, as chaos grew, it took over my homeland as a group of men called revolutionaries were undermining the foundations of democracy to appropriate political power forever.

Day after day in front of my very own eyes my “Venezuelan Dream” was fading. Most of my rights as a citizen were suppressed and terrible events occurred in my life as a result of the political and social crisis in my country. At that moment, I remembered stories from my childhood, stories of the “American Dream”, and decided to embark on my journey toward freedom. With the help of God and the support of family and friends, I arrived in America, the land of the free and the home of the brave, where I was legally permitted to begin both studying and working. With a lot of effort, dedication and strictly complying with the laws, I believed again, I dreamed again. Certainly, I can say what the “American Dream” means to me, the “American Dream” is freedom, freedom to think differently, freedom to express your opinions without censorship, freedom to undertake any economic project that brings prosperity to your life, freedom to dream and make all your dreams come true. Now as Martin Luther King said, “I have a dream”! A much bigger dream, and the ability to return freedom to the country where I was born. My dream now is to witness a free Venezuela, like my new country, America.

Giordano Reyes is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus.

Living in the United States of America

Many people have dreams but do not put their actions to them. To dream is a good thing, but to act is indispensable. Living in the United States of America has always been one of my dreams. However, it requires courage and willingness to be here and pursue my goal. In my case, improve English, seek new opportunities and interact with the natives to experience their culture, their habits, culinary mean living my dream.

Studying English here is very important because every day I learn new words and how to listen and pronounce them. It is the

first step to getting better work and being more respected and more recognized for my effort. Working here is very important too, because I am in direct contact with people who speak English. In addition to learning various tasks from day to day, I am practicing what I have learned in the classroom.

The simple fact of living here and the everyday tasks of daily life, contributes a lot to my learning. For example, shopping, going to the bank, doing laundry, watching movies give me direct contact with different information all the time. In short, there are many people who have dreams, but a few wake up to achieve them! Many people feel like living this adventure but do not put it into practice. Living here is a unique experience. As long as it is done with dedication, respect, and by following the laws, you can enjoy the wonders offered by this country.

Gustavo Lobo attends the English class at the Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What the American Dream Means to Me

When I was in my country, I thought that the most complete life meant to experience the American Dream. I wanted to arrive in the U.S.A. Although there were many complications, they would only be small obstacles for me.

I am from Nicaragua and there the people think that coming to this country is a big opportunity. You get to have the privilege to work, to earn money and to overcome. However, they don't have any idea of how hard it is to set up life here. I thought in this way too because of the cultural differences.

Now that I am living in the U.S.A., my way to the American Dream is overcome by a lot of obstacles, the first one being language. It is true that there are many Spanish-speaking people, but the advice and the traffic signals are in the native language English. It is like working with your eyes closed. I have to guess many things. Another obstacle is the different cultures of the American people because the majority are from many different countries. I have to take careful observations with the expressions used to communicate. This is very difficult as some have been unkind.

The job choices are hard. In my case, I have done things that I never used to do in my country. The work climate is stressful because there is a lot of competition for one position. The cost of housing is expensive, so if you don't work, you won't eat. If you don't have a family or friends, it is more difficult yet. But to face all of these factors, the most important thing is to have an open mind and propose to overcome and have perseverance.

Amy Jarquin is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus, where her teacher is Janet Berger-Polsky.

The “AMERICAN DREAM”

The AMERICAN DREAM is a common phrase that many people are used to hearing, but not everybody knows what it really means. Experts tell us that the meaning of this phrase has changed over the course of history.

Many people have used this expression in different periods and contexts; in 1774 the AMERICAN DREAM was used by the Governor of Virginia, 1848 by German immigrants. In 1931, the freelance writer James Truslow Adams popularized the phrase in his book “Epic of America;” that dream in which life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each, according to his ability or achievement. In 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. in his “Letter from a Birmingham Jail” rooted the civil rights in the African-American quest for the American Dream.

My first understanding of the meaning of the AMERICAN DREAM was a dream for Americans, especially US citizens, in other words, a plan of well-being for the future. For many immigrants, the Statue of Liberty was their first view of the United States. It signified new opportunities in life, and thus Lady Liberty is an iconic symbol of the AMERICAN DREAM. So, this has helped me to understand that the phrase means a better life for immigrants and US citizens based on equity, equality, without discrimination or prejudice, a sort of example of social harmony for other nations based on hard work, goodwill and the motivation of all. Finally, I can add that the AMERICAN DREAM is a patriotic feeling that drives the individual living on American

soil (Immigrants or US citizens) to love America, to work for its well-being which is the well-being of all. This individual can also be an official or a civilian; it is clear that during the last 10 years, two different presidents pronounced two famous expressions that, when combined, form an even more powerful phrase:

“YES WE CAN MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN.”

Rucharnel Dormeille is from Haiti where he graduated in economics (bacc+4 diploma / 2012-2016) and then studied political science (bacc+3 / 2012-2015) at the “Universite d’Etat d’Haiti.” At 24 years old, he is now studying English at the “Adult Literacy League” where Teege Braune is his teacher.

Personal Stories

My Personal Story

Every day is the opportunity of a new day, for each person to be a better human being. This is my opinion because my favorite day is today, the present. Today, I have the opportunity to learn. I can share with the family, friends, and other people who cross my path.

When I am sad or if I have problems, I live the moment and, at the same time, I think about other people who are living with bigger problems than mine. Maybe they are sick or maybe they don't have a family to share with.

I do not have everything I want in my life. I am not with all my loved ones, but it is nice to know that each of them is well. This is a very good reason for my day to be full of peace despite the many difficulties, which are not bigger than my desire to be happy and have a quiet life. After so many moments in my life, I have learned that there is no better day than today.

Aracely Alfaro is a student at Miami Dade College, InterAmerican Campus. Her teacher is Janet Berger-Polsky.

One Night With Irma

At 9:00 p.m., Hurricane Irma entered in the Keys. Before this, we had wind and rain. When Irma came, the party began. When the power went out, we understood it was to prepare for a long night. We put the mattresses against the windows in case the storm broke them. On the floor, behind the kitchen counter, we constructed a little shelter with blankets, pillows and cushions. Sometimes we slept, sometimes we talked in whispers as if we did not want to disturb the furious sound of the wind. At other times we peeked, between the mattress and the dark, trying to guess what was happening outside. It was as if someone cried her fear while her brother hugged her and caressed her hair. It even seemed like he sang to her in her ear.

The next day at 7:00 a.m., we lost all phone communication. The eye of the hurricane was devastating the middle Keys. When could we leave our shelter? A beautiful day showed us that our island was safe from the worst of the hurricane.

That night with Irma will remain a long, lasting memory. Life was different the first few days after Irma: without power, without phone, without tourists, and without mosquitoes. Key West was different: the sea, the sky, the surroundings, and the people too. We had time to walk, to talk, to love under the stars without any hurry or feeling fatigue. We could simply read or see the world in silence. What a beauty!

Antonio de la Fuente attends the English class at Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Day I Won't Forget

It was a dark night. I was at a party and had a great time with my friends. We enjoyed dancing and, most of all, we had fun. Then my eyes caught sight of a pretty girl I liked. So, I got ready to gather my courage to talk to her. Slowly, I approached and looked at her in the eyes and said, "Hello, what's your name?" She answered, "My name is Araseli, and yours?" I replied, "My name is Angel. Nice to meet you, Araseli." After that we talked for a few hours. Over time, I got to know her more and more until one day I asked her to be my girlfriend. She told me YES. At that moment, I felt like the happiest man in the world. Now, I am just waiting for the day we are going to get married. I hope it will be another favorite day for me.

Angel De Leon attends the English class at Career and Adult Education Center, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Breathe!

When we are born, we are in the care of our parents. As we grow up, we gradually leave behind those who care for each one of us. My childhood was normal for me because I played like any

normal girl. In my adolescence, I went out to be entertained like any adolescent my age. My life, you could say, was like anyone else's.

Over the years, I made the decision to marry and formalize my small family. As a young girl of only 21 years, I visualized how my GREAT FAMILY would be. Every day, I thought about how my children would be, how many we would have, and what it would be like to have a boy or a girl. However, my biggest illusion was really to formalize my little family.

A year after being married, the problems of any normal couple began. Throughout the days, I became pregnant with my first child. In my heart, I knew that it would be a boy and I knew that my son JORGE DAVID would be my greatest treasure.

A few months after my first baby was born, my husband and I decided to migrate to the United States. We wanted a better future for our son. Upon entering the U.S., it was not easy. My husband and I, after a year of being in the U.S., had our second son, DAVID. He is most caring and affectionate child.

My life was full of joy with our two children. I felt that I did not need anything because we had a normal economic status and a normal life. However, it was not to be. My destiny was already marked with the worst tragedy that could happen to a Mother. The death of my first child at only nine years of age, in an accident.

I cannot blame this event on anyone or on myself. I know that he is not the only one in my life to care for. It is unfortunate when a life is taken away at any time. I know I need to breathe. Nevertheless, I can say that when driving, I do not use the phone, I do not exceed the speed limits, and I focus on driving.

Day to day, I try to keep going for our son David. Sometimes it is not easy, but I know that the people, who have been with me during my process, supporting me, can help. I am starting to open paths to start again.

Anita Pallares is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center located in Dade City, Florida.

Good Bye Irma

I left Key West with a friend for my vacation in Chicago a week before the hurricane hit the island. For one week, we explored the city and leisurely walked around a lot. We were in touch with our friends in Key West, and they told us that they were preparing for the mandatory evacuation. Since they were not panicked, we were calm. In my country of Kazakhstan, we don't have hurricanes, so we didn't realize the seriousness of the situation in Florida. All that seemed to us like fun; the whole island has to take a vacation and go somewhere with the tourists. Even when we watched TV and knew all about the news, I felt it was happening somewhere else, but not in our second home of Key West.

When it was time to fly back to Key West, we went to the airport in Chicago and saw that all flights to Florida were canceled. There were reporters seeking people affected by hurricane Irma and trying to interview them. There was no Greyhound bus going to Florida. Only at that time did we understand how powerful the hurricane was. We had to stay in Chicago for a couple of additional days. This would be fun again. We even thought about going to other states, but we were running out of money. Also, we didn't know how long we would be out of work. Thus, that stopped us.

After a few days, we arrived in Miami. We thought we would rent and share apartments with other friends in order to save money, but they could not come to Miami from Orlando and we couldn't get to Orlando. So, the following week, we drove around Miami from one hotel to another hunting for a room and keeping alert for cheaper options. It was a bit stressful. We lost money, and we didn't know what was going on in Key West. The streets in Miami looked empty. These views were making us unhappy. I was laying on the bed all day doing nothing but watching soap operas, comedians, eating, and watching more movies. These were my lazy days, yet, wonderful because I needed some relaxation.

I understand that the weather is an unpredictable thing. We should be prepared: save money for unforeseen needs, keep important documents in a folder, have a small backpack with personal things (go-bag) ready. Of course, in any difficult situa-

tions of our lives, we need to look at the positive side too and use it in our favor. Panic never leads to sound decisions and actions. Let's say goodbye to Irma.

Botagoz Zhanburshinova attends the College and Career Readiness class at the Career and Adult Education Center, Key West. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Broken

Broken is not just a word, it's a feeling someone feels when they lost their world. My life became shattered when I lost the people and things I held close to my heart. Broken with pain deep down inside feeling as if someone pushed me in a hole deep down below. Fighting to get myself and family out of this mess, not wanting to endure the consequences of bad luck. I wanted to scream out so loud for the world to hear. Tears streaming down my face because of the hurt trying to escape death. The pain I experienced from being away from my children was unbearable. It's very hard to explain to my children why I wouldn't be around for a while. Guilt constantly consumed me for allowing my choices to break my family apart. If I could turn back time I would do things differently. Doing these 24 months I realized I had to be broken in order for me to understand my life choices. That's why I'm taking this time to piece myself and family back together. The future will be brighter. I love the better me, and the better mother I will be when this is all over. Broken is what I was. Now God is helping to mold me and my family together again.

Devina Ross is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Clearwater. She is a 39-year-old loving mother and grandmother. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education II class taught by Ms. Irene Henderson.

It's a Miracle!

It all began in January 2014, while I was living in La Paz, Bolivia, my lifelong home.

I suddenly started having terrible pain in my left leg. I saw many doctors and they offered different pills and diagnoses. Nothing helped. Then I became so sick that the doctor ordered an ultrasound of my abdomen. The test showed that my intestines were blocked. I received the most awful diagnosis – cancer! I was very nearly dead before they operated two days later.

I had so many medical bills that I had to sell my home to pay them. Leaving my friends and family in Bolivia was difficult, but I was able to come to the United States to be with my children and grandchildren and recover. Life is wonderful now, here in the United States. It is truly a miracle!

I am healthy now, so I can help my children and grandchildren, which keeps me busy many days of the week. I am so grateful to be able to help, and I can speak English with my grandchildren now.

Recently I went to La Paz to visit with the friends and family I left behind. It was wonderful to see and talk with people who have been part of my life forever and who were great support for me when I was sick.

When I returned to the United States in August, I returned to the conversation class at the Dunedin Public Library to work on improving my English. Now I tell everyone, in Spanish and in English, to be careful about what you eat and drink. You need to take care of your body and pray. I truly have a second chance. It's a miracle!

Fanny Sanchez is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.

Love Hurts

I have no memory of his arrival. As soon as I opened my eyes each morning he was there. The days promised an endless adventure, full of emotions and challenges; he was always by my side. When I laughed, he celebrated with me. When I cried, he dried my tears. When I was punished, he endured the same punishment. When I was sad, he comforted me. When the darkness

of the night filled my senses with fear, he protected me. Wherever and whatever I did, he was there by my side.

One night we heard the voice of my mother calling me. I took my dear companion and we ran to meet her. When I raised my arms to embrace her, my hand unwittingly released my best friend's hand. With the force of my arms, my friend flew out and fell into the void.

It was a cold night, totally dark, and I could not see anything. I asked my mom to go look for him. She just replied, "It's too late to leave. Do not worry; he'll be fine. Tomorrow we'll go find him, and you'll see that he is fine."

The next morning my mother and I searched for him but, my little teddy bear was not anywhere. I never saw my friend again. Then I got the news that he already had another friend and he was happy, that he was not alone. The pain lessened, and love grew; I imagined him with a new friend and that gave me the peace I needed.

That tragic night and that harrowing dawn at my young age of three years made me understand the greatness of love, a feeling that, however much pain it may cause, builds our days, is free of selfishness, teaches us to forgive, reconciles us with the world and fills us with gratitude to the universe. I will never forget my great friend who made my childhood days a beautiful fantasy.

Gina Obando is a student of the Literacy Council of Upper Pinellas.

My Story

I have a Marketing Degree in my country but when I arrived in Miami I was working as a Nanny because I didn't speak English. I am in ESOL English Class in Miami Dade College because I have ambition and goals. I want to work in my career and to be in a company that allows me to grow. Really, I don't speak English outside of class because I am shy. When I have the need, I know the words and the pronunciation but I get nervous and I pronounce poorly.

Now, I am very excited because I don't have work and I am applying for a bilingual job. I think that it is my opportunity to improve my speaking skills. I need to get ready for the interview process and my class is helping me. I think that one day soon I will be bilingual and I am very excited about that milestone.

Hamelin Camilo is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. His teacher is Janet Berger-Polsky.

My First Love

“Not sure if you know this
But when we first met
I got so nervous
I couldn't speak
In that very moment I found the one and
My life had found its missing piece”

That's my most favorite song because the lyrics keep reminding me of the first time I talked with my first love.

She and I studied in the same evening mathematics class. One night, when I came to class, I saw only her standing on the balcony in front of our class, eating bread. Using all my courage (even though I don't think I have much), I went to stand next to her, but I couldn't say a word. It was like the longest minutes in my life. Thank God, she broke the ice and started our conversation. We just talked about some mathematics problems but enough to make me keep smiling to myself even the next day.

One year later, we were a couple. We both went to college. I studied computer science, and she studied economics. We balanced the time between studying and loving very well. We got good grades, but it didn't make her family like me. I was shocked when I heard their reason, “We want someone older than you.” I wished I could have changed my birth year on my ID card.

Overcoming all the prohibitions from her family and sometimes from my family also, we were together year after year. We graduated, had jobs and began to think about marriage. That was the time I knew the reason that her family kept standing in our

way. They intended to go to another country. They submitted all the documents a very long time ago, before I met her. A wedding meant a change in her marital status, and it can make her family lose their immigration status.

After I found that out, we fought a lot. I wanted us to get married, but she couldn't stand against her family. That was the first time we didn't see each other for half a year. No calling, no texting, not any connection. But love always finds its way. We got together again 3 years ago, when her family's immigration process came to an end. They passed the interview in February 2015. Her family left in April 2015, with my first love.

And that's the end of my story about my first love. But if you don't like stories with sad endings, I won't let you down. Because now I'm writing my essay for my ESOL class, with her running around in our family store, in the United States. And we will never ever be separated again.

Hoang Hai Nguyen is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Letter to My Son

My lovely son, my lovely Poyraz,

How can I explain how much I love you? It is not possible; words and phrases are not enough. When I carried you in my arms for the first time, I understood that I would never be the same again. I will always think about you, and I will never sleep well if you are not with me. I know that you trust me, and I know you will always be my priority. I will always protect you until the end of my life.

You are so young, and you have a long life to live. Don't forget, being happy is the most important thing in your life. This will be the first thing I will teach you. If you want, you can be a doctor or a musician; if you are happy, everything is ok for me and for you. Always follow happiness.

Life is important, but everything is temporary. We all are temporary, and all we need is love. Don't trust people too much, and don't forget that being balanced is important. Love people, love animals, love the planet, love everything, but first love yourself. Don't forget you are special.

Be conscientious! I hope you will never meet bad people, and I wish you a happy and healthy life.

Your mom who loves you more than everything.

Itir Yigit is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Personal Story

I am Julio De La Cruz. I am from Guatemala I moved to Jupiter, Florida 2 years ago.

My story started in 2014 when I decided to leave my country, family, and friends. I decided to get a better life. I said goodbye to my family on June 5. My heart was overflowing with emotions. I was crying as I said goodbye to my mother and father. I had to cross the border Guatemalan and Mexican border. I was apprehended multiple times by the federal officers, because I was undocumented but they let me cross the border because I was not a criminal.

Two weeks later I crossed the Rio Bravo, Mexico on a boat to head towards the desert. I did not eat for two days until the border patrol found me, because I was lost and they arrested me and kept me in jail for two weeks. I was under age and my brother had to come and to release me out of jail.

Today I thank God because I now live in the United States. I have a good job and I enrolled myself in an ESOL program at JCHS and I have been successful at learning English. I now have greater goal and aspirations for my future.

Julio De La Cruz is a student at Jupiter Community High School. His teacher is Dielma Eusebio.

A Man, A Story

He was born in a rich but unfortunate country in the Caribbean, in a family of five children of which he is the third. Since his early childhood, he had always been interested in the liberal professions. Consequently, after high school, he attended the Faculty of Theology at UNAH where he earned a Bachelor's degree in Theology which allowed him to serve his country and at the same time earn his living as a pastor. When he was old enough to start a home, he married a lovely girl. From this union were born three beautiful children: Herbert, Edwards, and Dwight.

After providing eighteen years of service in his native country, a great natural disaster that left 300,000 dead and many disabled people, would change the course of his life by creating a very big decision that was not part of his plan. At home, in his native country, he earned his living very well. For many years, he had to separate from his family who traveled to the United States of America aboard a military plane. He used to go back and forth between the United States of America and his home country twice a year. Before making the decision to join his family, who had been living in the USA for seven years, he'd had to work very hard in order to take care of them and himself, because his wife didn't work when she first arrived there. At this moment, one needed at least 10 local dollars for one American dollar. His paycheck could be evaluated at about 400\$ US. He regularly sent 300\$ US to his wife. Can you imagine that he had 100\$ US left to live per month?

Finally, he made the decision to join his family two years ago, which was the joy of the whole family. We unanimously recognize that the USA is a country of great opportunities. This is probably why, almost everyone dreams of visiting the USA or staying there. This host country offers him great opportunities indeed; however, these opportunities seem to be for non-immigrant natives. Being an immigrant, he faces problems including: language barriers, unemployment, insurance, and racism. However, he recognizes that the host country offers his family what his native country could not offer them: a healthy environment, more security, a state of law, a place where excellence is rewarded. It is a country where almost everyone, regardless of the color of your skin, country of origin, height, or social rank is provided has the same chance of succeeding. He may be wrong, but if he

is wrong, he is mistaken in good faith. This man was me, your servant, Jean-Oreste Abraham.

Jean-Oreste Abraham is a student in the College and Career Readiness class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

My Childhood Story

My name is Juan Vargas. I was born in Guatemala City, in a small town called San Juan Ixcoy. I am a dreamer who fights for what I want until I get it.

When I was in Guatemala, I went to school like many other children. However, I didn't really like school, so I did not put much interest in it. When I was 12 years old my third grade teacher made me understand how important school really is. I started putting more effort in school and tried to be a better student. Unfortunately, in my hometown most children have to work due to economic problems in our families. I had to wake up at 6 am to go to work a couple of hours, and after that, get ready to go to school. It was extremely hard to do both at the same time.

At 15 years old, I told my mom that I wanted to learn more, and I also wanted to move to the big city to get a better education. But she was not happy with my decision. After a couple of weeks, she surprised me by telling me my dream of leaving my town was going to become a reality. I was really happy and got my stuff ready. To my surprise I was not heading to the big city. I was actually getting out of my own country! By the time I realized this, I was on my way to the United States.

For me this trip was a great adventure; I was young and inexperienced. On my trip I saw a lot of new things and new places that I had never seen before. It made me realize how big this world actually is. As I passed through Mexico, I had to learn a new language as well as the national anthem. My final destination was Caborca, which is on the border between Mexico and the United States of America.

After I made it to the border, I had to walk about a 15 minutes to Texas, and it was like a dream. I was in the United States of America! After that, I traveled to Florida and my second day in Florida was where reality hit me: I was no longer going to go to school.

Years later, I decided to enroll at the Adult Education Center to finally get my education because I learned how important school really is in life, and how much I need it because it will make my life easier.

Juan Vargas is a student in Level 7 ESOL and GED classes at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

Tomorrow Might Be Too Late

“Don’t take life for granted.” I used to hear this expression. I also knew the meaning. However, I never gave a second thought to it until January 12th, 2010.

It was almost 5 o’clock in the afternoon. I was on my way home in a bus when everything began to shake. In the next few seconds, a cloud of dust invaded the air. I didn’t realize what it was until I heard someone say the word earthquake. I’d never experienced one before.

The traffic being blocked, I walked for over one hour. On my way, here and there I saw injured people; I especially remember a woman crying and running with a child in her arms. Seeing this scene, I had a second shock. I started running and I started to panic for my mother. Running and crying at the same time, I feared the worst. Arriving home, fortunately, I found my mother safe and sound, but shocked.

As the news came, I learned that several areas in the West Department were affected. We were waiting for my brother to come back home. He worked in the morning and went to class in the afternoon; he had just started studying in the university. He was the youngest of the family. I was one year older than him. When we were children, we were so close that people always thought we were twins.

That day, I refused to worry too much about him. In my head, he was so full of life, too young, and nothing could happen to him.

As the hours passed, the news of other relatives began to reach us, but from him, nothing. And there began my anxiety. It grew louder when, on the radio, they mentioned L'Université GOC as one of the fallen buildings. My brother was there.

The worst happened. I never saw him again, at least, in real life. I keep seeing him in my dreams. I wish those dreams were real and that I had the chance to tell him how much I love him, but he stays in my dreams.

If there's any lesson that came from the loss of my brother, it's this: In the time we have left, we must be more generous with our love and more open to each other. Because of this experience, I know, today more sharply than yesterday. After we're gone, the time for showing love is passed and will never come back again.

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

The Child I Used to Be

When I was a child, I hid in the closet whenever new people came over. Even as a young girl I never felt good enough. I guess that is what being a middle child feels like. My older sister was a preppy cheerleader whom everyone loved. My little sister was a spoiled baby doll. But then there was me.

A brown haired, blue-eyed girl who would hide in the closet and read. I'd take myself to magical worlds such as the school of Hogwarts, the round table of Camelot, and down the rabbit hole. But once the story ended I had to go back to the real world.

As I got older, my older sister had children and moved away, while my younger sister moved across county with her father. My mother went into depression, and at the age of 14, I was no longer her daughter. I was her partner in life. I made sure she got up

and got something to eat. Before I went to school, I'd try to make sure she wouldn't have to worry about anything.

But being that young, I didn't understand bills and how much they affected people. Soon my mother and I were living on food stamps and my joke of a father's child support. I soon started doing odd jobs around the neighborhood: watching people's children, cleaning their houses, and mowing their lawns, just to make sure we had a house to live in.

I soon dropped out of school because I needed to work full time and take care of my mother. I did what I had to do, but it never felt right. At the age of 16, I ran away to New York City with a boyfriend. Let's just say I've made smarter choices than that one. So after a year I came home. I discovered that my leaving had forced my mother to get off the bed and go to work.

There will always a part of me that feels like I lost my childhood. But now I feel better about life. I moved out of my mother's place, into my aunt and uncle's home. They adopted me. They made me feel like I was in a real family. I never thought I'd have something like that. Now I'm going back to school for my GED and after that, college. I want to be a teacher and teach overseas. I want to teach other kids the joy of learning.

So, there you see, even the saddest of stories can come out with a happy ending.

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

Cell Phones Are Very Hazardous

September 12, 2007 was a day my family and I would never forget. Everything was going wonderfully. We were on our way home from Jer-Laysia's doctor appointment. I was driving my 94 Mazda Protégé with my four daughters in the car; Kanesha, My-Kwanazaa, Jer-Niya and Jer-Laysia, coming down Lake Hollingsworth. The sun was shining nice and bright. We were all talking, laughing and having a blast.

Suddenly, I saw a car swerving in and out my lane. I started wildly honking my horn to get the driver's attention, but unfortunately it didn't help. As soon as she finally looked up to see the road, she hit us! The impact was so horrible that she knocked us off the road into someone's yard, then back into the road.

After the car came to a complete stop, I checked around in the car to see the status of everyone. I saw Kanesha's face in the windshield, and my baby Jer-Laysia was breathing. She was blue and purple in the face. My face had the biggest hole on the top of my head. Jer-Niya had so much glass in her head and feet. My-Kwanazaa was covered in glass. This was a horrible accident!

Then I jumped out the car to confront the driver of the car. I asked her what she was doing; "Why did you hit us?" She told me that she was trying to get her cell phone. I yelled, "This is an example of why you shouldn't use cell phone while driving. You almost killed me and my family! What the hell is wrong with you?"

Suddenly, I realized my daughter wasn't breathing, so I started running down the road with her in my arms. I saw a woman in her truck; I reached in her truck and unlocked her door and told her to take my daughter and I to the hospital. She was terrified. She wouldn't do it because she didn't think that we could leave the scene of an accident without getting in trouble. She wanted to help but wouldn't take us to the hospital.

As I was getting out her truck, I started running again with my baby in my arms, begging somebody to take us to the hospital. Out of nowhere, this lady (Terri) took my daughter out my arms and stuck her fingers down her my daughter's throat; she pulled all that blood out, that she was choking on. It opened up her airway and she started breathing again. The baby became conscious as the E.M.T got there. They started an I.V in her leg and called for a helicopter to airlift her.

She suffered a fractured skull, fractured face, and a blood clot on her brain. With many prayers and the help of God she lived. With a lot after effects, one of the sad parts of this story is that the woman that hit us, killed herself because she thought

she killed my daughter. God bless her soul. But the thing I want to teach everyone that is cell phones can cause a tragedy. Do not use them while driving.

Latreas R. Bell is GED student at West Area Adult School. Her teacher is Kathleen Keen.

What a Life!

I dropped out of high school and went into the United States Army before I was 18. I became an expert in small weapons and served as a sniper in a strike unit. I served in the Korean War. Due to the atrocities in which I was involved and that I witnessed, I now suffer from PTSD. I still have nightmares. When I left the Army, I became a professional pistol shooter and competed in pistol championships all over the country. I also was a United States Postal Service letter carrier for 35 years.

I like to lift weights, go fishing, and keep the grounds around my house looking beautiful. My son is grown and lives up north, so it's just my wife and me now. I was a security guard for a retirement community for several years when a new company took over the security contract. They require all their workers to have at least a high school diploma or their GED. Well, I didn't have either since I had dropped out of high school. I had to decide whether to quit the job or figure out a way to get my high school diploma or GED.

I enrolled in the adult school during the 2016-17 school year, and now attend an off-campus class in Lake Wales, FL, which is the closest to my home. I have been able to progress through the curriculum and have re-learned many skills that I needed. At first, I felt like "the old dude", but I have met some kind and respectful young people and feel that the students in the class look to me for advice in some ways. We have become good friends, almost like a family. They have seen me become emotional about respecting veterans and our country.

My goal is to finish the work needed to pass the GED. Hurricane Irma set me back a little, since we had property damage and I have had to deal with insurance companies and adjusters. I

had to have emergency surgery, which kept me out of school for a week. Then a young driver rear-ended me, which caused some inconvenience, and interrupted my attendance. Nothing is going to deter me from finishing this goal.

Lester Hockenberry is a student at East Area Adult School, Auburndale, FL, in the Polk County Schools. He attends the Lake Wales ABE/GED class.

Mom, I Miss You!

My name is Lovensky Louis Douze. I am from Haiti. My mom means a lot to me. When I was two years old, my dad took me away from my beloved mom and gave me to another woman, my stepmother. I miss my mom very much. Each time I am on break from work, I will visit my mom. It makes her happy. We eat, walk, and joke with each other. When I have to depart, she starts to cry. She makes me cry, too.

Lovensky Louis Douze attends the English class at Career and Adult Education Center, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Horrifying Phone Call

March 10, 2017 is when my life suddenly changed. It was a sunny Monday morning, I was up making breakfast before it was time for me to go to work. My phone that was on the charger in my room began to ring. Before I could get to it, the call had already hung up. I checked my phone and it was my older sister. I called, and then went to the kitchen to check on my food that was still cooking.

After my breakfast was done, I went back to return my sister's phone call. She answered the phone so quickly like something was dramatically wrong. "Hello Lakeyshia, I need you to get to the hospital as quickly as possible. Auntie Shan is not doing too good." My heart completely dropped. I was lost for words. All I could hear in the background was my aunt screaming in lots of pain.

I asked my sister what was going on and she said, “It’s too much to explain just get here as soon as possible.” Before I could hang up I could still hear my aunt yelling. “I can’t feel my legs, I’m ready to go, I’m tired, I can’t do this anymore.” Immediately, I begin to pack my things and head to the hospital.

On my way to the hospital, all that ran through my head was why? Why is this happening to such a sweet person? I finally reached the hospital and there in the waiting room was all my family. My dad was just sitting in a corner crying. I walked over to wipe his tears, and to ask him what was wrong with my aunt. My dad started to tell me, “She has no blood flowing in her left leg, and she has a bad heart.” I then asked him “where is she? Can I see her?” He replied “No the doctor rushed her into surgery. As we sit in the waiting room and wait for her to come out of surgery, I called my job to let them know I was not going to make it to work for that day.

Hours and hours went by and she was still in surgery. I began to get impatient. The doctor finally entered the waiting room and said. “Turner family, Shan’s surgery went well, but we suggest that no one see her now she needs rest.” The doctor also stated, “she will have to go into another surgery in three hours, she still has a lot of bleeding around her heart.

After three hours went by the Dr. finally let us see her. She was not doing well. She couldn’t breathe on her own and she still didn’t have blood flowing in her leg. The next day the Dr. told us my aunt was not going to make it. My family had the option to leave her on life support or pull the plug. That was the most difficult decision my family ever had to make. March 11, 2017 at 8:45 pm is when she took her last breath.

Lakeyshia Turner is a GED student at West Area Adult School. Her teacher is Kathleen Keen.

In the Blink of an Eye

It’s hard to believe that just about a year and a half ago I was in the hospital giving birth to my beautiful daughter. It was terrifying and exciting all at once, mostly because I was 16 and

giving birth to a baby. But despite all that, I was excited to meet my baby girl, Adelynn.

While I was pregnant, it wasn't easy at all. Everyone told me that my life was ruined, that I'm not going to be able to do anything anymore, or that I'm just going to have to sit at home and take care of a baby all day. However, that wasn't the case. The truth is that becoming a teenage mom made life a lot more interesting and challenging.

You never realize how fast life goes by until you are watching your little one grow and learn new things each day. One minute they are tiny and lying in their comfy warm crib sleeping peacefully; the next minute they are up and going, trying to walk and get into everything. Just seeing and experiencing all of that growth, makes all the negative comments people ever said to me while I was pregnant just disappear.

Life is for the living, and having a baby brings a new meaning to life. It shows you that life is not all about going out to a party, or blowing money on useless things as if it's nothing. It's all about spending time with loved ones, and cherishing the moments that life gives you. Life goes by more quickly than we think. I've learned in life that I don't need anyone except my daughter, my family, and myself.

Life is too short to be unhappy. My daughter brings me happiness and shows me what life is all about. I now know what unconditional love feels like, all because of Adelynn. I may have had her at a young age, but because of her I am who I am today, and I wouldn't trade that for the world.

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

Life and Learning

My name is Miriam Carolina Moreno de Torres. I grew up in a little town called San Luis de la Paz Guanajua in Mexico. I like to do many things, like spending time with my family, cooking, and going to church. I like to watch my son in his baseball games, do

art crafts, and plant vegetables. I study about health and nutrition because I would like to help people with learning healthy eating habits. I am very interested in other cultures, especially Japan. Reading books about spiritual growth, motivation, and others' success is very interesting to me. Also, I like to play a game called mancala with my daughter. When I watch TV, I like to watch forensic files.

I live in Lake Wales and most of my friends live in different parts of the country. One of my best friends is Katy, from Ecuador, who is 10 years older than I am. She is married, has 2 boys, is a housewife, and she is my business partner. We give business presentations together. Many of my friends are Christians and Catholic. My friends understand me and cheer me up when I need it.

I feel very blessed by God; I have a wonderful husband and 3 beautiful children. On the other hand, I feel sad because I haven't seen my family in 20 years. Also, I have many goals and dreams to achieve in my life. I have attended the adult school for 2 years and am preparing to take the GED test. I want to continue my education at a college or technical college. Finishing my GED will help me toward better job opportunities.

Miriam Moreno is a student at East Area Adult School in Auburndale, FL, in Polk County Schools. She attends the Lake Wales ABE/GED class.

Have A Positive Attitude Wherever You Are

My name is Mirlo Lopez, and I'm from Panama. I would like to share my experience about our transfer to Key West. In May, 2016 my husband called me and said "Mirlo, we need to move to the USA for two years." At that moment I was very happy because I was only thinking about vacation, but later on my mind started to think deeply. I felt nervous because it would be a big change.

Everything became complicated. I had to take a leave of absence from my work. My son was not happy because he did not want to change the school and say goodbye to his friends. My mother and my mother-in-law live alone. My husband and

I spend a lot of our time with them. My daughters, Karla and Mirla, stayed in our country. Mirla works in Auditory Company and Karla traveled to Europe to start her professional practice in Naval Engineering. All of these things affect me very much.

Finally, in August 2016, we flew to Key West. When I arrived, I was thinking “This place is totally different from my country and it’s time to change.” But I didn’t change. For six months I stayed at home and did not socialize with anyone except on Sundays when I went to church. Then one day I decided to study English, to do different activities, to visit all the historic places in Key West and to find interesting things. Basically on this day I changed my attitude.

When I first started the English course, my level was low intermediate and now my level is high intermediate. Certainly, I have shown improvement in my English and in that short time I can speak English better.

My son is in his senior year and he will graduate this May. He speaks English very well. He has many friends and works at the “Incas Restaurant.” My mother will visit me soon. She will stay here with us for four months. My mother-in-law is sick but my husband has gone to see her. Some of the families are staying with her. In my free time, I lead the prayer group to help and give support to people who are less fortunate than me.

In conclusion, it doesn’t really matter where I stay, what is more important is to have a positive attitude, appreciate the new opportunities, study and be a better person.

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

The Worst Day Ever

It was a day like any other day, and all was good as usual. I woke up early to go to school. Mom made us breakfast, and then she dropped us off. The day went really well, and everything was normal. A bright sunny day as usual at lunchtime, the students were playing in the playground. School used to release us at two

o'clock, and then I took the bus to go home. When I got to my house, I ate. Then I took a bath, and I started doing my homework while babysitting my little sister and my cousin.

Suddenly at four fifty-three in the afternoon, the house started to shake. I thought it was going to be the end of the world. I rushed back outside. I saw a lot of dust, and a lot of people crying looking for their families. I was in a state of shock, and it took me a while to realize what was going on. There were no phone services. I tried to call my mother and my aunt who were at work. They were unreachable. This is when I started to get really worried and got so emotional and sad at the same time. I tried to calm my little sister down. She couldn't stop crying. We thought something bad had happened to our mother. After she showed up at midnight, it was a relief.

So the next day, we decided to go out to look for the rest of the family. This is when we realized how much damage the earthquake had done. The White House was down, and all other big business, even my school, had fallen down. Everything had turned into dust. There were people still alive and crying under those demolished houses without food. I was terrified and scared. I didn't eat for a day. I kept thinking, how are we going to recover from this?

The Haitian government called out for assistance to get those people from under those destroyed houses. We had a lot of help from other countries. There were a lot of dead people and injured kids and elderly. People were still alive under those crushed houses for three days with no food, but they survived. We had nowhere to live. A lot of people left the country to get first aid in Dominican Republic, and we still haven't heard from them. I also lost my best friend from the earthquake. Since then, we don't know if they died or not, and their family lost all hope of finding them again. It was the worst time I ever lived in my entire life. I would never want to relive that day ever again.

Nirva Leon is in Leslie McBride-Salmon's College and Career Readiness class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

Panamanian's Dream Came True

The Panama Men's National Team has been trying to qualify for the FIFA World Cup for 41 years. This is the main soccer competition worldwide, and it's very difficult to be part of it. First, each national team has to gain steps throughout regional leagues. Winners go to the next round and so on until the best teams qualify and get into the competition that takes place every 4 years.

In 2013, the almost impossible was going to become a reality. Panama was beating the USA 2-1 and ninety minutes of regulation time were over. Panamanians were containing the breath of happiness because "We're going to be in the World Cup!" But the dream turned into a nightmare right away. In the three minutes of extra time, the USA scored two goals. Just like that, the match turned out 2-3, and Panama lost. It was one of the worst feelings that I had experienced; it was an emotional shock for everybody.

The following year, with a new coaching staff, the national team started the path to the top again. Most of the players kept their spot on the team although people thought they were too old to be there. However, the experience was worth it. They have been fighting for this purpose for many years and transmitting their knowledge to the new generation. Thanks to them the soccer of the country has been progressing along the way. This road to the World Cup 2018 continued. After 5 rounds, Panama newly had the chances to qualify. Despite that the possibilities were very limited, there was still hope.

During the final match day, an almost surreal scenario was taking place simultaneously:

- Trinidad & Tobago, the last team in the statistics was beating the USA 2-1.
- Honduras was beating Mexico (the best team of the group) 3-2.
- We were tied with Costa Rica and that's very surprising because they were one step over us most of the time.

All the almost impossible facts that we needed to qualify were happening! We just had to score one more goal! The stadium was crowded with people screaming "WE CAN DO IT!" Then,

the team's captain, Roman Torres, didn't control his passion and courage and came all the way from the back to score at the 88th minute.

People couldn't believe it! These final minutes lasted an eternity, but this time, the team fought until the final whistle without hesitating. Finally, the dream came true!

For the first time ever, Panama qualified for the Russia World Cup 2018! It was so amazing; people all around the country were celebrating on the streets. We were living an historic event. As our anthem says, "At last we reached victory!"

Pilar Grimaldo is in the College and Career Readiness class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

New Doors Will Open – I Will Survive

Everyone has stories to tell about life because everyday life is filled with both good and bad experiences and challenges. The story of our lives are made up of our success, failure, mishap, surprise, achievements or the loss of loved ones. As far as I am concerned, I was very happy when I reached my dream to become a lawyer. Yet, I am disappointed when I am forced to give up the practice of my profession in my country.

After six years of primary school, seven years of secondary school, and four years of university studies, at the cost of great sacrifices, I finally graduated in Law at the State University of Haiti in 2012. Then I found out that actually I did not because it is necessary to do five additional years which according to the academic requirements are divided in two parts: three years for the preparation for the issuance of the license, and two years to do my internship as a lawyer at the Bar of Cap-Haitien. It was in April of the last year that I obtained my Certificate of Internship authorizing me to plead before all the courts of the Republic.

I feel helpless about my situation because I have spent many years devoted to my studies, professional and intellectual training, without forgetting my diploma in philosophical and politics obtained in two years at the Public State University of the North

of Haiti in Cap-Haitien, and my diploma in French Language at the French Academy of the same city. Moreover, I was a French teacher, as well as a Secretary at the State University of Haiti. Today, I am forced, for reasons of security, to rethink about my professional life outside the borders of my country. This is the greatest moral discomfort that one can imagine. It's like starting again at zero. It is very sad.

In any case, despite the demoralizing and uncomfortable aspect of my situation, I am already armed with courage to confront my new reality with certainty, perseverance and determination. I will remain convinced that I will be better than before and that new and more brilliant horizons will open before me.

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

Given Life Again

My name is Rosa and in 1992 my husband and I came to the United States. We started a family here in Dade City, Florida. By the year 2000, there were already five in our family, three children, my husband and me.

One day everything changed so quickly. I frequently felt sick and had kidney infections that spreads silently. I was in treatment for 12 years without improvement. The doctor told me that the news of my last chance to stay alive was to have a dialysis.

After a few months of treatment, the doctor and his assistant informed that it would be a possibility I could receive a kidney transplant. For me, it was a surprise. After filling out an application and partaking in all the necessary exams, my name is on a waiting list of an anonymous donor. I thought that there would be more people ahead of me waiting and that my name would disappear. The wait was long, after exactly three years of having registered; I received a call in the early morning. I recall that it was close to 3 o'clock in the morning.

The doctor said there was a donor who was compatible with me. This young man was between the ages of 19-20. All the joy

I could feel for a greater possibility of life; then I felt sad for his family at the same time for their loss. However, it was more my joy and I cannot find the words to thank for this second opportunity now in my prayers. I ask God for the rest of his soul, his family found comfort knowing that the departure of their beloved son had given the opportunity for another to continue living.

Personally, I have taken the opportunity to be better with my family and friends, now I am learning English. I have met many people, very different from me, from different countries and cultures with the same purpose as I take advantage of the opportunity we have in life.

Rosa Castillo is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center located in Dade City, Florida. She was born in the town San Jose De Los Guajes, Jalisco, Mexico, in October 10, 1974. Their family continues to in Dade City Florida.

Stolen Childhood

The Venezuela I grew up in remains in my memories like a beautiful and happy country, where we all lived in harmony with our different ways of thinking. Children were children, and therefore they thought like children. Who didn't ever invent a stomachache in order to skip school? Who did not pass hours in front of a dish of disliked food? Anxious, kids finished homework to go out to play with friends and waited for the ice cream truck to pass by the street.

Children only were scared of characters invented in old country legends like "El Coco" and "La Sayona". The youngest soon ate their food so "El Loco" would not take them away. Politics were not part of their lives. Kids knew about democracy and presidents but never paid too much attention to political issues.

However, nowadays in Venezuela, kids are not kids anymore. Venezuelan children are adults hidden in kids' bodies. Their fears are not imaginary characters anymore. They are afraid of shootings, tear gas, and violence. They are worried about finding food and trying to help their parents to get it. They learn to control their hungry stomachs and to survive with only one poor meal a day. They feel it is impossible to escape the anguish,

hopelessness, and desperation they see in their parents. Many of them don't ever go back to school. Instead, they start working or begging at an early age. They have only known a country in continuous crisis, and it is becoming worse every day. Now, they know about politics, official and opposition sides, hatred and resentment, the good ones and the bad ones. It looks like the innocence is gone and has been replaced by rage, impotence, and indignation.

The little ones grow and become young ones, and they go to the street to fight. They fight for a future that does not seem to exist for them. They go to fight with their weapons: the Venezuelan flag, their ideals, their courage and the desperate wish for a change. And they face dangers they do not suspect: repression, aggression, imprisonment, and torture. Many of them have died; their human rights have been violated by the authorities that once vowed to protect them as citizens of a free country.

No one can escape from the drama that means to live in a country where the most basic human rights such as food, health, and safety are not guaranteed.

This is the incredible story of a country that was blessed by God in every single way. A destructive government guided by cravings for money and power is progressively stealing the laugh, happiness, and dreams of the most vulnerable group of Venezuelan society: its children.

Ruth Neville is a student in Leslie McBride Salmon's CCR class at the AEC in West Palm Beach.

The “Pladinera”

When I was a boy, I lived along the Caribbean coast of my native country, Colombia. It's a special region. People have a peculiar idiosyncrasy: they live happily and any situation can be a party for them. For example, the “Day of the Dead” is a time to pray, to cry, to eat, and to drink. During that annual event, some people had an uncommon job.

Maria Tomasa, my older cousin, was a “Pladinera” who is a person that was hired to cry at memorial services. When the de-

ceased person didn't have any close family to cry for him, somebody searched for a "Pladinera" and paid for her service. They cried and prayed in the presence of the deceased's grave site in the cemetery. The "Day of the Dead" was a very busy time for her and me, because there were a lot of requests for her services. I helped her schedule the orders and collect the money for this activity. She paid me a portion of the money for helping her and that was great deal for a boy.

Around the cemetery, the vendors sold flowers, food, fruits, and beverages. There were a lot of candles to illuminate the way for the loving relatives. Early in the morning, we used to put "bollos" (a paste of corn wrapped in corn leaves), cheese and bread in a bag. We had a good provision of water, too. Many tears were shed. The day was hot and the sunlight was brilliant as a spotlight. Umbrellas were very necessary for the long day outside.

Maria hurried us along because she needed to start early. On the way to the cemetery, many people said, "Maria, give me an appointment. We know you have more than one memorial and you are very busy." I noted the time in the small notebook and the list increased more and more. Finally, we arrived at the cemetery and the work started. I asked the relatives of the deceased, "Do you want the service cried or only prayed?" That question was necessary because the prices were different. My cousin drank a lot of water. She had to cry a lot, but it was easy for her. After saying the "responso" (a special mix of religious orations and other requests to heaven), she dried her tears and I collected the money. Other memorials awaited us!

If I hadn't seen and participated in that activity, I would have thought it was invented. This and other similar customs still occur in the Caribbean regions of Colombia. The people there think and act differently. The "Day of the Dead" was not a sad occasion; it was a celebration of life. "Bye, bye, I'll see you the next year," the people said. Those were special days for me and my uncommon cousin, the "Pladinera."

Raul Romero is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. He works as a dental hygienist and has a love for traveling the world and oil painting. He enjoys telling his grandchildren about his childhood adventures in Colombia. Raul is also helping his tutor, Peter Anderson, learn Spanish.

Reaching New Goals

My name is Comfort Shaibu. I was born in a small village called Ochadamu in Nigeria in West Africa. I lost my mother when I was five years old, so my aunt and her husband raised me. They sent me to school where I had my elementary and high school education. I was married at 19.

We have 5 children. My first son is a university graduate. He studied Economics and is working with an oil company in Nigeria. My second son is doing his clinical studies in Medicine in Chicago, IL. My third son is an electrical engineer. I have two girls; one is a lawyer and the other is an accounting graduate from a Nigerian University. Education was a high priority.

I love to cook and that led me into the cooking profession as a chef for 23 years in Nigeria. I relocated to the United States of America. I have attended the adult school for 2 years and I'm learning the American culture that is so different from Nigeria. During this time, I studied for the U.S. Citizenship test so I could be an American citizen and have all the rights and privileges that brings. I passed the test and received my citizenship in December 2017. That was a highlight for my family and me.

I love to take care of children and the elderly. I currently work to assist the elderly in their daily life. I have great friends and we help each other morally and financially.

I feel happy and very thankful to God. I am very ambitious to move further in my education. That is the main reason for enrolling the GED program. It will help me to enroll in post-secondary education for the skills I need to work in the medical field.

Comfort Shaibu is a student in the Lake Wales ABE/GED class at East Area Adult School, Auburndale, FL, Polk County Schools.

My Hobby

All my life I have been looking for something that can challenge me. In a sport I found the special hobby that challenges me every single moment. My hobby is a skydiving. I'm an experi-

enced skydiver with more than one thousand jumps. I spend all my free time for my hobby and I'm excited about that.

I started skydiving nine years ago. It was a love from the first jump. I've been improving my skills all the years. There are a lot of disciplines inside skydiving. I choose one of the most attractive – wingsuit flying. To do that you need to be experienced in skydiving and have special equipment – wingsuit.

I've been flying in wingsuit last five years in a row. Wingsuit flying or wingsuiting is a very young parachuting discipline, but a lot of skydivers all around the world have chosen wingsuiting as a primary skydiving activity.

Last seven years I participated in all important wingsuiting events: world cups, world championships, national championships. The most amazing part of this experience was my BASE Jump. BASE-jumping is one of the most dangerous sport activities nowadays. BASE-jumping is an activity that a performer jumps from a fixed object (not airplane, helicopter or balloon). “B” is a building, “A” is an antenna, “S” is a span, “E” is an Earth.

Four years ago I decided to jump from the cliff. I remember my first base-jump very well. At home in Russia I found a coach who prepared me for base-jump. I spent one month for the training. Then we went to Italy. Our final destination was a small village Arco near the beautiful lake Garda. Then we arrived we stayed in a small hotel in Riva Del Garda – the town on the north side of the lake. It was the first time there and I really loved this place.

The next day early in the morning we checked the landing area and the weather condition. Everything was fine and we decided to make first jump before midday, because of wind condition. Usually the wind becomes stronger in the afternoon.

So, it was my first time there and I was a little nervous. The trip to the exit point was not very difficult but took one and a half hours of tracking and twenty minutes of a climbing.

Finally, we reached exit point. It was amazing. I was standing on a cliff. Thousand meters of air was laying under my feet. I see a small lake faraway near the landing area and huge peaks of the

others mountains. The sun was shining at a deep-blue sky and the air wasn't moving. It was amazing.

My coach helped me to hang on my gear and checked my equipment. I was ready to jump. I checked my gear myself again and we went to the exit fully equipped.

It was one of the most exciting moment of my life.

Sergey Panteleev is a student at ESOL, Adult and Community Education. His teacher is Dielma Eusebio.

THE PHONE CALL THAT CHANGED MY LIFE...

One day I was sleeping well and I heard the phone ringing over and over, but I thought it was part of my dream at the time.

Eventually, I woke up and I checked my phone. There were about 30 missed calls from my mother who at the time was in a nursing home. She was sick long before I found out about it. She was diagnosed with Lupus and was HIV positive. Her lupus cancer formed a mass in the back of her brain.

When I finally found out, I didn't believe it. But when I really thought about it, as I was looking through some old pictures of her, I could tell that her health was deteriorating. I was on the outside looking in and when I got the news, it was too late. I felt hopeless. My mother didn't tell me she didn't want to be a burden to me even though I would've said what any daughter would've said to a mother that was dying slowly: "No, you won't be, mother. I love you."

My mother had a heart of gold, a strong mind, was very humble, and always loved everyone no matter what the circumstances. She was not a judgmental person. As I saw growing up, she only saw the good in people. She didn't see their flaws. I am glad that I am her daughter.

So, the day that I missed all those calls was her nursing team telling me that I needed to immediately come because she took a turn for the worse, so of course my mind, body, and soul were

hurting mentally and physically. I was falling apart. If you were to ask me in one word how I was feeling during that moment, I would say my feelings were discombobulated. They were shattered like a puzzle on the floor.

When I hung up, all my emotions formed into a tear and many more, like a small river. My mom was hanging on. I decided to tell her that it's ok to go, that she didn't have to suffer any more. As I told her this, my heart seemed like it was slowly letting go of the grief and hurt that I felt when I got there. Like a breakthrough in the darkness, I am slowly seeing the light.

When I left and came back to her room, she decided to go. She took 5 breaths and then stopped. My heart dropped and I felt her spirit pass through me. It was a warm "you will be alright" feeling her spirit gave me. Her spirit literally did not let me cry anymore. I've been through a lot, lost a lot, and seen and experienced more than I can handle. I am a strong, black woman thanks to my mother. Tiwana Williams was her name. 1967-2008.

Brittany Williams is a dedicated student attending Adult and Community Education in Tallahassee and looking forward to graduating and wants to inspire others to join her. Her most appreciated teacher is Ms. Anne Meisenzahl.

Happy and Free

"Be yourself no matter what they say." - Sting

I remember my childhood.

I am ten years old.

That time was unknown and incomprehensible. What's next? How is it to be an adult? How can I be good and do the right thing?

It seemed to me then that something was wrong with me. I was not interested in talking about dresses and playing with dolls. I was not interested in what girls were doing at that age.

I was willing to learn how the world is made. I was looking for a true friendship where one is for all, and all is for one. I remember how boys and I climbed over a fence and I hung by my jacket and tore out some of the fabric. My grandmother decided that this could not be my idea and started blaming my friends, and each of them stood up in my defense. We were a united team, and everybody got punished.

Our parents did not let us see each other for a month, but we did not give up.

I am sixteen, and a lot has changed.

Girls began dating boys and playing adult games in the name of Love.

I am seventeen, and I feel more and more that the society in which I live rejects me. "You must live according to our rules," they used to tell me. That turned me upside down.

I am twenty, and I made one of the most difficult decisions in my life. And this decision is to be myself despite anything or anybody. I made this decision hoping that one day, it was going to be irrelevant who you loved, what color your skin was, what your faith was. You are a human being. You are what you are, and this is the only value.

I moved to the US in the year 2012.

I'm happy and free.

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

A New Beginning!

I look back on my life, and really regret the mistakes I made. Life is so beautiful, amazing and great. I look back on all the times that I was in the streets selling drugs. Or in a house somewhere getting high. I replay my life in my head, and watch it like

a movie. It's the saddest movie I've ever seen. What hurts me the most is watching the pain in my family eyes. My mother is my inspiration, my whole world. It breaks me down knowing that I'm the one who's hurt her the most. So much I could have done with my life. So many times I sat and dreamed about my perfect future. But I chose to let drugs control my life and determine my future.

I'm very thankful to be here. I have my life back. Now I'm free from the control of drugs, I look at prison as a new beginning. A time to really change my life, and gain control of my future. Life is so amazing. Why waste it on drugs? It doesn't matter if you're selling it or doing it. Nothing is worth jeopardizing my life now. I'm making a new movie now, and the ending is my future part. My mother smiling because of me.

Antionette Wicklund is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Mobile, Alabama. She believes that life is amazing for her right now, and she's happy. She is a student in the GED class facilitated by ITA Sharon Goff and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

Childhood Memories

My name is Andrea. I thank GOD I was fortunate to be born proudly in a family of 10 children in Celaya Guanajuato, Mexico. I am the third oldest daughter of our parents. As a girl, I had a happy childhood. I remember we did not have anything to spare, whether food or clothing. Nevertheless, we thank GOD we never missed what was necessary. Being an older sibling sometimes has its advantages and disadvantages. I had to help my mom with my younger siblings. I learned to cook, wash clothes, do dishes, sweep and mop the floors. I would help feed the little ones. Later, in my adolescence, that was my job. I can say thank GOD that he gave us some very strong, disciplined parents.

To bring money in our home, my mom made food to sell such as tamales, enchiladas, sopes, pacharelas, gorditas, pozoles, and many desserts; typical of our region. I was the one that would help her and, at the same time, I learned. We did not have the opportunity to study. I only got to the sixth grade in school. We did not have much opportunity to go beyond our Celaya.

On a few occasions, we went to visit our grandparents who lived in a town 45 minutes away. They lived near the field; I liked to go because when we went to Celaya, I felt free. I felt freer like a little bird in the field. We were going to help my grandfather with sowing. In the field, we cut the corn that he sowed. Then we would cook some in the embers. We also cut green beans and pumpkins to boil them. How tasty they were. It was so nice to eat outdoors and everything was tastier: the tortillas, the molcajete sauce, and the rich grilled nopales, that were all natural.

We played the game of marbles, spinning, maracas, matatena, and the yoyo. These are very typical games in our country. There was no technology back in those days. As children who played outside, we were more healthy and active. Children also had respect and were more obedient. We would stay up until very late at night to listen to our elders telling stories and more stories. Those were the best memories of my childhood. I am very proud to be a Mexican, even if I have to live far away from my country. We had to immigrate to this country for a better future for our family. I also thank this country very much for the opportunity it has given us. We give thanks for work and we have made progress.

Andrea Roaro is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center located in Dade City, Florida. She has five children; three of the five were born in the United States. She came to the U.S. in 1990.

The Story of an Immigrant

This is my personal story. Let me tell you more about myself, Genesis Torres, a nineteen year old, Venezuelan born woman. I have always been happy because I have had everything I need, thanks to God. With this I am not referring to material things, but to my supportive family. My family and I have always been healthy. Also, I have had an excellent education both at home and at school. My life was perfect until March 3, 2016, when due to the worst government in the history of my country; my dad had to take another course, a path without destiny, to guarantee our quality of life. Yes, that, "The American Dream."

That day arrived, we were at the airport when we heard: "Last call for passengers of Flight 801. Please board." Seeing the tears

on the face of my whole family, I walked away not to say good bye, but it was my turn. As I hugged my daddy, for the first time I saw him cry. He did that on my shoulders while he told me, “Take care of your sisters and your mommy. I will come back, I promise you. Do not forget me. I am doing this for your future.”

I said goodbye. I did not know when or if I would see him again. At the moment, I felt that the world was falling apart. That day something in me changed. I was never the same again.

Five months and five days passed until I saw my daddy again. It sounds like a short time, but it was not, because I had never been separated from my daddy before. Bad moments passed, and one of them was when my little sister, only three years old, cried every night. She did not want to eat, and just said, “I do not want to see him by Skype; I want to see him in person.” How do you explain to a three-year-old girl that her daddy cannot be with you because he is looking for quality of life, or how do you explain to her that he did not abandon her? He just wanted to insure her future.

Finally, the day arrived. On August 8, 2016, my sisters, mother and I were in The United States, and it was the reunion. It was the happiest day of my life. Now, I see this as an experience that made has me stronger and realize the value of things. I am thankful to God because he made it possible for me to see my daddy again.

Genesis Torres is studying College and Career readiness at Brewster Technical College. She is now with her family together, and happier than ever.

Jamaican Memories

The earlier years of my life have always been a blur; often a frail image of a former life would flutter my mind. At one point of my young life, I could remember seeing my mother zealously shoving her clothes into a rather unfitting green and beige Pullman carry-on suitcase with gold outlining the edges where the zippers were located. Destination? A far away land, one I was oblivious to at that time.

While growing up in the rural part of Jamaica, a little parish by the name of Clarendon, my mother was the only active parent I had known. One of the hardest things I had to come to terms with was accepting the absence of my father. I had dreamt of his warm embrace, his fervent need to protect and love me. He is the first love of my life and the one who truly owns my heart. But that dream was never a reality, nor will it ever be. The strength I have urged myself to proclaim was never acknowledged until I became older. By this time, I had accepted the fate and ordinance of my life. Though sadly, I could never really understand the reason my father chose to abandon me. I often question my existence because of that very choice. The heartbreaking act of negligence on his part has eluded me in ways I can never begin to decipher. To me he is everything and nothing all at once. With only my mother as my primary provider, all responsibilities rested solely upon her shoulders.

Despite her efforts, one very significant disadvantage for me was not being able to attend school as one should have. The little knowledge I had received soon began to dissipate from my mind. By the time I had gotten to primary school I was struggling to even recite the letters of the alphabet and the months of the year. I had always known I was lacking in something but never thought about it long enough to put it into perspective. As the years went by my self-esteem soon began ebbing away. I had become more and more self-conscious and inactive with those around me. I felt I was invading the space of anyone I encountered. I've always sought the approval and acceptance of others to make me feel better about myself. I would internally chastise myself if one was disapproving of me.

I vaguely remember the moments I had with my mother before she was given the opportunity to go to the United States of America to work. We were reunited after eleven years apart and the memories of her walking toward the airport with the same green and beige Pullman carry-on suitcase was now a figment of my imagination.

Julia Dixon, ABE Language student, Adult Education Center, West Palm Beach. Julia is planning to go to college to major in Psychology and minor in Production Assistance. Would like to go to Uganda to help less fortunate kids.

Miracle Remedies

In small towns in Colombia, peasants often play the role of doctors when someone gets sick. Part of Colombia's biodiversity is the fruits we consume all the time. In fact, if we wanted, in Colombia we could drink a different juice every day of the year without repeating the fruit. In addition, depending on the region, a particular fruit is used as medicine for a particular disease.

During my childhood, I spent my vacation in Tena, the city where my mother was born. My grandfather grew many fruits, but my best memories are with one in particular. the delicious and sweet mango. My experience with this began when my mother stopped breastfeeding and began the stage of incorporating food into my nutrition. There was always a small mango in the refrigerator in my house. There was mango juice, mango jam, mango jelly, mango dessert, mango punch, mango ice cream and so on. Also, if I caught a cold, the remedy was hot mango juice. If I fell and hurt my knees, it was only necessary to cover the wound with a mango peel. If my stomach burned, I should eat mango to relieve the pain. To quench cravings, green mango with salt was the key.

When I was twelve, I fell. My grandfather tried to cure my ankle with massages using warm water cloths and mango. When I was eighteen, the doctors advised me to do the reconstruction of my tendons. Surely, I did not get enough mango when I fell down. Obviously, no one at home missed this type of treatment.

My sister Vivi, as a child, put the eye of a teddy bear in her mouth. She swallowed it by mistake, but the teddy bear eye never reached her stomach. Ten years later, she began to get sick. She coughed, coughed, and coughed. When the doctors did the corresponding tests, they identified a rare object in the right lung and scheduled a complicated surgery. They would remove a part of the lung because that rare object had already damaged it. My parents suffered greatly with the decision of the doctors and there was no alternative. However, they could not forget the miraculous solution to all our problems. My poor sister had to take shark oil with a petroleum drops and mango. In this way, they tried to avoid subjecting her to the dangerous surgical procedure. Despite those terrible remedies, nowadays she has an extensive

scar from the back to the chest that reminds us all of the effectiveness and sweet taste of the medicinal mango.

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

Challenges

My name is Jason Fernandez Garcia. I was born in Ponce, Puerto Rico on July 12, 1985, and I am the second of three children. In intermediate school, I was an athlete of track and field. I earned an athlete scholarship to attend a University. To be honest, the studies were not for me since I was two years old.

My passion for cars is incredible; I went to study bodywork. There is where my life began to build strength in the studies, since it was a topic of interest. My certification is in Technical Collision. I had built myself a workshop to improve my skills.

I have a commitment as a father to provide for my wife and son to work, while my wife finishes her studies. My wife finished her studies and began to receive job offers and she had an interview in Florida; but with the passing of Hurricane Maria through our island, she could not leave Puerto Rico.

The first few days after the passage of Hurricane Maria were horrible with many people fleeing our island without jobs; among them was me. My wife started working in Florida, so we moved to Zephyrhills, Florida. In Puerto Rico, we left behind many memories and material things. Now a new life begins in the United States, I never thought that I would live here. I have had many mixed feelings for over a month.

Now I have started classes for English because a future lies ahead for our family.

Jason Fernandez is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL classes at James Irvin Education Center, Dade City, Florida. He attended Mechanic Technical College and earned a degree in Technical Collision. In 2017, he came to the States from Puerto Rico.

Cookie Grandma

Friends are an important part of our lives. If we're lucky, we find one special friend, our best friend forever, or "BFF." Not many kids have had a best friend that is 77 years older than they are, but I did. Grab your pot holders and chocolate chips, as I tell you about my BFF, Cookie Grandma.

I nicknamed her name when I was barely old enough to talk. I named her Cookie Grandma because whenever I would go to visit her, she would be waiting for me with hugs and a plate of amazing, chewy, chocolate chip cookies, still warm from the oven.

As I grew older, she and I would bake the cookies together. We spent lots of special times together. No matter how old she got, she never seemed old to me. She liked to keep moving! She would play cards and games with me, take me to movies, miniature golfing and out for pizza, and she would have water gun fights with my brother and me.

Christmas was Cookie Grandma's favorite time of year. She would make hundreds of cookies of all different types. She packed them in baskets and tins and gave them to her family or delivered them to her friends. She would freeze extra cookies, and whenever we'd get hungry for a frosted Christmas tree, she'd take one out of the freezer. She'd find them in there for months. That was my Cookie Grandma, she was Christmas cookies in April.

Sometimes best friends can't always stay together. Sometimes they argue or grow apart. Or sometimes, they just can't be together anymore, even though they want to with all their heart. One day, when my dad brought me home from school, my mom was on the phone calling from the airport. Cookie Grandma had gotten very sick and was in the hospital. "She's going to be OK, right?" I asked. The silence on the other end of the phone answered it all.

A few days later, I was on my way to Wisconsin to stay at Cookie Grandma's house for the very last time. At her funeral, so many people showed up. I never realized how many friends she had until they were all together in the same place. They all shared stories of how special she was, how caring she was, and

how much they loved her. I learned that day about what it meant to be a good friend.

After the funeral, everyone gathered for a lunch in the church hall. There were long tables full of food, and there in the center was a gigantic plate of chocolate chip cookies in her honor.

This anonymous writer is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her instructor is Rhonda Currier.

From Holes to Wholeness

My name is La'Vonja Barnes, and I was born August 12, 1969 in Florala, Alabama. My mother and father divorced when I was just two years of age. My mother and I moved back to Pensacola, Florida with my grandparents.

She remarried a Baptist minister and she gave birth to a set of twins. When the twins were older and able to walk, my stepfather was called to pastor a church in Montgomery, Alabama. At such an early age, the holes began to form in my life. At the tender age of seven, I was raped by our babysitter's boyfriend. I didn't want him to hurt me again, so I didn't tell anyone what happened to me out of fear.

My grades dropped, and I began many habit forming experiences such as lying, stealing and hanging out with peers that were involved with skipping classes, smoking marijuana and drinking.

At the age of fourteen, my mother sent me to spend the summer with my father. After not seeing him since I was two years of age, I never in my wildest dreams imagined that my own father would fondle me. I never visited him again and later found out he was doing the exact same thing to one of my younger siblings.

After returning back to my mother in Montgomery, Alabama, my habits worsened, and my mother became pregnant a third time with a boy. When he turned three, my mother and stepfather were having marital problems and decided it was time to move back to Pensacola, Florida. I was sixteen.

I ended up dropping out of high school and experimenting with cocaine, which I later became addicted to. It went from being just a recreational high to an addiction. I was introduced to crack-cocaine and life for me spiraled down. So many things continued happening, and I no longer felt I had the will to live anymore.

I was very confused about my sexual preference after being molested and raped twice. I became a “closet lesbian”, which is someone who does not display public affection. As my daughter got older, I started experimenting with lesbian relationships and came out of the closet. I created a criminal record with charges stemming from domestic violence to aggravated battery and assault with deadly weapon. I became homeless and watched my life spiral downward. I have been clean and sober since 2009 thanks to Florida City Rescue Mission.

I’ve toted many holes around that I felt couldn’t be healed. I was in yet another unhealthy relationship and was arrested in Pensacola, Florida, I discovered that I had a pending charge which landed me 27 months in state prison. I’m a student in ABE II to try and obtain my GED. I can finally exhale because after all my struggles, downfalls, rejections I still manage to go from Holes to Wholeness...

Lavonia Barnes is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Pensacola. She is a student in the Adult Basic Education I class taught by Ms. Barbara Pugh.

Personal Story and My Experience in Adult Education

I was born on April 16, 1944 in Lima, Peru, South America. I’m my parents’ oldest child. I have nine brothers and two sisters but two of my brothers died very young. I attended college at the Nacional University of San Marcos in Lima, Peru where I studied for five years to become a pharmacist. I finished school in 1965 at age twenty-one with a diploma to be a pharmacist. During my last year in school, one of the professors, Dr. Arnold Salomon from Holland, arrived in Peru and went to San Marcos University as a Faculty member in the Pharmacy program. I got the opportunity to work with him in a group of five selected students

during a time when the work was very hard and took long hours to complete. I was the only one to complete a thesis with him.

After that time, I got an Integral Fellowship to go to Holland for a year in 1968 where I received a diploma for my work. I lived in Utrecht and studied in Keist at Central Institute for Nutrition and Food Research. They gave me a diploma like that of a pharmacist from the University of Wageningen. My director was Dr. DAA Mossel who was well known for doing a lot of scientific research with people around the world. I am glad that I got to work with him before he died. The diploma I received was about analysis of fish meal. I analyzed one hundred sixty samples. I also conducted a conference at the Latin American symposium in 1968.

After that time, I got married and had four children - three girls and a boy. Now they are all married and I have nine grandchildren – four girls and five boys. I enjoyed being a professor of General Microbiology and Microbiological Analysis of foods at the Nacional University Federico Villaneal in Lima, Peru for forty-nine years. I truly enjoy my field of study because it is very important for our health to understand microbiology.

I am having a nice time in the adult education program. My first time in a class was when I lived in Dallas with my oldest daughter and her family. I had classes at the Frisco Public Library with others that were from different countries as well. There were five of us from Peru. I really enjoyed it until my life had to change in December of 2017. I am very happy with my current teachers at the Palm Beach High School where I am learning more English. There are many others in my class seeking to learn more English as well. Some are from places such as Venezuela and Costa Rica. Even though many of us in the class speak Spanish, we use only English language in class.

Maria Teresa Flores Cordova is an adult English language learner in the Adult Education program at Royal Palm Beach Community High School. Her teachers are Sereatha Beamon-Steward and Bozena Lack-Barkley.

Family

My name is Cecilia Mendoza and I come from Mexico. Our family consisted of five brothers, two sisters, and our parents. My mother was a large influence by teaching me how great it is to love and respect our parents and grandparents. I remember that when I was little, we visited our grandparents that lived so far away. Our mother would wake up very early in the morning to prepare food that we would eat on the way. My younger brother and I would ride a donkey for two to three hours as our mother walked next to us.

Our grandparents had a large patio with many chickens. We liked to watch the chickens come to us rapidly as we threw ground corn to them to eat. Grandfather would take us further out into the country to build a fire and we cooked corn on it. There are so many memories of my childhood that I will never forget.

My husband and I moved to the United States in 1996 for the opportunities. Now I am participating in an Adult ESOL class to help me learn English by reading, writing, conversation and I have to thank my family for encouraging me to sign-up. I thank GOD for all that I have my family, my friends, and my life. I love those who are close to my GOD. Bless them.

Cecilia Mendoza is a student in Margo Scranton's Adult ESOL class at James Irvin Education Center located in Dade City, Florida. She was born in San Miguel De Allende, Mexico in March of 1970. She studied until the eighth grade. She is married and has two sons, one daughter, and they have two grandchildren. She arrived in the United States in 1996.

The Dark Side of a Selfie

Each day technological advances appear more and more. More than 3 billion people in the world always have their cellphones in hand. A big percent of the population uses technology and has social networks on the Internet.

We have a lot of options to use to communicate with others. Some of these options are Facebook, Twitter, Snapchat, Instagram, and Whatsapp. With them, you can share pictures with

your family and friends. I'm always taking pictures with my smartphone; they can be selfies or pictures of something that I liked. Three years ago, I had the most embarrassing moment in my life, just because of a selfie.

I was shopping with my sister, and we were having fun in the Prime Outlets of Barceloneta in Puerto Rico. We were going down stairs, and she got me to take a selfie. What a mistake! I can't remember if she took the picture or not. What I will never forget are the consequences of that selfie.

I was wearing a strapless long dress, and accidentally, I stepped on the dress and fell down the stairs. Suddenly, I was on the floor, with the upper part of my body almost naked, my knees injured, and all the people in the place looking at me. I'm sure that I have learned my lesson to never take a picture when you are on stairs.

Nicole Lopez Gonzalez is in the College and Career Readiness class at the Adult Education Center in West Palm Beach.

My Road To The United States

October 10, 2005, I left my home to try and find a better opportunity for me and my family. October 21, 2005, I started my journey to Honduras. My second night in San Pedro, I was feeling anxious, different city, town, and police officer.

October 22, 2005, 5:00 a.m., I started my journey feeling tired, but continued to Guatemala all day sitting on a bus with not a lot of food.

Day 4, in the morning the bus was ready to pick up our group and move on. Maybe 1 hour later, at a check point, a Guatemala police officer came on the bus and asked everybody to sit down and show their ID. We must go to the other officer who told how much to pay, and finally the bus continued after a 2 hour stop.

There at the border of Guatemala and Mexico was my coyote. He told everyone how we would cross the border first taking one boat and after one big truck.

I'm already inside Mexico and the person we were going to cross the road with and take the other bus, lost a 9 year old son of someone but insisted that everyone cross anyway.

In Mexico, I took my first bus 1 hour later one guy said to get off and walk. I was walking for 6 hours, the sky was dark and I could see nothing, I could not even see my own hands. Six hours later one truck without lights showed up and picked everyone up. Another 5 hours later we arrived at one house.

After 2 nights the coyote said at 4 a.m. the truck will be ready and we must run to it. At 10 a.m., the truck driver dropped us off at one connection in a different city, we ate nothing. Later another truck driver in one truck picked us up at 1 a.m. and we started again tired but continued to Puebla, Mexico. At 6 p.m., after the 2nd day in Puebla, we continued to Monte Rey. The trip was 25 hours, no food, no drink, no sleep, but we continued.

In Monterey, we slept one night and continued to the closed border in Miguel Aleman. The last day in Mexico, one van picked up 8 people and took us to the border 2 hours away. We needed to cross the Rio Grande River, took one raft and we crossed over, inside the USA. We saw border patrol and the officer called more officers and brought a truck and bus to pick us all up. They took us to one office, six hours later, they took us to the bus stop in McAllen, Texas.

In McAllen, Texas, I took the Greyhound to Miami, and 2 days later I was in Miami with my family safe. Thank God I am here and okay.

Ricardo Cordoba is a student at Miami Dade College InterAmerican Campus. His teacher is Janet Berger-Polsky.

My Family, My Motivation

I am Roberto Gabriel. I have been residing in United States for almost a decade. Living in this country makes me stronger and more independent. It took me at least a year to cope with the western culture. It was more difficult than I thought. Helping my family and also owning a house one day have always been my top priorities.

I work two jobs every day and I have been saving my money for many years. This is how I could afford to have my dad built a house in my hometown, Guatemala. This has been one of my dreams and I am thrilled that I was able to make it a reality. I really miss my parents, especially my mom, who has always been there when I needed something when I was in my country. They miss me, too. They always tell me that every time before I hang up the phone.

Life has been getting tougher and more expensive no matter where you are. It makes me worry just to think about it. So, I'm trying to save more money as much as I can. Interestingly, my family is getting bigger. Wow, presently I have five nieces and seven nephews. Every Christmas, I try to get them some gifts such as shoes, some clothes, or toys. In return, I get great big smiles from them.

Around Christmas this year, I video called my younger sister who has two daughters, age six and eight. I noticed something on the wall next to her bed. It made me wonder so I asked her. And she said that it was actually a wall from our older sister. They tried to put something around and over to cover as a ceiling so that they would be able to live in it. I also asked her whether it was safe, her response was, "No, it is not and even worse when it rains."

I could not sleep that night thinking about my younger sister's living situation. The next day I called my mom and told her that I was going to use some of my savings to rebuild my sister's house. They got very excited and could not believe it. A day before the job was done, Maria, my younger sister, called me. She was overjoyed and told me how so happy she was and still could not believe that I would do this for her family. I told her that my motivation is my family. They are who I care most and that was their special Christmas gift from me.

Roberto Gabriel attends the College and Career Readiness class at Career and Adult Education Center, Key West, Florida. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

How My Father Met My Mother

It was autumn of 1964, when the leaves were beginning to change colors and fall to the ground. There was a lonely, solid boy in Eastman, Georgia. His name was Willie. Willie wanted a family, as well as a soulmate. So he started the quest to find her. He decided to travel to Florida. Willie drove through several towns, but he couldn't decide on them; they were all wrong for him. He wandered aimlessly until he arrived in Lakeland.

Willie said "This is it, the town I can call home!" He quickly obtained a job at Rochelle School as a janitor. Yet, still his heart was empty and longing to meet her, the woman he only dreamed about. Willie started at the local bars, hanging out with friends and co-workers. Willie even went to church, but still no woman seemed appealing to him. Willie was getting discouraged, but wasn't ready to give up on finding her. It was a Friday evening and Willie was just getting off from work. He noticed he needed gas. He didn't have enough fuel to make it home. He drove to the nearest gas station to purchase some gas and to pick up a pack of cigarettes.

While he was pumping the gas into his car, another car was approaching. Inside the car were three lovely ladies. They pulled up to the pump across from him. When the car door opened, a sweet aroma swept across his nose while his goddess emerged from the car. She was wearing a bright yellow outfit. She had shining black hair, ruby red lips and a gleaming smile. She was just breath taking! Willie couldn't stop gazing at her beauty. Willie forgot he was pumping gas; the gas was streaming down the car onto the ground.

Moments later, he finally came back to his right frame of mind and he placed the nozzle back onto the rack. Gathering his thoughts, Willie got up the nerve to ask her her name. This is a prime example of setting your mind up to do something. He found true love, got married and lived together until they died.

Donetha Thomas is a GED student at West Area Adult School. Her teacher is Kathleen Keen.

God's School

As a journalist, six years ago, I was forced to leave my country because of a political system, against freedom of the press, plunged into oppression, dictatorship, and the incompetence of the Res-publica. In December 2011, I wrote an article about the presidential and legislative election. I wrote about exactly what was happening during this election. There were a lot of irregularities in favor of the current president who was up for re-election. After the article was published, the president's secret service arrested me and wanted to kill me and my family. I was forced to leave my country, Democratic Republic of the Congo, and fled to Russia because the neighboring countries had their own problems.

When I arrived in Russia, where I lived for four years, I discovered another type of political system, which was living in fear of a possible foreign invasion. The Russian people, despite the difficulties encountered, looked toward more changes than what was presented to them, following the model of the modern world. I thank God almighty that because of Russia, I had the privilege of coming to the United States, a country of the modern world, where democracy reigns, and where one can grasp the meaning of love of one's neighbor.

The United States is for me the completion point of a long and painful journey I have had in my life. As a modern, democratic, and blessed country, the United States encourages me to fight for the love of one's neighbor. With these experiences, and with the help of God, I believe that it is still possible to make our world a better place especially regarding my country of origin, the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Fabrice Kanda is a student at Orange Technical College, Mid-Florida Campus.

Original Poetry

Living This Life

Today I've had to face the life I've made.
I'm on my knees, begging for God's Saving Grace
My heart is so heavy... my mind is weak...
Please Lord help me to find the peace I seek

Dear Lord I stumbled and I fell
I've made my life a living hell
I'm struggling to find my way
Help me to accept I'm here to stay

I'm now in prison, and my life is not my own
Everything I've lived for and had is gone
I'm forced to make this place my home
It's causing my heart, to turn to stone

I wake up and have to act like I'm ok
To go through the motions, to get through each day
Some days are easier, some days are hard
Most days I'm so very tired

Just help me Father to stay focused on You
To stay in your word, and speak the Truth
To stay prayed up, and keep my eyes on You
And when I'm free and I walk out these gates
I know without a doubt what path I'll take

Jennifer Dempsey is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Crestview. She is the 44 year old mother of two beautiful daughters. She is a student in the GED class facilitated by ITA Sharon Goff and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

Writings on the Wall

Close to twelve on a cold winter's night
While the clock announced bedtime and all was right.
Darkness had fallen dimming city lights,
My shadow would then be hidden from curious sight.
The 13th was the day, and the moment had come
To make my way for my only one.

I then departed accompanied by
My will and the struggle with my partner in crime.
To perform my endeavors, we headed out
While my heart pounded with every step of stealth.

We strode for a mile; how long would it take?
Before reaching my destination good time we did make.
An abandoned bus stop with worn and torn signs
Like a forgotten cave alone in no man's lands.

Suddenly, a car just drove by,
And we hid in the shadows
To escape from its light
Because we were criminals for only that night.

I grabbed my weapon, black carbon chalk,
And I started to scrape those tired white walls.
My hand trembled, was I out of my mind?
But my strokes were stronger so my fear I left behind.

Three words were enough to unwrap my heart.
For her to see them at dawn's light was my part.
I will always remember what it was like
To tell her "I Love You" in graffiti bright.

The day had come, as the sun rose
On February 14th, my secret work to reveal.
From her window she stared, perplexed by the view
Forever and always we Valentine's two.

Carlos Figueroa is a College & Career Readiness student of Kathryn H. Niedbalec at Brewster Technical College.

Shape my Personality

How do others opinions of me
Shape my personality
Into someone I may not be
And how do I break free
From the chains that bind me
And become the person that I see
An internal reflection of me
I must first recognize my potential
This step is essential
What gifts do I possess
And how can I progress
To lead to my success
This is my final test
To stand above the rest
And when I do my best
And express it from my chest
I will come to find
I become intertwined
The stars seem to align
And I become inclined
To let God's love shine
I begin to see the signs
And read between the lines
All painting a picture of grand design

Jonathan Allred is a student in Miami Dade County. His teacher is Christina Brownlow

My Colombia

I always carry in my heart the people of my country of all races: Indians, black, white, half- blood. They all make up my Colombia, which is a beautiful paradise. I am proud to be Colombian when I sit to contemplate the green meadows, big mountains, extensive valleys, and its variety of beautiful birds.

I tremble with joy when I look up to a wonderful blue sky that disappears at the top of the three mountain ranges. Colombia you are beautiful as a big rose. Your landscape gives tenderness, as well as your plains. Your oceans are so blue that at the

distance they become one with the firmament, and next to me flowers dance with the wind. I like everything about you, my dear homeland.

All my being shudders with happiness when I listen to your music. I respect your national shield, anthem, and flag that represent the greatness of your heroes that gave us freedom. I am a big fan of the national soccer team that proudly carries the yellow, blue, and red of my flag. With their victories and great performances, the team gives us peace and joy during the hard times of our country.

God gave a great tribute to the Colombian women who are as beautiful as a rose in spring. With their hard work and dedication, they make us proud of being Colombians.

Dafne Herrera Lozada is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

The Small Beautiful Things

Let your soul breathe.
Live that moment, when you're on a long car ride;
Or wait at 6:30 in order to see the wonderful sunset.
Or listening to music, or reading.

You forget your troubles, and everyone around you;
You're focused on that one thing, and that one thing only.
You're content and everything seems peaceful.

I hope I never get tired of these things.
I hope I never grow to be someone who can no longer
See the small beautiful things.

Daniela Martinez is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Dad

Everyday I see my dad.
In the eyes of the child I had.

I will never forget his smiling face.
His death is still an open murder case.

He was killed for 3,600 bucks.
Walking to his semi-truck.

In his front yard is where is he laid.
Almost 8 years ago to the day.

This message is for all.
No matter how big or how small.

Anyone can do a good deed.
Call 1-800-tips is you have a lead.

50,000 is the reward.
Maybe someone will come forward.

Thomas E. Horton was his name.
Help me find the one that's to blame.

Isn't it amazing how life goes on.
Long after your loved ones are gone?

Everyday I see my dad.
In the eyes of the child I had...

Mildred Horton is currently housed at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy, FL, with a hometown of Mayo. She is the youngest of Thomas Horton's four children. She is a student in the GED class facilitated by ITA Sharon Goff and supervised by Ms. Deon Lee.

My Real Age

My life is wonderful.
Today my life has been changed.
Reading the Bible everyday has given me peace.
No more searching for answers and worrying about the past.
My children are grown and have families.
Sometimes they make me happy.
Now I am free to go to school, exercise, and make friends.
Stress made me mean, now I am a happy person.
God's love has shown me how to forgive and love everybody.
And God loves me too. I feel like 20, but I am 65 years old.

Paulette Guerrier is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

Riches in my Heart

When I saw your face,
I remember love flowing in your face.
I felt my heart beat 1,000 times a second,
That day I shared with you my heart.
I start to explain to you how you are a fundamental
element in my life.
I love you as you are.
You clean my eyes with your beauty.
You are my downtown in my life.
You open the light on my way.
You complete the empty in my pot.
I don't have any paper;
I don't have any words for explaining to you how I love you.
You have the best love of the world.
When you are angry with me,
I cry like a baby because you are all I have.
I want to spend my time with you.
I have nothing in my wallet,
But I have riches in my heart.

Steeve Fils is an ESOL student at West Area Adult School in Lakeland, Florida.

The Road

The road that takes me to you
Is an uneven road
A road hardly taken
A road with a lot of curves
A road where the wind blows
A road where the sun shines
A road full of light
A road to heaven
A blessing road
A road of full rewards
A road where things happen
A road to my destiny
A road to experience a new life
A road where patience is required
A spiritual road
An inspirational road
A motivational road
A road to embrace
An abundant road
A loving road
A road with no ending
A road of unexpected miracles
A road, but not any road, it is an
Unforgettable road, a road to remember
A road to your soul
A road where we become one
A road to you

Carol Walker is a student of Wanda Klaas at Literacy Program at Cooper Library.

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