

# MY WAY



**A Collection  
of Essays by  
Florida's  
Adult Learners**

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.**

**Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition promotes, supports and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As the statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's Adult and Family 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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## **Preface**

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

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## *Experience in Adult Education:*

### **The Lucky One**

At the tender age of sixteen, in the 1980's, I was struggling at school. With three kids in the house, it was almost impossible for my Mom to help me with all my weaker points with school and I had a lot of them. My dad always worked a lot, so I never remember having a united front in the household.

I then became a run away from Detroit, Michigan at 16 with no education. When I finally reached Texas, I tried to enroll again, but was rejected; they said I had to be eighteen. I went to work, married an abusive man, had a son, and then got a divorce. Then I met another man that always made me feel less than human, dumber than a rock.

Sixteen years later, I got lucky. We split and I found Even Start, which gave me an even start where I wasn't put in the back and labeled the stupid one. Instead, I found encouragement, acceptance, care and love. I found teachers who would teach me and didn't mind if it took me awhile. I learned how to communicate with others, be a part of a group, make friends, and watch them all grow and pass their test with such promise and pride.

I am very lucky to be here and have their wonderful teaching skills. With Even Start, I am going to reach my goal of being a nurse. I look straight ahead now with my head held high.

*Maggie Roach, mother of Hannahlee, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

## **If at First, I Don't Succeed**

When I first started going to Even Start, my daughter, Kayla-Ann was only eight months old. I was doing good in the program until I got pregnant with my son Shawn, Jr. I had lots of complications. After the birth of my son Shawn, I waited for two months to go back after his first set of shots. Everything was going good. When my son was 5 months old, I quit going to school at Even Start due to marital problems. Soon after that, my husband and I separated. I had to get two jobs to support my son and daughter, so there was no time for school.

Two years later, I'm back at Even Start where I will stay until I get my GED. I love this program a lot. I love the parenting with Mrs. Quinn and the home visits with Miss Connie. The staff at Even Start is so supportive. My son Shawn, Jr. loves coming to school to learn and to play with his new friends. It's like a second family for him. He calls Miss Connie and Miss Sandy his princesses. He says "Mommy, they love me." My daughter Kayla Ann loves going to ILA nights to spend some alone time with me and to get to visit Miss Becky. I love the Even Start program and this is where I will be until I get my GED. Thank you.

*Shawna Flynn, mother of two, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

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## **Grateful**

I was leery to start the Even Start Program at first. I had so many questions and concerns. My biggest fear was about my baby's safety and well-being while I was studying for my G.E.D.

I have been in this program for 3 months now, and I have no words to express how grateful I am for all the people that work here and make it possible for me and the others to get our high school diploma. I struggle with math a lot, and I needed a lot of

explaining and help with it. My teachers, Mrs. Seijas, Mrs. VanBebber and Mrs. Neuges, are always here for me to help with whatever I need. They go above and beyond to help everyone out. Lots of materials are at our disposal to help along the way, and if you get tired of books, you can use the computer class to study.

My daughter has changed a lot since she has been coming here. She has grown more and is more sociable. I see how happy she is being here and how comfortable and safe she feels with her teachers. I am so happy to see her like this. So I would like to encourage everyone who needs their G.E.D. to start an Even Start Program, because I see only positive changes in my life and in my daughter's life that come through it. In the end of the day, I am so grateful for this program and for all the teachers that are here to help and guide and to be a friend.

*Tanya Francisco, mother of Julia, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program. She moved from Belarus to the United States in August of 2005.*

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## **I've Made Some Big Mistakes in My Life**

I've made some big mistakes in my life. Many were made because of my dysfunctional home life during my childhood when things were often difficult. I disappointed some of those around me and I disappointed myself. My mother tested me and tried me in ways no one could ever imagine, or should ever have to experience. I thought it was the world around me that was causing me to fail. I'm just 17, but I have found a new determination to right the wrongs of my past and set myself on a path to a brighter and better future.

When I was little, my mother decided she couldn't get me to understand her way of life, so she sent me and my sister out into the world on our own. With no family but my sister, we had to learn on our own with no one to guide us; we made some bad choices. Now I know I have no more time to waste if I am going to



improve my life. My failures and falls taught me that I have to try harder if I am going to succeed at anything. My prior circumstances have taught me what I need to do and what I don't need to do. What I need to put behind me and what to put in front of me if I am going to improve my life and gain control of the direction it goes.

My goals for the next five years are to get a job, receive my G.E.D., and to start Manatee Technical Institute's Nursing Program. To achieve these goals, I need to have a steady job and dependable transportation.

The most important thing I could do now is graduate my G.E.D. class. I have to remember to work to my best ability. To do this I must attend school on a regular basis and maintain a healthy lifestyle. I know I have to do this; there is no more time for excuses. Getting my G.E.D. is my first step to a successful future.

The last thing I have my mind set on is to start college as soon as possible. Studying on a regular basis is always helpful. Studying in a peaceful environment helps me think and understand things more clearly. I know from past experiences that managing my stress is very helpful, allowing me to focus. Always make sure to keep your mind set on what is most important and what will benefit you in the future. In my opinion, college is the key to success.

In the next five years I plan to get a job, graduate my G.E.D. class, and start college. Reaching my goal is a step closer to having a successful future. It is the key to my happiness. This whole experience has made me who I am today: strong.

*Deidra Fields is a 17 year old young lady who attends Manatee Technical Institute's G.E.D. Program. Her teacher is Siobhan McCollum-Award, M.Ed.*

## **My Experience in Adult Education**

My experience in adult education and literacy was a result of being sentenced to a Florida prison. I hoped that my educational background would be helpful in some way. Never would I have imagined that so many women had fallen through the cracks of our educational system. I became an academic aide and discovered that with the exception of a few women with real learning disabilities, many were eager to learn. The joy of seeing these women progress and many receive their GED is more than I ever expected.

I began tutoring in the Adult Basic Education class. There, I started to discover the number of women in prison without high school diplomas. However, the biggest shock was the number of women with educational skills below a sixth grade level. In a class of twenty-five, two were completely illiterate. Some had never written a letter. Some had no idea how to multiply and most had no concept of how our government was structured.

As I became more familiar with the women and the educational plan, I realized the most productive tool for this class was encouragement. These women were not dumb; they were afraid, afraid of failing again. With persistence, patience, and a lot of pats on the back, these women were on their way to success. Some moved up quickly; others gave up and withdrew from class. The ones who stayed and put forth an effort began to surpass their own dreams.

I eventually became an aide in the GED class. This was a trying time for many of the women. There is a lot of homework, studying and model testing. They work hard and worry more than they need to. After taking the test, the next couple months awaiting results are filled with anxiety. What a great feeling to experience the excitement they feel when they learned they pass the GED exam.

From helping someone write their very first letter to seeing someone receive their GED is one of the most rewarding

experiences of my life. These women have made a positive advancement out of a negative experience. Through their accomplishments, others are encouraged to try one more time for the one thing that can never be taken away from them- an education.

*Virginia Albritton is a student at Broward Correctional Institution. Her tutor is Ms. John-Pierre.*

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### **My Name is Nidia Martinez**

My name is Nidia Martinez, and I'm from the Dominican Republic. I came to the USA in 2005 with my husband and my youngest son. At that time, my husband could speak English, but my son and I spoke very little.

We waited almost three months before getting a job. The job I got was in a fast food restaurant. This job required very little English. The people there spoke to me in English while using hand language so that I could understand what they wanted me to do.

At my job, I have learned the language that allows me to do my job, but I don't have direct contact with the customers, only the workers.

I need to improve my English to get a better job so that I can bring my other son from the Dominican Republic.

I watch TV programs and movies in English, but I don't understand a lot of it. I thank God I'm in the Adult Learning Program at the Chaffee West Regional Library where I can learn to improve my reading, writing and conversational skills.

I understand I need more practice to gain confidence when I'm speaking English to others. Thanks teachers for helping me.

*Nidia Martinez is in the ESL program of the Jacksonville Public Library.*

## Mary Wheeler's Literacy Story

Hi, my name is Mary Wheeler and this is my story. When I was four years old I had a head injury. The doctor told my mom that I would always be a vegetable. I always struggled through school, and at the age of 16, they told my mother to take me out of school. So I never finished my education.

I met Norman, my husband, at the age of 21. I was living in Boynton Beach when we met. In 1994, Norman and I moved to Chipley and that's where I met Mary Ann Pelletier, who works with the local literacy program. They have a little library and learning center in the Country Oaks community, which is down the road from where I live. I've been working at improving my education since 2001; my family and friends say I've come a long way. I've completed all the lessons in the *Challenger* series as well as *Patterns in Spelling*. The *Write All About It* series has really helped me in writing this story. Since last summer, I've been receiving math help in preparation for taking my GED test. I think the hardest part was working with fractions. The *Foundations* book, which was given to me by the McGraw Hill/Wright Group exhibitor at last year's FLC conference, really helped both me and my teacher.

Back in 2001, when I first started to improve my education, it was very hard to understand my speech. I am now involved with my church and working with other children. In 1995, I had a girl and named her Christina. Three years later in 1998, I had another girl named Heather. In 2001, I had my third girl and named her Nicole.

About three years ago I met Monica Baxley, who is also a literacy volunteer. Two years ago, with Monica's assistance, I went through the FLC Ambassador Training. I've continued working on my education and see the vast improvement. It has helped me assist my children with their homework and other children, who

attend the after-school homework assistance program at our learning center. Now, I'm working on getting my GED.

We live in a small community called Country Oaks and there is not a lot for the kids to do out here. Twice a week, we have an after school homework assistance program at the County Oaks Learning Center. Mary Anne Pelletier and Monica Baxley are in charge and I also help. I also help with the Summer Reading Program, which encourages children to keep reading while they are out of school. My kids wanted to be in Girl Scouts and there were other kids in the community who also wanted to have more to do. So, I talked to a Girl Scout leader who works at the Kate Smith Elementary School. Now, with Monica's help as my team leader, we established Girl Scout Troop 248. My church has also been a big help as well as supportive of my family and me.

With the help of Mary Ann, Monica, and my church, I'm now able to help kids to learn and give back to the community. This is my story, and with help from all of these people, I'm now very happy and able to give back. Anything is possible with God! I'm also involved on the state level with VALUE, which stands for Volunteer Adult Leaders United for Education. We all can do important things with just a little confidence. Thank you for taking the time to read my story.

*Mary Wheeler*

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## **My Education is Important**

Education is one of the most important aspects of my life. I have many reasons to educate myself. My self-development and confidence will improve. With an education, I can speak English better with other people. Eventually, I would like to go to college.

English is an international language, so it is important to learn English well. I am taking this class to improve my

understanding of English. I must say that speaking and communicating with people in a better and faster way is improving my English. As I get better in English, my confidence will become stronger.

A goal of mine is to communicate in English comfortably. Understanding English will give me better communication and thinking skills, making me a better listener, speaker and writer. Writing will also allow me to develop my own unique personal style of communicating.

Attending college is a goal of mine that I am going to achieve. I want to get my college degree. All of the members in my family have already received their higher education. Knowledge is power, and the power of knowledge will help me grow.

Now that I am more mature, I have decided to continue my education to get my college degree. A college education will bring to me more knowledge. A degree will not only benefit me, it will also benefit my husband and our son. This is why I think education is important.

*Aynur Demirbas is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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## **An Experience in Adult Education**

An experience I had in Adult Education taught me to be honest and trustworthy. When I want something really badly, it is always better to earn it. Then I can honestly say, "I did the best I could and it paid off." The experience I had came in the form of a writing assignment. We were asked to discuss what we would do if our teacher mistakenly gave us ten extra points on a test. Would I tell her about it or just keep the extra points? I would tell the teacher about it because there are a number of problems that could happen if I chose to keep the points.

The first problem is one of omission. If you know to do right, and do it not, that is betrayal. If the teacher cannot trust you with something small like that, then she cannot trust you at all. Even teachers can make mistakes.

The second problem is this: I would not want something I did not earn because later on I could have a test on the same material and get it wrong. I want to learn so that I can get it right. We can all learn from our mistakes.

A third problem is that I may need to know this lesson in life. This could mean the difference between a very good choice and a very bad choice in life. It may not seem to make a difference at all, but being honest is always a right choice.

To sum all of this up, it may not be a big deal about the ten extra points on the test, but I believe the big picture is being honest so people will trust you. Always tell the whole truth, and make the right choices in life. Sometimes the choice we make is not right, but we can then learn from our mistakes.

*Richie Brown is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

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## **The New Me**

I was raised up in Clearwater, FL. From my childhood I lived in foster homes for five years or so. When I grew older I moved to Hialeah, FL. There I enrolled into auto body classes, refurbishing cars and then I went to work delivering telephone books for a year and a half. Following that I moved to St. Petersburg, FL and landed a job in construction laying pipe for about two years. At the end of two years, I had an on the job injury, so I had to get on disability. Because of this unfortunate situation I turned to drinking, which affected my relationships, the

way I treated others, and the way I presented myself to society. After several years of this on-going agonizing process, my fiancé changed my thinking and our relationship was restarted.

Several years later she and I had a beautiful daughter who is now fourteen years old. She lives in Alabama and she is the best thing that's ever happened to me. Now I plan to better myself by getting my GED so I can have the knowledge to teach others new and better things. Upon my release from prison, I'm going to move to Canada and open a Christian homeless shelter for abandoned children in my community and teach them the word of God, and show them how to conduct their lives in a good way so that they don't end up in prison.

*John Andrew is a student at Jefferson CI Education Program. His tutor is Angela Henderson.*

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## **What is Success?**

Success is what you make of it or want it to be. Success is always right there within your reach; go ahead, reach for it, grab it, make it yours. It's there for your choosing.

The question is do you choose to seize it, or let it slip by? Don't do anything to hamper your own ability to succeed by limiting your potential. Success is achieved through vision, inspiration, and resilient determination. Reach out. It's right there in your reach. Participate in success; make it one of your goals to be a better person. If you don't like who you are, simply partner with success if you wish to change. If not, you will go nowhere. It's your choice, your call, your move, but don't ever blame others for the choices or paths you've elected to go down.

Failure comes if you don't take hold of the opportunities when they avail themselves. Only those who dare to fail miserably can achieve greatness. Success isn't a direction, it's a new



beginning. Take hold, your life is about to take a radical change, a life altering change for the better. So, fasten your seatbelt and enjoy the pride of success. Remember it's not the obstacles in our lives that deprives us, but our unwillingness to contribute to the methods to overcome them. The beginning of success only requires your willing participation and desire to "get ahead." Be an active participant or partner in the success of your life. Don't let life's situations control you so completely that you feel overwhelmed by them. Be aware of who you are and take an active roll in changing it for the better. Set today for your success tomorrow. It's time to take one step toward success, your success.

Are you ready for your new adventure? For the new you? Face it, most individuals are afraid of change. We tend to be independent, free thinkers, our own man, an "island" bent on destruction. Look inward; recognize who you are and what you can do. Don't compare yourself to any other person. However, be honest by being realistic and true to yourself. Make it your business to figure out if you wish to keep all the old attitudes, baggage, and behavior patterns in your life or make a change. The participation in the success of your new life is to live it fully. The pursuit is to sustain it, to give it purpose, to give it life by pursuing it with energy and zest; to be actively involved, immersed, or endured in this form of life is a success, your success. Don't ever forget to tell yourself, "I am a success," for you are that or you would not be reading this searching for a better way, a better life and a better you.

*Teddy Morvant is a student at Jefferson CI Education Program. His tutor is Angela Henderson.*

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## **My ESL Experience**

I'm Delia Corzo. I want to tell you a little about me and how I can write this letter in English, thanks to the ESL classes and thanks to Miss Katie too.

I came to the USA in 2003 with my husband and my daughter. After a week of waiting for a job, I got one at *Holiday Inn Hotel* to be a housekeeper. I knew a little English, only the basics, and worked there for about 3 years. It was a necessity for me to learn English because I kept getting mail from my daughter's school, constantly. Also in my job there were a lot of meetings, and when I went to the movies, I didn't understand anything. One day, my sister in law told me about the ESL classes in the Main Library here in Jacksonville, but I couldn't participate in the classes because I wasn't fluent in English. My family and I came across a great opportunity! The West Regional Branch Library on Chaffee Rd. had ESL classes. I attended classes for 2 years and graduated.

Now I can truly say that...Knowledge is Power!

*Delia Corzo is from Lima, Peru and continues her studies at the Center for Adult Learning in Jacksonville.*

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### **The Secret to Endless Knowledge**

In our lives, many secrets reveal themselves with time and age, so we can improve the way we live. The secret of endless knowledge doesn't come with time or age. The secret needs and wants to be discovered by someone. Usually a person makes life too complicated to see that there is a secret right in front of them. Since I already know the secret I feel that I am ready to give it to the world.

Here it is: All the knowledge of the universe is laid out before us. All we need to do is reach out and grab it. It is just that simple. It is simple, yet powerful. This knowledge can be used for good or it can be used for evil. Make the right choice.

I am proud to say with the help of my tutor Pat Horton and my teacher Mary Putnam at the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center, I am able to share this knowledge.

*Andrew Bess is a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center/Pinellas County Schools. His tutor s are Pat Horton and Mary Putnam.*

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### **My Experience in an ESOL Class**

I have been in the United States of America since 1999. I did not speak English very well. I was afraid to talk to people or answer questions of any kind for communication. One thing I could do was use money. I knew I did not want to be like that all of my life. I wanted to stand up and walk with my head and chin up. I decided to go to school to learn English. I wanted to improve my English and meet friends. I also could find a job. Let me tell you about my experience in an ESOL class.

My experience in an ESOL class has been interesting. I started the ESOL class in summer, 2008; this was the perfect time for me to take an ESOL class. On the first day I was so nervous. I was afraid the teacher would ask me some question that I did not know how to answer, and maybe people would laugh at me. I was wrong; everyone in the class understood because we were all learning English. My teacher taught us so we can all understand. It was not very long before I felt comfortable with my classmates.

In my ESOL class, I have met more people from all different countries. We have been learning how to read, write and communicate with each other. Sometimes we share our cultural diversity. I did not learn only English, I also learned about many cultures and customs. We are more than classmates. Many of us have become dear friends. We like to go out to eat lunch and also to go on field trips. We also come together during holiday parties. Learning English and meeting new friends was not my only reason

for enrolling in an ESOL class. I also wanted to get a good job for myself and my family.

When my English skills improve, I would like to get a job. I will be able to communicate well on applications, resumes and the all-important job interview. The skills I have learned will help me get a good job. Then, hopefully, I will be able to make some money and to improve my family's way of life.

The English as a Second Language class is very important for me. It gives me the skills to read, write and communicate with people very well. I also have a lot of friends from different countries. What I learn will help me get a good job so I can help my family financially. This is my experience in the ESOL class.

*Piyanart Moore is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College. Piyanart is also studying for her GED.*

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*Turning Point in My Life:*

### **A Turning Point in my Life...**

I am at a turning point in my life when it is time for me to stop wishing for things that I want, and stride hard to get to my goal! I have started school, I have been in search of a job, and I have also started to take care of myself. If I can keep it up with what I am trying to accomplish, I could change my life! I am back in school! I have started school again to become a better person and to make my family proud. Ever since I have started school, it has been real easy and my family has been really supportive now that I'm doing something positive with my life. It feels great to wake up in the morning and feel like somebody; I love it! It feels wonderful, if only I had a job.

I am on the pursuit of a job. I have finally got off my behind and went job hunting. I am in search of a job so I can build

my credit up. There is nothing in this world that is better than having great credit. I want to start doing things I want to do on my time. If I stay on the right track, I will have a job in no time, and that's when I will be able to handle money problems and do a better job taking care of myself.

*Trenard Elliot is a student at The English Center. His tutor is Elena Jakubowicz.*

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## **Adapting to Change in the New Life**

Long ago, adapting to change was a matter of life and death. Dinosaurs and many other creatures could not adapt to new environments, so they became extinct. However, human beings could, and they have changed in body and mind in order to exist. As I am a member of the human race, I have also changed many times throughout my life. In my case, the biggest change in my life was when I decided to come to the United States.

The first thing I have had to adapt to is the American culture. When talking about culture, I am referring to language and fashion. Of course, I spoke Vietnamese in my country; however, as people speak English here, I have had to learn English to communicate with them. I had to get acquainted with the way people greet each other because, for example, they do not kiss when they meet in my country. As for fashion, in my country, people wear uniforms when they are at work and school, but here that occurs less often.

Along with cultural differences, the American transportation system is also different from my country's. The primary form of transport in the United States is the car—not as popular in Vietnam by far. Consequently, I had to learn how to drive: something I would never have thought that I would do. Besides that, street vehicles travel very fast here; when I traveled on a street for the first time, I was so nervous. Moreover, I have learned that it is impolite to use a horn while driving. It is new for

me because people use horns a lot in Vietnam. For example, they use horns to notify their hosts when they arrive instead of ringing the bell, to greet friends on the road and have some fun because they do not know what else they can do when they are in a traffic jam.

Third, I have learned many different things about the educational system in this country. In Florida, tuition for college and university is more expensive than in Vietnam. However, the educational system in Florida offers financial aid, which helps students pay for their tuition. Financial aid is the new thing that I have learned about because it does not exist in my country. Besides tuition, the meeting time for a class is more complicated here, so I have to choose classes that fit my schedule. Furthermore, I have to apply for my classes early to have an available seat because my school has many students with only a few classes.

In conclusion, I have adapted to the culture, gotten used to the transportation, and learned new things about the education system. However, there are still many other things that I need to adapt to in the future. I do not know exactly what will happen tomorrow, but I can plan an entryway to continue to adapt to new things.

*Thi Nguyen is currently attending Brewster Technical Center's ESOL Academic Skills Program.*

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## **The Strengths and Struggles of Raising A Family as a Single Mother**

Hello, my name is Lisa and I'm a single mother of two beautiful girls who mean the world to me. I have had many struggles raising my family; however, I have made it through with the support of my parents, grandparents and church family.

I'm so proud of my girls! They have been through a lot in their small lives, but they're my strength to get through life's struggles. Gracie, who is two, is so smart for her age. She knows her alphabet, numbers, colors and some shapes. Although she has had a lot of health issues, my little angel has persevered no matter what life has brought her.

My four year old, Elizabeth, is also smart for her age. She can spell her name and write it, too! She loves her family, church and God. She can't wait to start kindergarten and go to school. Although she has had some challenges with behavior, through it all, she tries to help everyone.

My girls are my life and my light, and through all of our challenges, we manage to get through it all together, as a family. My dream is that I get my GED and become a paramedic to show my girls that struggles may come and go in life and I'll always be standing beside them!

*Lisa Kinney currently attends classes at Columbia County Adult Education in pursuit of her GED. She is also involved in Even Start Family Literacy.*

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## **The Turning Point of My Life**

The major turning point in my life was when I found myself with no real friends or family to turn to and no ambition or motivation to do something with my life. I found myself at rock bottom with nothing but a debilitating addiction and an endless urge for more. I would have done everything in my power to continue my habit.

So waking day after day with the same feeling of emptiness and nothing to live for but drugs, I found myself praying the next day would be different. After so many days of wishing and praying for a change I decided to do. I got the little belongings I had left and moved hours from the people and connections, which

made up my debilitating life style. I began working and finding new ways to keep my mind off of my habit. I now have a great relationship with my family and a now have an awesome boyfriend who loves me and cares enough to help me keep my sobriety. Now I live in Lake City and have decided to get my GED and start attending college to receive a trade in pursuit of a better life.

Though I continue fighting my addiction, it has been one of my hardest and greatest accomplishments to date. I WILL continue on the right track. I will continue pursuing my education and a family life, drug free. I wish to live a fulfilling life and never see myself returning to a lifestyle of addiction and misery.

*Monica Rodriguez is a graduate of Columbia County's Adult Education Program and is currently planning to continue her education at Lake City Community College.*

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## **A Bold Decision**

Five years after my little daughter was born, I made one of the most difficult decisions of my life. I always dreamt how wonderful it would be if my child and I could have a better future.

The time passed and then I met a caring, sweet and special man. After we knew each other for a year I fell in love with him and we decided to get married in my home country of Colombia and then immigrate to the United States.

My daughter and I arrived in Los Angeles, California, in April, 1994. My husband was waiting for us and welcomed us with great joy. It was a very exiting day to be in the United States of America.

A couple of weeks or so after we arrived, I began to miss my family, friends, and sometimes even the food of my country. But not knowing the language was the hardest part to live with.



Studying it was very important to me, and as I learned English I began to enjoy more and more the American culture and my new life in another country.

My husband, daughter and I traveled a lot and lived in several Western states. We even spent seven years in Mexico and South America before we returned to the United States. We enjoyed the beautiful mountains of Colorado for several years before we finally moved to Naples, Florida, so we could be near the ocean.

*Sofia Heller is a student at Golden Gate Adult Learning Center. Her tutor is Polly Spring.*

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## **Mistakes Remembered**

I can honestly say, as a person who has repeated many old mistakes and made new ones, I would never want to continue making a mistake that would hurt my family and friends. Depending on what that mistake is would result on how hard or easy it is to overcome making the same mistake again.

I have a relative that was once my favorite. now I despise him and he is in jail. He had everything from family, house, cars, and unfortunately prone to making mistakes and repeating them with little shame. For him, a mistake doesn't matter if it's repeated it only matters if he's capable of manipulating his way out of trouble. He has never learned from his mistakes, he just tucks them away until he feels the need to make some.

In my opinion, I don't think he'll ever learn until something makes him want to, like a breaking point. He has been paying child support for 8 years and was not able to make payments, so he fled. As the loving relative I once was, I decided to go get him from West Virginia and bring him back to Florida. His ex-wife dropped the \$32,000 he owed his kids in child support as a forgiven

statement but not a forgotten one. He started off on a clean slate. He had a real job, along with a free car given to him by his 60 year old mother, and his family beside him. What else could a man ask for? Thinking he would change his life around after being manipulated to go rescue him. I realized, maybe if he had his loved ones surrounding him, his mistakes would be caught before anything worse happened. Mistaken myself, I forgot that he was a man who used his age as an excuse to not receive advice from anyone born before him.

As soon as he came in contact with his old so called “friends” and partners in crime, he lost his job, sold his car, and was backed up owing \$3,000 in child support. The mistakes once sworn never to be made again were being resurrected. His family, including me, were growing distant again and being pulled in slowly by his manipulation and lies due to the biggest mistake he’s ever made, drugs. Once he knew how deep he was in, even he realized jail would be the only place that could keep him from repeating his mistakes and hurting his loved ones.

Once a person makes a mistake usually they understand that there are consequences for repeating them if they were lucky enough to be let off easy the first time. The adrenaline rush from a situation you placed yourself in could keep you repeating the mistake. If it is fear that hits you from your boss at work or loved ones that you hurt, the chances are you won’t want to repeat that mistake again, but doesn’t mean you won’t.

*Alvin Gato is a student at Golden Gate Adult Learning Center. His tutor is Polly Spring.*

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## **Incredible and Unbelievable Things Can Happen**

I have a very happy life. My parents love me and I have a wonderful family and amazing friends who are educated and knowledgeable. A turning point in my life is when I made up my

mind to come to America. From that day, I really started to find ways to change my life to make my dreams come true. It is the best thing that happened in my whole life. Though it is a very difficult path, I am prepared to go through all channels of discomfort. In this new season of my life, I'm getting higher and I can see where I can fit in. Something that I want to share with everyone is that there is a thing called luck. You make your own luck. Don't let anybody make you feel useless and destroy your dreams. Remember, there is only one life to live. You are not going to have another chance. In this world, incredible and unbelievable things can happen and this turning point has proven me that.

*Nuris Antunez is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **A Turning Point in My Life**

One day I asked Marianne why there is so much suffering on earth. She was so happy to give me an answer, but not from herself, but from God's word. I am a mother of 2 daughters. I realized that life itself is precious. It is a gift.

My daughters and I came from South America, Suriname. It was a big challenge for me with communication. I never spoke English until I came to this country, and all of the sudden I have to make a big change in my life. From a Senator's wife to a housekeeper I used to have a comfortable lifestyle. I was divorced when I came in this country, became a single mother. It was not easy and very frustrating. My daughters went to school and graduated from high school and college. Golda has a degree in accounting and Nancy has her Medical Assistant degree. I am very proud of my daughters. I think God gave them the strength and wisdom to achieve their goals.

While I was studying the Bible, I learned a new language – English. At the same time, I used my Dutch book and English book and a dictionary to have a better understanding. It is very

interesting, because every week when I met Christine I asked a lot of questions. I was very excited to learn new things. I also learned to have faith. It says in the Bible: “Faith is the assured expectation of things hope for, the evident demonstration of realities though not behold.”

The Bible also gives me a wonderful hope something better to come. It offers to obedient mankind a wonderful prospect, no more sickness, no more death, no more wars, but a peaceful condition on earth. By putting in to practice what I have learned, being faithful and obedient to my God Jehovah, there is a reward for doing it, that’s forgiveness, a clean conscious, and a hope of everlasting life on earth in the new system of things. Godly wisdom is a treasure for me. I believe that the Bible is inspired by God. My life changed completely when I decided to live in harmony with God’s principles.

That was a turning point in my life. My God provided a husband for me, with high moral standard. His name is Gene. My attitude is always that I cannot see the future, my future is in God’s hands because anything cloud happen. The Bible is a practical book, a guide book and is not outdated; it is beneficial for my family and me. One of the examples the Bible teaches me is to be simple, with sustenance and covering to be content, not be a greedy person because material things could be replaced; however, life itself cannot be replaced. Another example is that stealing is wrong. There are consequences you could be killed or in jail. That’s why a good reputation is important in life. So life is for us to keep. Dreams are there for those who sleep. Life could be right or wrong. Imagine people think I am a dreamer, but I am not the only one.

*Elsje Chinjauio Kong is a student at Golden Gate Adult Learning Center. Her tutor is Polly Spring.*

## **A Turning Point**

My life changed in several ways after I got married. First of all, after I got married, I moved to America from India. I had to learn English because English is now my second language. Also, an incomplete education made it difficult to get my cosmetology license. For the cosmetology license, I had to start school again. While I was studying the English language, I became pregnant and had a baby boy. I had to stop school because I didn't have enough help. While I was raising my son, I had another baby boy. When my kids started going to school, I started going to school to get my education. After moving to America, my life really changed.

*Vanita Bulsara arrived in America in 2003. She is currently enrolled as an Adult Basic Education/GED student at Seminole State College of Florida. Vanita is a busy mother with two sons, ages three and five.*

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## **About My Life**

I would like to tell you a little about my life. I was born February 12, 1956, the week after Valentine's Day. I dropped out of school in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, got in with the wrong crowd, and started smoking cigarettes, marijuana, crack and snorting powder cocaine.

I was arrested for the first time when I was 16 years old. I went to jail numerous times and I even got busted for drugs once on Valentine's Day. I was a rebellious child and if I didn't get things my way, I'd rebel. Finally, my unjust ways got me some time. I was given a year and a day (one step from prison). I had no privacy or rights.

After getting out, I started praying to God for strength to be who he wanted me to be. I didn't want to keep living my life

unjustly. God answered my prayers and I have been drug free for 10 years now. I even got married 10 years ago, on March 30, 2000. My husband died on January 8, 2010. I miss him very much. We had our ups and downs, but we loved each other in our own way.

So now you know about my life. But, best of all, I know that God answers prayers.

*Rosa Burls is enrolled in Columbia County's Adult Education Program.*

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### **A Turning Point in My Life**

A turning point in my life was coming to prison. I never thought in a million years I would end up where I am. I did a lot of bad things in my life time and I was finally caught. I thank God because drugs had total control over my life. Taking pills was my downfall. I tried to stop many times, but I couldn't. I would make excuses to use and began to steal, which ultimately lead to robbing people. I had no fear in my heart. All I wanted was to get high and didn't care who saw me.

One day, when I was high, my oldest baby girl told me, "mommy wake up". Even though I was high, it broke my heart. I felt like a piece of crap and decided to check myself into rehab. Detox was the hardest thing I ever experienced; giving birth wasn't even as hard. I had to admit to myself that I was powerless and had to share my life story to total strangers. I was doing well in the program until I became really sick. I was being loyal to my recovery so I went to the hospital and returned to rehab. Of course I was drug tested and it came up positive. I was mad and discouraged because for the first time I know I hadn't done any drugs. I let anger get the best of me and I checked out of rehab. I cried all the way home. I told myself that's how I was going to die. I was afraid. I was begging God to please give me a chance. When I got home, I heard a knock at the door-it was the police. I freaked

out but I was tired. I opened the door with my hands in the air because I knew I had a warrant out for my arrest.

Being sentenced to two years in prison on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 2009 was a turning point in my life. God gave me a chance. He didn't make it easy, but I accepted it, and thankful to be alive. Now, I have two years to focus on myself. My main goal is to pass my GED exam so I can have something positive to show my children, but most importantly, myself. Not using drugs makes me feel good about myself. I want to go home a civilized person, knowing that I never have to use again. Prison is actually helping me in a positive way. Although I can't make up for lost time with my children, when I go home, I will be the best mother I can be. I thank God for making something good out of a bad situation. This is definitely a turning point in my life.

*Nancy Batrez is a student at Broward Correctional Institution. Her tutor is Ms. John-Pierre.*

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## **Turning Point**

I feel the pain, quit touching me there,  
You both say you love me and that's why you're here.  
Can't you see I'm too little for that.

Tear drops like blood; you shove me back in the cage.  
I'm scared and hungry in this big empty place.

What do I see? A man with a badge all dressed in blue with eyes  
full of tears,  
Saying we are here to take care of you.

Now a teenager, but the pain is so real  
All I want is to leave this world.  
Swallow these pills.  
I hear sirens outside.

I'm getting sleepy. It's time I say goodbye.

Crime was the only way I could hide this pain and get attention.

Hey Wait!

I don't like these cuffs, you are hurting me.

Why prison? What did I do? It's all over now.

They are locking me away from these big stormy clouds.

I don't have to be the victim.

I don't have to hide.

I can throw away that little girl down deep inside.

Make a turning point, no more shall I run.

Start loving myself and have some fun.

I'm wiser and beautiful, and now I have some pride.

This is where I start living my life.

*Denise Gentry is a student in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **Oreo—My Turning Point**

One morning my son Allan awoke early. He showered, dressed and said smiling, "I'm going out, but I'll be back soon."

Allan didn't say where he was going, but when he came back he told his sister Juanita to come outside.

I was in my bedroom, but I could hear Juanita say very excitedly, "They are so cute."

And then Allan asked Juanita, "Which one do you like best? One is for you."

As soon as I could, I went outside, too. There were two puppies on the ground. One was white with black spots, and the



other brown with black spots. They were playing around, following each other. Allan and Juanita were watching and laughing.

Allan told me, "One is for Juanita, and the other is for our cousin." They asked me which one we should keep. My answer was, "None." I didn't want a puppy.

I said to Allan, "Give one to your cousin, and take the other one back." I reminded them that it was a lot of responsibility to take care of a puppy because I knew they didn't want to work.

Then Allan said, "Look what I bought: puppy food, leash, collar, toys and also veterinarian information."

Allan and Juanita begged me to keep the puppy, and they promised to take care of him.

I let them keep the puppy. We started thinking of a name. I said, "Oreo," and they agreed. The puppy has spots like an Oreo cookie.

Oreo is so cute. We play with him and take him outside for a walk. I take the most care of Oreo because every afternoon Allan and Juanita are busy doing their homework. In the mornings, they are in a hurry and go to school. They pay attention to him but not all the time.

I knew that having a puppy would be more work and responsibility for me, but I love my kids and I love the puppy. So with love I take care of Oreo. He is another family member.

*Beatriz Martinez is a teaching assistant at Head Start. She has two children: Juanita is in high school and Allan attends college and a brand-new puppy. Her tutor is Sharlya Gold.*

## **A Turning Point in My Life**

I dropped out of school in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade. It seems to me my life is almost pointless. This is not the life I intended for myself... A few realizations came to me and made me think, "hey, I've got to do something." Now, I have decided to come back to school to further my education so that I can be somebody someday.

As I looked around I began to notice that all my class mates have nice cars, jobs, some even have nice families now, but here I am still stuck the same old girl. I see now that my education is a must, and I am fully ready to get it.

Secondly, I don't come from a rich family. My parents couldn't put me through college if they wanted to. I'm not saying that it's their responsibility; I'm just saying that it has made it a lot harder for me. I've realized that my education won't be just handed to me.

Another realization is that I don't have much to show for myself right now, such as a car, a house, or a job. I don't even have a boyfriend, but what I do have is my adult school now, with a very nice teacher that is willing to work with me. She takes the time to make sure that I do succeed. I also have my parents encouraging me to pursue my education.

So as all these realizations came to mind, I understood that I was at a turning point in my life. I had to make a decision to better my life. I chose to come back to school and complete my education. Watch out world, once I get this degree there is no stopping me!

*Leah Smith is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

## "A Turning Point in My Life"

Well the turning point came in my life, the day that the police put **handcuffs** on me!

My life began to turn for the better, but all alone, I knew that I was alive, but I was not living, anymore! Now I am locked up and am living again!

Let me tell you this, I have AIDS. No, I am not ashamed anymore, because I have come to the turning point in my life. My biggest fear was that my family would not love me anymore, but they love me just the same.

Would you know that I had AIDS by looking at me? No, because I look just like anyone else. Would you still talk to me? Some of you would and some of you would not. But that's okay with me because I am not ashamed and I am not alone.

The day the doctor told me that I had AIDS, someone else was told that they had AIDS as well. When I close my eyes, someone else will close their eyes, the day they put my body in the ground, they will put someone else's body in the ground. So you see, I am not alone, this is why I know I have reached the turning point in my life. The doctor's tells me that I no longer have AIDS, but that I am an HIV carrier. Now that is a true Turning Point in MY Life!

I give all my thanks to God because without him I would not be here today. So to God, my family and many of my friends that I have met along the way, I say thank you so much!

*Linda Lynch is from St. Petersburg, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ESUBA class at GCF.*

## **A Turning Point in my Life....**

My name is Kathi Gonzalez. All through my life growing up, I've always felt a certain pulling. Like someone was trying to reach out to me. Upon leaving jail on November 11, 2008, I received probation for a charge of possessing crack cocaine. I made arrangements before I left jail to go to a program located in my home town of Ocala in "Marion Co." I placed myself into a discipleship program at the Ocala Four Square Church, also called Sheepgate Ministries. The Pastor there is Hawkeye. During my stay there I felt something pulling very strongly on me and was finally able to grasp and understand who was doing this pulling. It was our heavenly father God trying again to reach out to me.

I learned who his son, Jesus Christ, was and what he did for me. All the pain and suffering he did more than two thousand years ago just for someone like me! He was someone who was torn and at the verge of death physically, emotionally, mentally and even spiritually. That first week I was there, at Ocala Four Square Church, was my true turning point! I had to ask for his forgiveness for every single thing I had ever done to others, myself, and even to him, all my wrongs, past and present, and the choices I've made. I was desperate for help. The people at Four Square became my new Christian family and are still there for me, even today. Thank God they haven't given up on me! I do know that there are some hard feelings about my leaving there this last time I left. I had gone back a couple times since moving out Jan 1, 2009 to live with the man who became my husband on Feb 9, 2009.

Michael and I were married at our church Ocala Four Square, by our Pastor Hawkeye. My husband and I had a lot of odds against us including the devil, better known as Satan. We fell into his negative destructive schemes, back into our past addiction to crack and the negative, reckless and destructive lifestyle. Needless to say, I violated my probation because I continued to make the wrong choices and continued to use crack. All my self-inflicted abuse, running away from everything, including the man I married and love with all my heart and soul. Even drinking alcohol

again finally caught up with me again. My true turning point was at that church the first week of Nov. 2009, when I found out about Jesus Christ. He still loved me and has a plan for my life.

My calling and purpose in life is to help others, bring them the same kind of hope someone helped bring to me, and share my life testimony with others and to help them in any way I possibly can. I am here to live for and to serve our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. I truly desire that more than anything else. My husband Michael has recently made a new commitment to better his life, not only for himself and us and our future together, but also to live for and serve our lord Jesus Christ! I thank God today for Ocala Four Square Church, Pastor Hawkeye, his wife, and all my family there and for putting my husband Michael into my life, for giving us another chance, and for giving us both a turning point into our lives!

*Kathi Maheu is from Ocala, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ABE III class at GCF.*

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## **Turning Point?**

The turning point in my life was when my grandmother passed away when I was 15. A lot of things in my life changed. I went from good to bad real fast. My grandmother was more like my best friend who raised me.

I grew up with my twin brothers and my mother; our father was never around, so my mother was a single parent taking care of all 3 of us, making sure we had the best in life. I was always respectful towards everybody; I have never been the type to start fights. I stayed in school and played ball up until I was 17, then things turned in my life. I figured out the real me. I started liking women and along with me liking women, I moved in with my first girlfriend, who was much older than me, started selling drugs. I dropped out of high school. I had left and got caught up with that

fast money. I forgot about my family. I was caught up in the game, I started setting bad examples for my brothers I started going to jail and doing the time. I was out there doing my thing when my grandfather passed, and that's when I felt like it was over for me. So when I was 21 I got myself together because I wanted to set a good example for my brothers. I pushed them real hard to stay in school and become successful, and they did. Now I'm at the turning point in my life. Prison is a place where no one should be.

*Sherika Boone is from Jacksonville, FL and is in Ms. McCall's ABE III class at GCF.*

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## **A Turning Point in My Life**

I have come to a major turning point in my life. I have been struggling for quite some time trying to better my life. There have been a lot of things that let me know I needed to turn my life around. I am now focusing on my education so that I can achieve greater things. It would make me feel great to think that I have inspired someone else to do better as well.

First of all, I am coming to realize that my education is my number one priority as I begin turning my life around. With a GED I can go on to achieve other major goals that I am headed toward. I believe I can rise over any obstacle in life with good educational skills on my side.

Next, I'll have to be focused on my main goal at all times of my life. I'll have to walk it like I talk it. A focused man will always look and feel more comfortable as he progresses through his goals.

Finally, I must help inspire and teach others the right way to make themselves better. I believe that nobody is perfect in this world, but I do believe that the harder you practice, the fewer

mistakes you will make at things. I believe deeply in inspiring people that want to make a difference in this world today.

So, I have come to a point of major change in my life. I realize how important it is that I complete my GED. Staying focused on this goal will keep me overcoming obstacles that get in my way. As I achieve goals and advance in my life, I hope to inspire others along the way!

*Darrell Jones is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

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### **My Turning Point**

My turning point in life was when I came to prison in 2008. I had 20 years mandatory on me, but I fought it and got 17 years off. It is now 2010 and I have 1 1/2 years left.

This had to be the hardest thing for me to have to deal with, me being in prison, because I allowed someone to beat, hurt and take my self-esteem from me. Why I am here was the question I always asked myself. He was the one who did me wrong.

Well now that time has gone by, I started to realize that it wasn't his fault, I just didn't know any better, I never got the chance to take time out and get help for myself. I had to keep working, cleaning house, cooking and most of all, keep taking those beatings.

Being out in the "free world" never would have opened my eyes. I never had that chance. As much as I hate prison, it's not a place I never thought I would be. I feel this is God's way of giving me a time out. I never would have had a "time out" in the outside world. I have been introduced to a few really good teachers that took the time out to help and listen to me, not judge me. They have also been through the same relationships.

So when I leave here I know that I am a good person. I am somebody special. No one has the right to put their hands on me or verbally abuse me, if I get any sort of sign that this is becoming abusive I am going to walk right out because I deserve better. Everyone does! We are women not punching bags!

Wow, my turning point in life, I never expected to be here. I guess I couldn't keep up with that fight. No more living in fear. I took so much. I couldn't take anymore. I couldn't stand his touch! I felt like a nobody. I didn't count, but I am somebody! I am somebody! I am someone! We are all someone, everyone counts! You are number 1, don't let anyone ever make you doubt it.

*Jeanne Scire-Tully is from Stuart, FL. She is in Ms. McCall's ESUBA class at GCF.*

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## **Now I Can Read**

Now that I can read life's a lot better. When you can't read people will take advantage of you. Some know they are doing it and some don't. That's why you have to know how to read. I feel really good about myself because I am learning to read. When I go to the bank there are no more mistakes on my banking account. I work at Lake Wales High School and everyone knows I'm taking reading classes and they tell me how much I have changed.

The way I talk is even different. My boss is able to give me work like putting tags on labels. It's really hard to find classes without being able to read the teachers' names. I found out it's difficult to vote if you can't read the ballot. When you can't read it's like being handicapped. When you can't read you can't apply for a driver's license. Nowadays if you can't read you might not get a job, most of the time you have to have a GED or a diploma. Most jobs test you on a computer. That's why reading is so important.



I hope that when someone gets a tutor that she is like Barbara. She's always on time. She's always ready to go to work no matter how I feel. She has God in her heart, and now so do I. We have become friends. She always knows what to say to get the class started and even makes sure I'm okay by asking about my day. It really makes me feel good. I know if we didn't have people like Barbara I wouldn't be as confident as I am about myself.

Studying hard is why I can read and without a tutor I wouldn't be where I am today. I plan to go to GED classes in the future. I thank Barbara and all the volunteers for being there for me.

*Sylvia Estill a Florida native, works as a custodian at Lake Wales High School. She is learning to read through the Lake Wales Literacy Council. Her teacher is Barbara Delorey.*

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## **The Day I Knew I Could**

It all started three years ago. I was a normal teenager. I thought I knew it all. Reality struck when I found out I was pregnant at the age of fourteen. At first, I was going to give her up for adoption, but then I thought I could do it by myself. I finished my ninth grade and I quit school. I later found out that it's a lot harder than it looks. After about a year I thought I was grown and could do anything I wanted. I was having family problems at the time and had no friends to confide in. I started hanging out with the neighborhood kids, and I became addicted to crack. I did what I had to do to get money or crack. I started robbing people to support my habit.

I knew it was time to do something about my addiction when I found myself on my knees with a gun to my head because I tried to rob a drug dealer. I had gotten in a little trouble for messing up some school buses with my ex-boyfriend, and I was on

probation. I went to my probation officer and told her I had a drug problem. I asked her if I could go to drug rehab. I went to rehab for a few months. Two weeks after I got out of rehab, I relapsed. My dad had a new girlfriend and I thought he didn't love me anymore. I met my boyfriend, we got serious, and I decided to run away with him.

I got in a car accident one night, a week before my seventeenth birthday. I was in a coma for two and a half months. I was on life support for five months. Due to my mistakes, I am now a quadriplegic. I'm paralyzed from my neck down, and I'll live the rest of my life in a wheelchair. As a mother, never being able to hold my daughter again hurts worse than being in a wheelchair. It took about a year for me to stop hating and blaming the world for my problems. I thought I had ruined my life. Then I realized I didn't ruin my life, but I got a second chance. I decided to go back to school. I want to give back to the community.

I know now that without an education I can't move forward. I want to be a counselor for disabled kids. I would like to go to schools and talk to kids about drug abuse and how it changed my life. I want to prevent other kids from making my mistakes. Being in a wheelchair has not slowed me down, but has empowered me to be a better person and to be a good example to my daughter. I want to show kids that using drugs and alcohol is no way to live, but with an education you can do anything.

*Marie Coleman is a student in the e-learning program at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. She hopes her story will help others.*

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## **The Most Influential Decision**

My thoughts about life were pretty doubtful. I grew up in a stressful home. There wasn't much to do and that is where I met my demise.

Doubt was an everyday fixture in my life. Without an objective, every day slowly became more boring. Drugs became something to do that seemed like fun. Now I am just about fourteen, hanging out with the older guys. Peer pressure came into the picture. Before I turned fifteen, I took on eight felonies and spent the next two years locked up.

I had hope still in my heart simply because I knew it wasn't the end of the world. I still had family, not much of one, but they were still there. Losing a couple of good friends, I had to make a decision. My decision led me to meet my wife Erin and make the most influential decision of my life--to have a child.

That was a success in my eyes. It took a while, but now the benefits of having a child have almost saved me. Happiness has become a permanent fixture in my life. After my little buddy came into my life, my education became very important to me. That was a success also.

My life has been like a Picasso—it began all messed up, but can still be learned from. No one can predict their life, or downfall. One important thing is to live and learn. Never give up, strive for better, and always keep your chin up!

*Jacob Detzel, father of a son, Anthony, received his GED in 2010 from the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Citrus County, FL.*

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## **How I Overcame**

I was independent until a bacterial infection turned my life upside down. I lost my left hand and all of the fingers on my right hand except my thumb and half of my right index finger. I went from owning my own home, car, and furniture...to losing all of these things. I had a job and was raising my son, Quintin. My mother had me turned over to hospice and they placed me in the

Santa Rosa Health and Rehab Center six years ago at the age of twenty-seven.

The doctor who took care of me put me on prednisone, which caused me to gain so much weight that I was unable to walk. It has caused many other medical problems also.

About a year and a half ago I overcame a life threatening crisis, but in the process I had many wonderful doctors who took care of me. I came off of prednisone and began to lose weight. I got a gift of an electric scooter from the Scooter Store which has allowed me to become more independent.

I have dreamed of studying for my GED. Now I am living that dream at Santa Rosa Adult School. Even though I face a lot of critics, who think that I can't achieve this goal, I know that if God has brought me this far in life, he can take me even farther.

At the end of the day, I get my thoughts together and thank the Lord for letting me see another day that wasn't promised to me. In true reality, tomorrow is not promised to anyone. So even though I face many trials and tribulations, I keep my head up and keep moving forward.

*Betina Galloway is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

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*Goals and Ambitions:*

## **Why I Want My GED**

Most of my life I have thought of myself as someone who is weary of venturing out and then I started thinking about this essay and realized that I am more of an adventurer than I knew. I have always been one to try different things, even as a child I was different from other kids. I was very involved in taking care of

older people; that was my heart's dream, so I didn't pay as much attention to school as I should have. Somehow I believed my love of people would simply make a way. Helping people, taking care of people's families was what I did and because it was my desire I never thought it was work. It wasn't until I grew up that I realized I would have to work to support myself. By the time I was twenty, I had three babies to care for and I knew I wanted more for them and myself. Fortunately, I met a wonderful man who had a friend in America and he asked his friend if she knew someone who could sponsor me in America. Lo and behold, she arranged for me to come and work for her and I left Jamaica.

My desire to be a nurse wouldn't go away; however, I was grateful for the housekeeping job, but I knew I was destined to do something more. To give more, to help others, I just kept telling myself and anyone who would listen that I wanted to work in a hospital. A friend told me that her hospital was hiring, even though I told her I didn't know how to do the job, she said they would train me. She helped me fill out the application and I was immediately hired in housekeeping, but I couldn't stay away from the patients. My longing to work directly with patients was rewarded by training for and becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), and fulfilling that dream. I retired from that job after thirty-five years, thank God, but I realized there was still more I wanted to do.

The reason why this GED means so much to me is because I went through so much of my life not being able to read and write. I cheated my way through the best part of my young days and fooled a lot of people along the way, but again, the yearning to learn more would not leave me alone. Two years ago I made a decision to go back to school and get my GED. Despite the initial lack of understanding by some, as to why I would do such a thing at seventy years of age, I pressed on, researched, asked everyone else I knew how to find a school, until I finally found one where I felt comfortable and that was the beginning of my newest adventure. I love school and learning so much.

In this day and age, intelligence is often measured by how much education you have and I felt incomplete not having gotten mine. Now that I am in school I have more confidence in my ability to communicate my ideas and thoughts without feeling so insecure. My teachers, family and friends are supportive and encouraging, even when I start to feel scared, I never give up. I feel a sense of accomplishment that is new to me because I am doing this for me.

To wrap this up, getting my GED will be one of my greatest and most important achievements. It has empowered me and motivated me. I know now that I can do anything I set my mind to. The sky is the limit!

*Olive Morgan is a student at Dunbar Community School. His tutor is Sylvia Gibson.*

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### **Looking For a Better Job**

After graduating from a university in Uzbekistan, I wanted to continue with my master's degree. One second thought, if I finish the master's degree abroad, I can find a better job. My friend advised me to enroll in the Work and Travel Program to U.S. I participated and won a Visa. Now, I am living and working in U.S. Actually, I find it difficult living here because I have to work very hard to earn money. On the other hand, I have a lot of freedom. Even though I can do whatever I want in this country, self-control is the key.

*Shoyatbek Aripov is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

## **My Goal is to Go Higher**

My goal is to go higher in every stage of my life. First, I need to get my GED. Second, I want to go to college. I want to become a lawyer. I am glad that I have the opportunity to come to United States. Had I not been here, I would have been caught in the earthquake disaster in Haiti. I want to continue to learn because I want a better life. Wherever I go, I don't stop thinking about my goal. Now that I am in the Adult and Career Education, it is just the beginning of the path to reach my goal.

*Wildane Jean is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **My Goal and Ambition**

Before I came to the United States, I was working as a babysitter in my country, *Nicaragua*. I came here to live with my husband. I love children. My dream is to open a Fun Day Care Center for toddlers in America. However, English is a barrier. So, to begin, I am studying English. Before I could not speak English at all, but now I am speaking at the beginning level. My life is very important to me. I need to prepare for my future. I know that with a good education, I would be able to fulfill my dream someday.

*Yovanna Ramos is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **My Life Goals**

Life is the greatest gift on earth. It is a game between give and take in which everyone is the smith of his own luck; therefore, everybody should take every opportunity and put the highest effort into it. Only then may you harvest the biggest fruits. For me, it would be much easier to reach something in life when I set some goals. Then I know for what I am working.

When I think about my life, I think of my family which is for me the most important team. Education is important and necessary, too, for all of us. Also, there might be a little bit of time for fun and recreation.

My husband and I together are a great team, and only in this way are we able to be good parents. We want to be loving, but strong leaders for our kids. Therefore, we must be very good examples for them. We want to give them all the necessary things to start their own lives.

Learning never ends, and in every respect, education is the best basis. It enriches our lives and strengthens our self-esteem. Only with knowledge are we good life-managers and can be successful. For me, it is my ESOL class. I have learned not only English; I have learned so much for my life. I have heard about many different cultures, and each one of them has its own charm. That we are here for this one year was a great decision that my whole family does not regret for even one minute. It has opened up our eyes for so many things. It is a wonderful experience for all of us which we cannot pay in dollars.

Recreation is also important as a relief from work. If I work hard and am well-organized, I will have a little bit of time to enjoy. Together with my family, we have a lot of fun, and having fun makes many things easy. Even after a short break, I can start with a fresh brain and a smile on my face.

Everyone has to make decisions in life. Some are good, and some might be not so good. Only someone who dares can win. Life is given to us, and with all our efforts and goals, we are able to do wonderful things. Health, peace and happiness can help, but everyone is responsible on his own.

*Kerstin Westphal is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*



## My Life

How I would like my life! I am a very satisfied person. I thank God for every detail of my life: my health, work, my children, my companion who is my husband and help with everyday chores or duties. My main concern about life is my presentation, my ability and my capacity.

I don't know if I'm mistakenly thinking like this, and I do not forget that there are worse cases than mine, but the thing is, I would like to live a better life. For example: one day, I called to a Doctor office about my son who was sick. One of the nurses answered me and said, "Do you speak English or do you have someone I can talk with for you?" She replied to me. "No, I do not." Here is a barrier.

These are the kind of things I do not like or appreciate towards me. I would like to be able to do anything that comes my way, such as in church, at work. Sometimes I try if there is a mistake there is complaint or criticism. How would you feel, being in my place?

I'm working earnestly putting God first to see what I can achieve, and I know God will grant me the opportunity to accomplish something. Some questions can deeply nail the preacher down and leave the other person totally confused. I have a job to do, to win souls for the Lord. I cannot go empty handed to heaven.

*Linda Philemond is a student at Golden Gate Adult Learning Center. Her tutor is Polly Spring.*

## **If I Could Make One Change in My Life**

If I could make one change in my life it would be to have a more positive attitude. To accomplish this, I have to learn how to control my temper better and to have more patience. I also want to become more focused in life so that I can achieve my goals.

Learning to control my temper will help me have a more positive attitude. One way to do this is by taking a deep breath and counting to ten when I get angry. Taking an anger management course would be another way to keep my anger in check. Keeping myself calm and relaxed will also help to control my temper when things don't go my way.

Having more patience would be another great way to keep my mind in a positive frame. One way to gain more patience is to stop and think before acting. Saving for a rainy day and putting things off until I am ready are great ways to practice having patience. Saving money until I have what I need is a rule I can follow that will increase my patience.

Being more focused will help me accomplishing my goals. which in turn will lead me to keeping my attitude positive. Keeping my mouth closed and minding my own business is another way to help me stay focused. Writing down my goals and referring to them often will keep me on the right track, also.

In conclusion, in the past, not having a positive attitude has kept me from being a better person. Once I learn how to control my temper and be more patient about things, I will be able to become a better friend, mother and companion. Finally, being able to focus on life and goals will help me to achieve my GED and to fulfill my dream of becoming a registered nurse.

*Laquanda Boyd is a mother of two soon to be three children. She is a student in the Even Start program. She is taking the GED exam next month.*

## **Nurse, My Ultimate Goal**

When I was a little girl, my ambition was to become a lawyer or a journalist. When I grew older, I wanted to become a nurse. Unfortunately, I was neither a lawyer nor a journalist. Then I studied to be a secretary in my country, Haiti. When I am in United States, I have to go to school to learn and speak English. Now, I really want to be a nurse. I want to help everybody who needs help in this world.

*Majorie Tunice is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **My 3 Steps for Achieving My Goal**

Everybody has goals, but I have one particular goal. My goal is to pass the math part of the GED. I have three steps I have to take in order to achieve this goal. They are going to class, studying, and focusing. By following these three steps I know I can achieve my goal.

First, I have to go to class so I can learn more information about math from my teacher. Going to class can really help me to prepare myself to take the math part of the GED. I can ask questions that I don't understand in class. Therefore, my teacher can help me with all of the lessons that are on the math part of the GED test. Then, I can be ready to pass it.

Second, I have to study. By studying, I can make a good score on my math test. I can review all the lessons I've learned about math from school. Studying really helps me to remember. I can study each session one by one until I get a full understanding of each part.

Third, I have to stay focused. Staying focused is very important. I can stay focus by eating a good breakfast, not thinking about other subjects, and concentrating on the math part only.

Staying focused helps me when I'm taking a test. By staying focused, I can surely do my best.

In conclusion, going to class, studying, and focusing are three steps to help to achieve my goal of passing the math part of the GED.

*Shalanda Moore is a happily married woman and the mother of two children, Elijah Moore and Antonio JR. She attends classes at Lively GED in Tallahassee to further her education.*

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## **Everybody Has Goals**

I have goals that I would like to achieve this year and they are as follows. I am working on getting my GED and being self employed in a home business in internet marketing. The steps I must take to achieve these goals are getting my GED, own my business, and to allow God to be a blessing to me.

Step one: to achieve my goal in getting my GED. I must work on the math subject even more being that math is my most difficult subject. Math has never been a friend to me in my school days, but to get my GED I must conquer it and not let it deter me anymore. I have passed my reading and social studies part of the test. I am proud of myself, but please be advised that I will conquer the mountain called math. Furthermore, I am working on being self employed in a home business doing internet marketing.

Step two: to master my goals. For this to happen I must do a lot of research on business opportunities. This would include weaning out the bad advice and holding on to the good one. This journey can take time to achieve, in this research one must be able to ask questions and get answers from only good resources. This could include families and friends or someone you trust, like a church member, doctor, and maybe an employment specialist. This is some of the action I do to accomplish my goals. Furthermore, I

also use the search engines provided by Yahoo, MSN and Google to accomplish this task. As you can see, this is a journey that I must go through to achieve my goals in being self employed in my home business. In order for me to top this off, I want to be a blessing to someone else in some kind of a way whether it be through face to face ministry, building hopes and dreams of being their own entrepreneur or maybe someone is down on their luck.

Step three: to achieve this goal I must be in tune and on the same page with the almighty, Himself. This would include me getting my life in order and in check with Him. What this boils down to is to know one's self weakness and being broke down to know that I am nothing without Him and that I cannot do anything without Him. Fasting, praying without ceasing, growing in His words by reading and being a doer of His words by showing other people the blessing. He has given to me and, they also can accomplish to. Furthermore, by knowing this, I can be rebuilt stronger in my heart and soul. I know now that I am encouraged to share the blessing with others so that they them self will know their blessing as well. I know that I must be a beacon of light for others to see the light that He has given to me, to share and not to hold from others. In conclusion, my goal is to be a light for myself and others.

*Craig Page is a GED student at Adult & Community Education in Tallahassee.*

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## **Goals and Ambitions**

When I was a little girl, I could not wait to grow up, finish high school, and go to college to achieve my goal. I have always seen the difference between adults and teenagers. For example, in my childhood years, I use to pretend to be a nurse and acted as if my doll was my patient. I examined her, gave her shots and prescribed her some medicines to make her feel better. Interestingly, my goal and ambition is to be a nurse.

To begin with, I went to college, and put all my efforts to obtain my degree in nursing. No matter how hard my stack was, I always kept my dream alive. Someday, I will see what my heart desires. Since I put my faith in something that I trust, I know I will achieve my goal and my ambition.

Second, thankfully, I also found time to cultivate my skills to help others feel proud with dignity. It does not matter what their race, gender, religion, or ethnicity is. I take good care of people, especially elderly people. I feel like I give back to the community. I feel very happy, because I accomplished my biggest dream.

Lastly, nursing is a great field that can help sick people ensure their health. I pursued this career because there are job opportunities available throughout the whole world. In addition, nursing is a high paying job. Therefore, with the money I have earned, I could buy a house, take good care of my family and buy a new car. In other words, I will pay all my debts and invest some money in the stock market.

To conclude, I like my career because it means a lot to me. Additionally, it changed my life for the better. My goal and my ambition is the key to my success. Finally, I can move forward. I am happy; I did not give up on my dream. My life is better than before.

*Marie Selmelfort is from Hiati and a mother of one child, She is a very dedicated student from Miami Dade County Public Schools- TLC online GED program at South Florida workforce in North Miami Beach.*

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## **My Goals and Ambitions**

I was born in Bogota, Colombia. Through my 25 years of life, I have realized that the future of a successful person is based on the studies that they have acquired, either here in this country, or in any country of the world. Only intelligent people who seize opportunities are those who get far and are able to fulfill their

dreams.

After getting my high school diploma, it was not easy for me to know what college career I should go for, which my future would depend upon. It is difficult to make a good decision when you know that your life is going to be affected, but if you really take a close look at how many options are out there, you will be able to get the best professional education.

My goal at that time was to become a professional. At the end of the day, having on my desk several university careers that I could go for, I decided to study criminal justice. I chose this career because it has always been something that not only I liked, but that drew my attention since I was a kid. I guess it was that way because my father worked in the military for over twenty years as a policeman; it seems to be an interesting career to be in.

I started my studies, which turned out to be very interesting and fascinating. I think that when a person really likes what they do they can spend hours and hours studying and simply do not realize how the time is passing and what is happening around them. My career would take me two and a half years to finish, but at the end, I would receive my degree in criminal justice as a technologist. When I was about to finish my third semester I came to the United States of America. Although I was missing two semesters to finish my studies, I decided not to continue.

It has been 6 years since my life took a turning point; although, it has always been my desire to finish that career. I am currently living in Bradenton, a county in the state of Florida, and I can say that during these six years I have met a lot of challenges in all the areas of my life. I have learned many things, but the main goal I have right now is to learn English perfectly so I can fulfill my biggest ambition, which is to finish my studies in criminal justice in this country. Getting my college degree would help me feel more accomplished as a professional. After accomplishing these goals, I would be able to support my family and help my daughter and the baby that is on the way to be part of this society,

without going through all the trouble I have gone through. I will be able to make their dreams reality. I want to be able to grow not only professionally, but personally.

In conclusion, I think that any risk we take in this life is worth it. On the other hand, I think it is fundamental and important to remember that we should support each other and always be there for family because when we have motivation and perseverance, we will get what we want.

*Diana Nino is a student at the Literacy Council of Manatee County.*

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## **My Goals and Ambitions**

I want in life many things. There are many goals and ambitions to succeed, and I am positive that I will make it to the top with the help of my mother and my motivation for a better life for my family and me. I especially want for my daughter to graduate from a better school than I attended, and to grow up in a better neighborhood than I grew up in; she is my motivation. As for my ambitions, I have many of them in my soul.

Accomplishing my goals is what I will do. My very first goal that I must complete is to receive my GED because I am smart and positive. I just made the wrong mistakes back in high school. With this GED, I can go very far in life and be a success. Once I earn my adult diploma, I will go directly to college -- no breaks or vacation. I will complete because this goal is my greatest goal. I dream of this goal.

The course of study I will be going to school for is Criminal Justice and Psychology as my minor. With the help of my mother, and my self-motivation, I will achieve this goal. I will apply for scholarships and stay above grade average with integrity and good behavior unlike my high school days. My ambition of helping others find their way in life, and to motivate others to choose the right decisions in life, enlighten me in ways that you



cannot imagine. This is just one of many reasons why I chose these two professions to study.

Although after I earn my GED and register for college to study Criminal Justice and Psychology, right after I complete registration and financial aid, my goal is to take the FBAT test to become a corrections officer so I can have a good paying and stable job while I attend college. I do not want my daughter to have to struggle in life the way I am now. My daughter is my greatest ambition in life, so if I have to work a full-time job and attend college full-time then hey, “It is what it is” is what I always say. My goals and ambitions are not too much pressure for me; I am happy with family, friends and myself, and I am a strong women.

In conclusion, my goals and ambitions in life are to be the greatest I can be through the storm and through sunny days. Nothing will get in my way. I am my own self-motivator: “Team Lakisha.” There are many other goals that I will eventually succeed in, but some goals that I just discussed with you are my main priorities -- and they will be accomplished!

*Lakisha Wright is a self-motivated student ready to accomplish her TLC ONLINE-GED Program at South Florida Workforce-North Miami Beach.*

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## **My Goals My Ambitions**

My name is Martine. I was born in Haiti. I have a family there. I grew up in Haiti and have many friends, as well. I graduated from high school in Haiti. I want to be a nurse. When I came to U.S. I had to study English. I realize now how important it is to speak English to accomplish my dream. Though I am in U.S., I love Haiti. I long to go home, and hope I can be there soon.

*Martine Pierrilus is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

## **My Goal in Life**

Many people have dreams and goals. One of my goals that I set for myself is to have a good, productive job that I will enjoy. However, the problem right now is that I cannot reach my goals because I have a kidney problem.

A goal in my life now is to get a donor for a kidney. Three years ago I had a normal life. While at work, my feet began swelling. After testing at the emergency room, the doctor told me that my kidneys had quit functioning. When I heard that, my mouth dropped open and a lot of things came to my mind. How can I help my family? How can I support my mother and my sister? I spent days crying and with no sleep.

I had to think about the reality of a fatal disease. I searched for doctors and treatments. Truthfully, I spent many waking hours in fear. Is this disease going to kill me?

The dialysis treatments help me to wait for a donor. When I get my kidney, I am going to go to see my mother and give her a big hug; also, the rest of my family. I want to work in and around a nursing home business. I am willing to put in a lot of hard work and time. I hope that I accomplish my goal.

*Lilian Vantol is studying English at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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## **The Promise**

For those of you who have been contemplating a rapid tornado at sundown, please reconsider such dark clouded thoughts. Cast away that ominous moonlit shadow that surrounds you, and fill yourself with daylight symphony. I assure you, from this day forth, we will journey alongside each other, discovering purpose,

meaning and reflection. Moving forward and becoming that golden autumn field, immersed with the drive of continuance.

However, you must help me; I'm unable to do this alone. We must transform and together, become collaboration. Stay with me, and I promise my student, we will see stars from sky to distant river. Remember, you have decided to dedicate yourself to entering the place of evening glory. I.T.T. Tech has presented itself to you as your gateway, filled with opportunity for growth. Look, the door is open now, no longer dead-bolted and chained; you're free from frivolous restrictions. This means you can begin to fly with the wind, rather than against it.

My message to you is this: you're here now alongside me, never having to sit upon broken wings. I'll simply fill you with fortitude, for it will become your resting page in the sky. Your endurance will never flicker out. You'll always view shades of lavender skies, which beckon prosperity. Did I mention your brightest star would always shine? Yes, I know the road can become quite perilous; however, I will never have you lose your vibrant luster. Simply embrace it, as a means to attain.

Together, we will strike adversity with your mighty hands, and claim your right to dreams and affluent endeavors. Having this said, keep in mind that tolerance through positive thought, brings a vision of victory. Therefore, the answer to achievement proclaims two words: don't quit.

*Diane M. Bazail is a student at ITT Technical Institute. Her Goals and Ambitions: To receive her Associate of Science Degree in Criminal Justice, and pursue her Bachelor's Degree in Psychology. Then, continue and finish with her Master's in Neuro-psychology.*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

One of my goals is to get my G.E.D. Another goal I have is to get a couple of trades. My final goal is to get a job, so I can move on with my life. These are my goals and ambitions.

My first goal is to get my G.E.D. School hasn't been so great for me in the past. I was always in trouble, or I just wasn't making good grades because I didn't care. Now I do care about my education, and I see what I want in life. One of the obstacles I have to face to get my life straight is to get my education. That's why I'm getting my G.E.D first.

My second goal is to get a couple of trades. I want to learn mechanics and welding. I need these trades so that when I go to apply for a job they can see that I have experience. I've always been interested in mechanics and welding. I used to help my dad work on cars or weld something. In the world you usually have to have experience to get a job, and that's why I want to get trades.

My third and final goal is to get a job. Once I get a job I'm going to help my mother out with the bills. I'm also going to save enough money to move out. I'm ready to start my own life. I want to get a good paying job, but it's hard to find a job these days. You have to work hard to find a job, but I'm willing to do that.

These are my goals and ambitions for life. Some people don't know what they want in life yet, but I do. I realized what I want and now I have to get it. There's nothing better than having your own life where you can actually call everything yours. Life isn't easy. It's a battlefield, but I'm ready to fight.

*Cody Kilpatrick is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

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## **My Road to Success**

Coming from a deprived background, being raised by a psychotic mother who never graduated high school, living from place to place and being dependent upon others, you would think that any person in their right mind would say, enough is enough, and want more for herself. Right?

According to the choices I made, I wasn't in my right mind. I told myself I wanted more. I got in more trouble, more stress, and with all that, less motivation and less ambition. All of this left me with no education. I felt lost, unloved and uncared for.

I went looking for love in all the wrong places, which led me into an abusive relationship that I didn't get anything out of, except a beautiful baby boy named Xzaivion Malechi Houston. The day of my son's birth, I asked myself, what am I going to do? I'm a single mother, no job, no education. What employer is going to hire me? That's when it finally sank into my head that education was the key. I knew, right there, in order to have a successful career, I had to accomplish the first step, which was earning my GED.

I did my research and found out about the excellent GED program at W.T.I. Did I tell you that it also included a teen single parent program that provides free daycare as well? That definitely made things much easier for me. One thing is for certain, I am very thankful to receive the assistance of the amazing staff at W.T.I. There's never a day that passes by without one of my teachers asking me if I need help, which makes me feel wonderful, knowing that help is available.

Another thing is also for certain, if you want something, you must work for it. Nothing is ever just going to fall into your lap. The ball is all in your court, if you want to be successful.

*Catoya Houston is enrolled in the WTI GED program. She is a 19-year-old single mother who grew up in Long Island, N.Y.*

## **Accomplished Dreams**

When I came to the United States about 13 years ago, in January 1997, I did not know what to expect. I didn't speak English at all. I came to a new country, and I didn't know even one English word. I felt lost; life became hard.

I started working in the Marriott Hotel in housekeeping. Because I did not have any language knowledge, I was treated with disrespect; people laughed behind my back, saying words I didn't understand. Guests tried to talk to me, but I could not respond. I felt very embarrassed and worthless.

About two months later I began to see a little light in my life when I found a new job in a daycare. The owner, Marianne, was very nice. She hired me to prepare meals for the children. She stayed in the kitchen with me and taught me English by pointing at things we used or things that surrounded us, repeating their names over and over, day after day.

Some days she would send me to the class to talk to the children. She said, "Kids will never judge you." She was right; I had so much fun. About six months later I realized I understood what people said, and I could even answer them. For example, I could order myself a meal at a restaurant. Finally, at the Publix deli, I could order my favorite salami cut the way I like it.

After that, my life got a little easier. I had many different jobs, and I met new people. I wasn't afraid to speak English anymore.

Year after year passed. People admired me for how much I learned on my own; however, I wasn't happy. My dream of going to college became stronger and stronger. My friends pushed me all the time: "Go!" I had to tell them the truth. "I can't write English." So many times I tried to find schools to learn English, but everything was very expensive. With that discovery, my dreams slowly died, but God loves me. He had a plan for me.

One day I shopped at the local Dollar General store. When I was ready to leave, I saw a small yellow brochure by the cash register. I picked one up and read the title, "Do You Want to Learn How to Write and Read English?" "Wow," I thought, "maybe I still have a chance to follow my dreams." I took that very special brochure home, answered all the questions, and mailed it the same day. A few days later I received a call that changed my life.

Now seven months have passed. I am going to school to learn to write English thanks to the good people of READ Lakeland. I don't have to pay anything. Yes, it's free. Every day I wake up and feel so blessed. I have things in my life to look forward to. I have my dreams back again - I will be attending college.

So what does learning English mean to me? Accomplished dreams.

*Trela Lenka is a student at READ Lakeland. She has two children and is currently learning English and taking class to eventually become a children's book writer.*

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## **My Story About Life Choices**

I believe that the biggest fear we have is that we are afraid of failing. Before even trying to succeed at anything, we would rather give up because it is much easier to do, with no effort at all. It may look like, or seem to be, more difficult to take the high road, the hard road, rather than the low, easy road in life. It is my belief

that we as people sometimes miss out on the things that were designed for us from the beginning, or, shall we say, our destiny, because we tried to take the easy road.

So here is my story about life choices. I never knew education was so important in high school, but, you see, it is very important, even more now than back when I first tried to get it right. I elected to choose what I wanted to do, rather than finish high school. So I dropped out in my 11<sup>th</sup> grade year and took my show on the road, to see what I could see, if life was good as people say it is! And it was...and it wasn't...

One day, when I was working for a manufacturing company, I was having a discussion with my supervisor. We were talking about God, work, people and opportunities. And, do you know, the funny thing is that my boss said people miss out on opportunities in life because all of us have choices. Choices are being made all the time, so we can't blame boss, jobs, coworkers, friends, wife, girlfriends, etc. etc. The problem is that we make those choices ourselves, so we can't play the blame game. Because of choices made, there is responsibility and accountability for the actions and the results!

The fact of the matter is that we need to take a look at our own choices and examine ourselves to see where we are in life, and why. In my personal learning experience, I have failed, time and time again, but we have to understand that every great inventor, great person and great discoverer, did not accomplish their dream by chance, but by choice. Also, choices that are made keep hope alive for the next generations to come. To build on the words, "my people will perish for lack of knowledge," lack of education can destroy the future.

So I finally said to myself, it is time to correct something that should have been corrected a long, long, long time ago; this brings me to the here and now, bringing my life and choices into adjustment. To succeed in life, I am going to need order and direction to further my education. Here I am, 26 years later, finally achieving my goals. We as people all need higher education to be able to get the great jobs, have the opportunities to be positive role models and to be conquerors in life's battles. It all comes down to choices.



*Isaiah Farrington attends WTI's GED program. He wants to be a better role model and to show his children that "nothing is impossible with God and a little hard work."*

## **My Goals and Ambitions**

Upon my release from prison my goal is to receive my GED. I would like to get my GED and further my education by attending college. I would like to start my own business. I feel that I will become a better person. I will be there for my family. Previously, before I came to prison, I tried to get my GED. However, I got discouraged by negative things in life and just gave up. Since my negative ways landed me back in prison. I feel like I can make the best out of a bad situation by getting my GED. I feel that there is a reason for my being here and that I'm going to do something positive from this experience.

Upon my release, I will get my GED and start my own business. I would like to go back to school and get a degree in Business Management. My education means a lot to me. By getting my GED it will help me buy a house and establish who I am. I would like to open a very large popular barber shop and a very nice night club. I will finally be able to obtain my goals and be a success. I will be there for my family who encourage me to stay positive in life. So, when I get my GED, I can really be the man I intended to be.

*Vashon Johnson was born in Tallahassee, Florida, I attended James Rickards High School. I am currently getting my GED at Jefferson Correctional Institution in the GED program.*

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## **My Life Goals**

I want to be a psychologist. Another goal is to learn everything I can in this life journey. Finally, I would love to travel the world.

Since I was a child, I felt like I had to do something to help people, but I just did not know what. I knew it had to be something that I would also enjoy doing. I enjoy helping people. There are many ways to help people, and one of those is the psychological way. With this help, people can have relief from their problems and be happy. Therefore, I decided that psychology would be a career that I would enjoy and would benefit others. My next step is to improve my English so I can get my GED and start college.

I feel that we all are here for a purpose, and that we have many lessons to learn on this wonderful journey called life. I also believe that everything happens for a reason, and that it is important to learn everything I can because it will be useful to me in the future. I open myself and mind to everything, and I learn from it. Whatever I do not like, I just leave it behind. I also like to learn from all the people I meet. I learn from their personalities and their points of view. Every day to me is a lesson; this knowledge enriches my soul.

One of my biggest needs, I feel, is to travel the world to experience the different cultures: how they live and what they believe. I can see how insignificant I am in this big family called Earth. My travels will show me how good my life is compared to others, how many people in their poverty are happier than richer people and how people everywhere are wondering about the purpose of life. I can observe the different ways people use to thank the creator of all things. I want to get to know as many countries as I can. In the ESOL class, I feel that I am learning more than just English. The students are showing me the world I want to travel so I can become a better human being in every way.

I will accomplish my goals for my life. I plan to study and choose a career that will benefit others. With all of my energy, I

will try to learn as much as I can. As I travel the world, I will develop a better understanding of people. I think I CAN DO IT!

*Zoila Araya is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

## **There Are a Lot of Things That Happened in My Life**

There are a lot of things that happened in my life that are hard for me to talk about. As a kid, I spent a lot of time on my own. I was sad and always cried...sitting in dark places. I never understood why I hurt all of the time. I wouldn't go to school because the kids always picked on me on account of my lazy eye; not to mention that I was also cross-eyed and my eyes slightly bulged. I grew up with low self esteem. The cruel name-calling put fear in my heart. My mom didn't understand me at all; she beat me a lot. I tried to kill myself...taking pills from my mom's room. Once, I tied a sheet around the door to hang around my neck.

Running, always, away from home...sleeping in old buildings... About age ten, depression had put me in a world all on my own. The only time I felt good with myself was when I started drinking alcohol and doing drugs. My dad was an alcoholic, and we drank together. He would say, "Don't tell your mom," but she knew. She called the police and they picked me up from my dad's and took me back home to my mom.

At fifteen my mom sent me to Job Corps, a place for kids that don't go to school. I tried to make it work, but the kids were the same: calling me names that hurt even more. I would go off on my own and drink. I was still alone. When someone looked at me, I would turn away hoping they wouldn't, or couldn't, see my eyes. I couldn't understand why God would allow this to go on. What had I done to suffer and hurt so in my heart? I just wanted to die. I've been in lots of places running from myself.

I wanted to learn to read and write. I would get a book and look at the words and pray that God would help me to understand. I am trying now to get the schooling that I never had when I was younger. I spent the better part of my life in drug and alcohol programs, trying to stay off drugs. When I was forty-five years old, a doctor fixed my eyes, but it didn't fix my heart. I still hurt inside, and I have a depression problem. I feel the same today as I did when I was ten years old, but today I am sober and feel better in life; setting goals that I will put all of my time and energy into achieving. I love myself today, and life for me is good.

*Michael Clemons a father of three daughters - Brittaney, Faith & Ashley - who are growing up in TX. I have been, and currently still am, enrolled in the JPL's Center for Adult Learning. My ultimate goal is to successfully achieve my GED and move forward with my life.*

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## I Am

I am Malcolm X'avier McCall and I am destined for greatness. I am someone that is going to be something, there is no one like and there never will be anyone like me. I am not going to be standing on the block selling nickels and dime sack wasting my time.

I am Malcolm X'avier McCall and I am destined for greatness. I am going to be successful I am going to stay positive to stay headstrong so I can get through life.

I am. I am. I am. I am Malcolm X'avier McCall. I am not a convict or a thug; I am someone that is going to make it happen because I want it to happen.

I am changing for the better and not for the worst. I am Malcolm X'avier McCall and I am destined for greatness. I am not going to be a statistic; I am going to go to college.

I am going to make it to see my 25<sup>th</sup> birthday; I am going to make my mother proud.

I am so sick and tired of people underestimating me, thinking less of me.

I am proud of whom I am and the good choices I make.  
I am Malcolm X'avier McCall and I am destined for greatness.

The message is don't let anyone tell that you are nothing because all you have to do is prove them wrong. Remember you are the microphone and your speaker is your future.

*Malcolm McCall wrote this poem because he got tired of listening to the world telling him he will be a statistic so he decided to express his feeling in poetry.*

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### **Will Betty Make It?**

A few days ago, I went and applied for a job that I really wanted. Oh my god! Three days later, they were interested! They called me! I have an interview!

How will I get there? I'm still saving so I don't have a car yet. My friend Rita and Fred drive. Oh no, Rita's car is in the shop. The mechanics are waiting on a part to fix her car. Fred said he would bring me to the interview. I'm not quite sure we will make it there. Everyone knows his car is a heap. Nevertheless, I have to take a chance.

Fred drove his precious car Betty. Betty was everything you did not want in a car. However, she meant everything to him. Betty was the last thing his grandpa had given him before grandpa passed away. Although Fred loved Betty he would use and abuse her. She was old and corroding inside and out. Fred never took the time to feed her oil and tune her up properly.

As he pushed on the gas pedal, massive grey and black clouds stormed out of her tail pipe. The first few minutes she would choke and die. Her air conditioning was confused and only blew out raunchy hot air. Only one of the windows would crank down, and just halfway. The right front wheel would wobble and squeak as it turned. Her left mirror, dangling by a wire, kept smashing on Betty's side as Fred drove.

Oh my! I was scared. I had many thoughts going through my mind.... Would she break down? Will we have to pull off the road and wait in the hot blazing sun? Would Betty run out of water and overheat? Is Betty going to survive this drive? How much longer will she take it? About 15 minutes had passed but it felt like an hour. It was a hot, smoky, choky, wobbly, squeaky, smashy ride.

Finally, we arrived. As we pulled into the building parking lot, Betty was surrounded by an awful smelling smoke. Everyone had stopped doing what he or she was doing to stare, but I didn't care. Betty got me to my interview on time and I got the job.

*Josee DeMarco is an adult learner who returned to school after an absence of 11 years. She made it clear from the beginning that she hated writing. In spite of her dislike, she agreed to try to write a creative essay.*

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## **My Goals and Ambitions**

My goals and ambitions are to pass the G E D test and get a job so that I can get a house for me and two of my kids who are still living with me. The past year has been very hard for us, but I have goals and won't give up until I get what I am going for, that is my GED and a job so that we don't have to live day by day and not knowing where we will be from one day to the next. When I pass the GED test and get a job, we will be able to get a house and settle down. That is my goal and ambition to do at this point. I will be very glad when it happens, and I know that it will be very soon.

*This author is an Adult Learner from Learn to Read North Florida. Her tutor is Jo Ann Jenkins.*

*What Learning English Means to Me:*

### **Learning a New Language**

People say that it can be difficult to learn a new language. A new language is different from the mother language in regard to cultural backgrounds, pronunciation, new words and so on. So I agree.

First of all, learning a new language requires one to understand new cultural backgrounds. Language includes cultural factors. After understanding new cultural factors, it is easier to learn a new language.

A second reason is pronunciation. The pronunciation of a new language differs from the mother language's pronunciation. Therefore, those learning a new language must train themselves in pronunciation in order to speak the language well.

A last reason is verbal acquisition. Acquisition of new words requires continual memorization.

In conclusion, because of the cultural backgrounds, new pronunciation, and new words, I agree that it can be quite difficult to learn a new language.

*Seyeon Kim is a student in the ESOL Program of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County.*

## **What Education Means to Me**

An education means how successful you can be in life.

An education has been very important to me since I was a child. During my study at the Middle School, I was interested in the sciences: biology, geography, history and playing the piano. It was so interesting to learn about human organs, new countries, historical events and the World Wars. It was amazing to listen to the classic music in the Musical School for hours, and then discuss, using our imagination and impressions, with classmates and teachers. I enjoyed playing music of Paganini, Mozart, Chopen and Tchaikovsky. Also, I used to like to read detective stories, romances and science fiction. My favorite authors were Agate Kristi, Somerset Moem, Edgar Poe and Margaret Mitchell.

After graduation from Middle School, I studied Technology and Economics at a training school. It was interesting to learn a basic knowledge of economics and computer technology. In 1986, people didn't have computers at home, at work, or at elementary and middle school. The computers looked like very big machines. So, it was a big opportunity for me. I was really interested in studying it.

In 1999, I started studying to graduate as a computer operator. First, it was very difficult for me because I didn't know a keyboard and could not type fast. I decided to stop studying, but after a couple of days, I borrowed an old typewriter from my friend, opened a book and retyped texts. I spent hours doing it. Finally, I've started typing fast and I came back to the course, finished it and graduated.

Then I got a job in Public Tax Inspectorate as a Tax Inspector. My manager's condition was to improve my education. So, I started to study in Donbass Metallurgy Institute. I will never forget that time and my friends. In 2002, I was graduated with a Bachelor's in Economics. It was really difficult to combine a very



busy job and education, but it was really interesting, and it has helped me to be promoted to reserve manager of a big department of Public Tax Inspectorate. My coworkers and I were surprised because I was young for it.

I got an opportunity to become a Chief Accountant of new, big, fancy and beautiful Trading House. Also, I decided to continue my education in Eastern Ukrainian National University and Regional Management Institute. I had to work during the week and studied in the weekends. I studied Accounting and Auditing at the University, and took an excellent bookkeeping computers program in the Institute. Finally, I graduated from University as a Specialist of Economics and got a diploma as operator of program 1: C Enterprise.

My hometown is small and has a bad economy. People, who are educated and have good work experience don't have an opportunity to earn a good salary. Bin Kiev, the capital of Ukraine, has a lot of opportunities. So, I've decided to move to Kiev in 2004. All of my education helped me to find a good job as a Chief accountant of a big company very fast.

Now I'm studying English as a second language at the Daytona State College. It has helped me a lot to improve my skills and to communicate better with society. Also, I've finished a course in Computerized Accounting and Bookkeeping. I am hoping all of these experiences will help me to find a good job in the United States.

I always tell my daughter to succeed in this life you have to study hard and be serious. If you are an educated person, you can express and realize yourself, have a good salary and be surrounded by educated and smart people. Education for me means a way to be successful and happy.

If I hadn't had a good education, I would not have moved to Kiev, so I would not have met my American husband and I would not have written this now. So, education means a lot to me.

*Inna Zalozna is married. She has daughter Kristina fourteen-years-old. She is a student of Daytona State College, Deltona, Florida. Her teacher is Kathleen Titus. Kathleen tutor is a Grammar teacher at Daytona State College.*

## **What Education Means To Me**

Education is not only about learning! To me, education means to be prepared, to improve and to develop your mind in order to achieve every goal or dream that you have. At this point in my life, I have realized and experienced three meanings of education that I want to explain.

The first meaning is Preparation. It's important to prepare your mind to handle situations and opportunities which will help you establish a life surrounded by success. Your own acts and thoughts should be a tool to utilize in each moment and each event throughout life. Last year, somebody told me that I was lucky and I said to him "Be prepared, luck happens when preparation meets with the opportunity." Moreover, education prepares you to be a good person, an excellent spouse and a good parent. You won't know everything, but you will be able to respond in a reasonable way to different situations.

The second meaning is Improvement. Education helps you increase your intellectual capacity. Education is the way to learn something, no matter what or where, no matter how, no matter if the education is formal or informal. Just because you are not attending university, it does not mean that you are not learning every day in your life. The education you get should not be random; it should be especially selected to integrate with your life, to be part of your environment and to be in harmony with who you are and what your expectations and goals are. In addition, the education should facilitate the improvement of your surroundings

and your community. For example, I saw the importance of learning the language when I arrived to this country. Given that it was my primary need, I focused all my efforts to improve my language skills, to integrate it to my personality and make it part of my life.

The third meaning is Development. Education has a developing effect on the character and personality of people. It gives you the tools that you need to conquer the objectives related to the profession or area of expertise you decided to follow. In the educational process, we develop abilities such as speaking in public, social interaction, coexistence and tolerance. We learn how to live.

Therefore, I think that sometimes, people don't realize the importance of education in their lives. It's clear to me that you will have more chances to make your dreams a reality if you have the formation and knowledge to be able to start and direct your life towards your goals. The more prepared you are, the more you are likely to succeed in the things you set yourself to achieve in life. Those three aspects: Preparation, Improvement and Development have given me enough skills and tools to confront situations in my personal and professional life.

Finally, I want to conclude that, unlike material things, knowledge remains inside and nobody can take from you what you have learned in your life.

*John J. Vargas is a Colombian man who came with his wife to United States and both are learning English as a second language to achieve all their goals. He has a tutor and her name is Jean Stanley. He is grateful for every minute with her.*

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## **What Education Mean to Me**

Education is a very important to me because education can help me to reach my goal and ambition to become true to myself for a better future.

One of the opportunities is to come to school every day and be able to learn a new thing to improve my English.

One of my Major goals is to learn English well to be able to help my daughter with her homework and be helpful in her activities in her future. Also, my family is the most important thing to me; they help me to be a better person and they are the ones inspiring me to continua learning

After I complete this class I will like to get my GED and study Cosmetology. The reason I want to study this career is to become a professional and be more independent and to be more prepared; I want to be an example for my children so they can do anything we propose.

In conclusion, education is important because it allows me to help my family and it also lets my daughter know the importance of study so she can get a career, which will allow her to have a better future.

*Teresa Quezada is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee.*

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## **Education Is Very Important To Me**

My name is Rosemitha. I am from Haiti. I have been here for 5 months. Education is very important to me. I know with higher education, it can change my life. It will help me get a better job in this world. My ambition is to become a nurse. I believe that I will achieve it someday.

*Rosemitha Joseph is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **Education Gives Me Freedom**

Education is the process of giving or receiving formal instruction. It is also the key to open the best knowledge to change the world. Without education, you can't climb the ladder of optimum success. Education is something very special to me. It is my map to find where I would like to go with my life. Also, it will give me the freedom to do well in my areas of interest. It can help me reach my goal. I need more education so that I can get a better job. Education is the power of knowledge and success.

*Vanessa Jean is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **Get Your Education is My Mother's Advice**

On my first day at school, I tried to understand what education means. Education is the process of obtaining knowledge or skills. Some people think that when you finish high school, you reached the height of education. To them you don't need to learn anymore. This is not so for my mother. She knows the importance of education. When my mother found out that I have two jobs, she was not happy. She forced me to leave one job so that I can give more time to education.

*Jean Lourdy Brevil is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **What Education Means to Me**

Education is the golden key in life; we need to be educated from the first moment of our conception, through our entire life. When a mother finds out that she is pregnant, she needs to talk to

the baby all the time and let the baby know how happy she is, because she is going to have a special guest in the family. Once the baby is born, the mother will sing, talk, and schedule food and sleeping times. Then in the growing process, the mother will teach the child good manners, respect for others and proper behavior. She also explains why he/she needs to go to school and teaches he/she that learning and reading books are important.

We can appreciate that we are always going to be in a learning process, at least based on my personal experience. I worked two jobs and I found out that I didn't need to speak English, because everyone around me spoke Spanish. However, after the first year, I realized that I wasn't learning anything, and I needed to do something else to move forward.

I moved to Roswell, a city in Georgia where no one around me spoke Spanish. I found what I was looking for. It wasn't that easy for me because I never spoke English, but I didn't have more options and I needed to communicate. I spent two years learning the language and when I felt self-confident speaking and reading English, I decided to move back to Florida.

I took Real Estate and Mortgage Broker courses and I have been working in the field ever since. When the Real Estate industry started collapsing, I experienced a very difficult situation: I got pregnant, so I couldn't work full time. I have two daughters: a 6 year old and a 2 year old. I realized there is no way that I could provide my family a quality life or decent living conditions without at least a technical career or bachelor's degree, supported by my computer and communication skills.

In general, it makes a lot of difference between having a professional or technical education versus a limited education in order to get work just to pay bills. When you pick a career, you are setting up your future in all the ways possible in life, such as enjoying what you're doing while you're working, planning your finances and what you want for yourself and your family. With an education you get a different point of view in everything: how to deal with others, respect different cultures, religions, and opinions. It also opens your mind and gives you the knowledge to troubleshoot.

So, you need to keep in mind that sacrificing things and being persistent and not easily giving up will help you to reach your goals. When I am studying I feel very happy with myself, because I know that I doing the right thing.

*Veronica Moreira is a student at the Sheridan Technical Center. Her tutor is Suell Scott.*

### **Education, A Key to Happiness or Sadness**

Education has always played a very important role in the lives of those who intend to live a better life. It is the process of acquiring knowledge, which leads to success. Without this important key, nobody can afford to satisfy his or her wants and needs. All the inventions of the world come from thinking minds that have emerged from the sphere of education to try to solve world problems. Schools are where knowledge is reachable. However, the root of knowledge should originate from families and friends.

Education brings happiness. Unfortunately, the misuse of our knowledge can be as harmful as it can be good. Inventions can be used to destroy life. We have to be aware of the manner we use our knowledge. Education leads to success and happiness, its misuse can be as much fatal.

*Jean Esaie Henriseme is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **Education, the Universal Key to Open All Doors**

In my life, education is my first priority. Sometimes people don't think of the importance of education, but I do. It is necessary for me to have an education because it opens doors for me and my

future. I want to get a better job, but without education, I will not be able to do so, especially in this time of economic difficulty. Also, I will feel free and peaceful. I want to be a doctor. That is the reason I want to get a good education. I want a better life. I know it is not going to be easy for me, but I know God will help me if I put in the effort.

*Jackson Joseph is a student at Adult and Career Ed, Key West.*

### **What Education Means to Me**

One morning, when I was a young girl, my father took me to his school and showed me his class of 40 students. On our way home, he told me an old Chinese proverb that surprised me: “I would prefer to give you a box of books to that of a box of gold.”

At that time, gold in my opinion represented richness, the lifestyle of the upper class. Gold was the material that everybody wanted to keep, but a box of books was only worth a few hundred dollars. What a crazy idea!—or at least that was my thinking at the time.

I have a different idea about that phrase now. I realize that books represent intellect, knowledge, and wisdom. The more you read, the more you learn, the better you are.

Yes, without knowledge, we would still be in a barbaric age; we would not have what we have today. Knowledge, as applied to technology, has made us a civilized generation with such commodities as rapid transportation and labor-saving inventions. Therefore, man can go father and reach new frontiers; man can step on the moon and proclaim “a giant step for mankind.” Man can dive deep into the sea and discover a new world 2,000 meters under the sea.



Moreover, because of medical knowledge, man is able to prevent many fatal diseases such as tuberculosis and malaria. Louis Pasteur and Jonas Salk, through their studies, changed the history of mankind, and because of them, we have enjoyed longer, healthier lives.

In addition, the computer (thanks to Bill Gates) has allowed us to get closer and closer to each other: one event from an unknown place can be transferred and read by millions of people. Furthermore, we can understand and know the world electronically through e-books!

When President Reagan was able to destroy the Berlin Wall and rejoin the East and West by asking Gorbachev to tear it down, the power of technology, passed along in books, was apparent. The computer has knocked out a million invisible walls of ignorance; it unites us and makes us know each other through our different cultures and civilizations.

Now I fully understand what my dad was trying to tell me: he gave me valuable advice which was and is worth more than a box of gold. With gold, we can be a rich person, period! But with knowledge, or with intelligence and hard work, we can achieve whatever we want, and we can be whatever we dream.

That is what education means to me.

*Kim Do Truong is an ESOL student at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, Florida.*

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## **What Education Means To Me**

Education is a roadway to a good life. After the search, we need to spend time to understand, accept and put it into practice.

To get an education depends on many factors such as the educational system, culture, environment, finance, school,

colleges, teachers and instructors. With education, people can have a better life. They can build, change and find solutions to their circumstances. Above all, you will feel free, proud and increase your self-esteem. Last but not least, education is a good tool to help us understand our friends, government, economy, world, technology and reality in our lives.

*Elder Aguilon is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

## **What Education Means to Me**

Education is part of human nature and it is applied all over the world with a striking similarity. People who had an effective education can achieve self-actualization, which is considered the highest level that an individual can achieve according to psychologist Maslow, who wrote the theory of hierarchy of human needs. In my point of view, education is divided into two types. I consider formal education the one that is based on teachings offered in a school to prepare for occupation. The other type is one that is linked to the meaning of life, which I call informal education, influencing individuals' behavior.

Formal education applies to everyone in a standardized fashion. It prepares the person from a very young age until adulthood. The goal for seeking this type of education is to achieve occupation success and recognition by attaining higher levels in the occupation ladder, power, leadership and financial reward. Therefore, this type of education leads people to become preposterous professionals. I believe that formal education is very important and leads individuals to develop their intellect and psychomotor skills, which is without a doubt an essential tool for professional development. Nevertheless, this type of education tends to focus on only one area of expertise, thus it does not solely

represent the complexity involved in the human psyche: it simply contributes to it.

Informal education is one that permeates the person from birth until death. This education is linked to the meaning of life and the noblest human values such as honesty, humility, patience, respect, love, and gratitude. It is an education based on moral values and ethics. This type of education happens in all socio-economic levels; however, it varies according to cultural values, ethnic background and groups, such as family. Informal education begins with values and beliefs that are passed on to us by our parents with a common goal of extending it into all the spheres of culture and preparing the person to face life's diversities with minimal conflicts and plenty of wisdom.

In conclusion, the formal education given in schools focuses on development and productivity. Informal education, on the other hand, is given to us by our family, social circle, culture and media. Both have a great value and play important roles in one's life. However, people can best benefit if there is a combination of both types of education, which confers the holistic formation of the individual. Integrating moral values with professional knowledge and skills will help people to practice with competence and ethic, and to succeed.

Nevertheless, these two types, alone are not enough to maintain ego integrity. It is also essential to live a balanced life, full of love, flexibility, positivism and a good dose of true altruism. All of these, together, should raise the individuals' self esteem and will, consequently, allow people to reach what Maslow classified as one of the most difficult goals to achieve in his theory, the self actualization. Not everyone is capable to lead oneself to such a high level; however, the secret lies partly beneath not only what is learned but how it is applied to daily life, building a better society for our children who will be the adults of the future.

*My name is Rita de Cassia Silva, I have a son, who lives in Brazil, he is 17 years old, and his name is Andrew William. I was born in Brazil and my city is*

## Education

Among the subject which have marked human life since the earliest societies, **Education** is one of the most important. Its meaning differs from one point of view to another; as a matter of fact, for some people, **Education** is the process of providing school, but according to me, it is too important to be considered in its simplest expression.

Sometimes parents find their children rejected from school because they don't behave well, which means the parents did not educate their children at home; thus, the process of educating should start earlier than most people may think: It begins at pregnancy. We found mothers read to the unborn.

Some may need more **education** to attain a specific type of job or a promotion; some others may need it for self improvement, knowing that the brain is absorbent as sponge. There is also what is called general knowledge that people acquire through reading a book for fun or the newspaper, watching a movie, talking to someone, traveling for fun etc. and really there is no specific age to do these things.

Finally, we find all the members of a society: children, teens, and adults in the process of learning. According to this fact, it is easy to conclude that **Education** is not only providing school, but the *“whole mechanism of the engine that drives us.”*

*Ralph Jeune is 21 years old and from Port-au-Prince, Haiti. He moved to the US last summer to further his educational goals. He is an extremely motivated and dedicated student.*

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## **What Education Means to Me**

There is only one answer if anybody asks me to picture myself without any education. I would not have a good job, no house. I would have an unhappy life with little money and no chance to meet my husband, Thomas.

I was born in north-eastern Thailand and lived in army camps because my father was a soldier; he is retired now. My mother was a hair stylist and designed clothing; she had her own shop in our home where she could take care of me and my younger brother.

After I graduated from high school I had to take a test to determine which faculty in which University I could go. I got into a nursing faculty of Siriraj hospital in Mahidol University. Siriraj hospital was named for a little prince who died over a hundred years ago and Mahidol University was named for the father of all medical things in Thailand. It is the best medical university in Thailand and the oldest nursing school in Thailand. I had the great opportunity to study in the best university in Thailand and had incredible nursing experiences at the first hospital, Siriraj, in Thailand where a lot of girls who dream to be a nurse really would love to study. That shows how lucky I was; otherwise, I would not have had any chance to have this good life. Even better, I was in the last class who received their diplomas from the King, but I did not like nursing at all.

Fortunately, I made the correct choice because after I graduated, the economy was so bad all over the world that it was difficult to get a job anywhere. Therefore, I started my first nursing job at the hospital where I worked when I was a student. Less than 2 years after that I switched to a private hospital because I had no idea at that time about what would be the career I could apply with my nursing bachelor's degree.

My life changed because I met a lot of medical representatives at my department and they suggested a new career where I could use my degree. It was tough for me because I graduated in a medical field to wind up representing products and getting sales volume by convincing the doctors with my selling skills.

It's been 13 years since I graduated and worked so hard to achieve my dream---to get better income and to have a beautiful life. I earned enough to give myself and my parents something better than what I expected. I had everything I desired.

I filled my dream with the income I earned because of my degree, but I wish I could go back and pay more attention to all details in the University and get better grades to brighten my future with a master's degree or a PhD because I want to be proud of myself. That is what education means to me.

*Joanna Ainscough is a married Thai girl who moved to the USA a year ago and lives happily with her husband and 3 kids. She started to learn formal English from the Literacy Council with her wonderful teacher Mary Milfred who is teaching her patience.*

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## **What Learning English Means to Me**

A couple of months after I came to the United States, I had to go to school to learn a new language. Being here without English you can't do anything and more, it is the second language of the world.

It was a Monday, early in the morning. I walked about thirty minutes to get to Piper Community School to start learning English. I was very anxious about my first day in a new school and country. When I arrived at school, I was very worried, I felt a little bit lost. I couldn't speak clearly or communicate with anyone. The only things I could say was, "Good morning! Excuse me! Where is

my class? My name is Wollene and I am from Haiti.” I finally met a Haitian student who spoke English better than me. He helped me to find my class.

I remember my first day in the beginning class when the teacher asked me my name and where I was from? I felt comfortable because I knew my response. My problems began when she explained her grammar lesson. I didn't understand anything. I tried to concentrate but my listening skills were bad. I asked myself how long it would take to speak, listen and write in English.

A few months later, I was comfortable in my class. I had a nice teacher. She was very patient and I adapted very quickly. For practice I went to an American church every Sunday. I also watched T.V. and talked with students from different countries.

Today, a lot has changed since those early days. Now I speak English, I understand when people talk to me and I can communicate my needs. I understand T.V. and the radio. I can read and write in English. I don't worry or feel anxious. Speaking English is very important. Not only can you do and become anything you want, but you can also communicate with the rest of the world.

*Wollene Polycarpe has been a student at Piper Community School for 2 years. She began in the beginning level, and has progressed through the levels. She is now in the advanced level. She is a very committed student, and loves to learn.*

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### **What Education Means to Me**

“Education makes people easy to lead, but difficult to drive;  
Easy to govern, but impossible to enslave” (Henry Peter  
Brougham).

I agree with this quote since knowledge gives one the power to avoid things that cause harm. On the other hand, ignorance can enslave. John Dewey said, "Education is a social process...education is growth...education is not a preparation for life; education is life itself." Webster's definition is: "knowledge or skill obtained or developed by such a process."

In my opinion, education is learning; it is developing knowledge, and knowledge is power. It gives one credibility, respect, and appreciation when knowledge is demonstrated. A practical consideration is that the more one learns the greater will be opportunities for employment.

There are different conduits of learning. Whenever one is alert and observant, one is learning. Most learning comes about through our sense of taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing. However, education allows one to explore beyond the senses. For example, Nostradamus had the ability to predict events based on his dreams. Most scientists agree that certain people have a natural ability for pre-cognitive dreams.

The twentieth century witnessed the rise of Parapsychology, which set out to prove the reality of "extrasensory perception (ESP)." J.B. Rhine of Duke University was responsible for this term. His research included telepathy, clairvoyance, intuition, long distance perception and other modalities of Parapsychology. It is also important to consider the influence of learned scholars in the educational field. "The Father of American Education," Horace Mann, wanted schools that would be available for all, as part of the birthright of every American child; it would be available to the rich and poor alike.

For John Dewey, learning was active and school was unnecessarily long and restrictive. His idea was that children came to school to do things and live in a community that gave them guided experiences. That enabled the students to contribute to society. Another shining star is Maria Montessori, who developed a system of education for children from three to six years old, utilizing equipment and activities that allowed for freedom and individual pacing of learning. His principles of learning are also applicable for adults.



Continuing education keeps one updated. It will help one to apply knowledge to the current situation. When somebody is educated, he or she is cultivated person as well. Interaction with others enriches one with knowledge and wisdom. The more one knows, the more humble one becomes because it is realized that there is still a lot to learn and understand.

For those, like me, who love education, this process lasts for a lifetime.

*Luz S. Ariatizabel is a student of Hillsborough Literacy Council. She is native of Columbia. Her goal is to become a Spanish Teacher in Tampa.*

## **What Education Means to Me**

Education is a door to a wide range of possibilities through knowledge, skills, values and character. We can be educated through schooling and through life. Being educated enables us to have a better perspective on our physical world and a wide open view of our society. To me, education is progress. It improves and fulfills my life.

Education gives us the training and knowledge to acquire the career of our dreams. We can learn a certain trade in a short time, just to make a living and a meaningful life which is satisfying. I am one example. As an adult, I learned a second language (English). Then, I mastered typing and acquired a basic knowledge of computers so I could become an office clerk in one of South Florida's largest hospitals. It was very rewarding, and I felt proud and happy. I was able to make a living doing what I loved, and because of education, I discovered my own abilities and goals.

Due to education, we learn about our physical world. Information provides us knowledge, but if we are not educated on how to use or value it, it will pass us by. One very important tool that education gives us is reading. From textbooks, I have read, absorbed, understood and retained much information. I have come to realize how fragile and unstable our world is.

Education provides us with values on cultural appreciation, as well as understanding human relations. It opens our minds to the realities of our existence. We learn to reflect on why there is proliferation of religion, what causes wars and how overpopulation impacts our world. Education has a formative effect on the mind, character and physical ability of an individual. On a personal level, education has helped me to offset ignorance and superstition.

In essence, education is progress. In its broadest sense, education is any act or experience that gives knowledge and a clear view of the world.

*Gabriela Shohfi is originally from Costa Rica. She came to the U.S. 29 years ago. She is a GED student at Miami Dade College, Wolfson Campus. Her instructor is Sherry Joseph.*

### **Education is Important to Me**

Many years ago I was working at the Boer Warner Company. I had a lot of experience. It was the best company I had ever worked for in my life. I had always believed that education was very important. I found out why.

At the time I was working at the Boer Warner Company, there was a job opening for inspector. Anybody qualified for the job could sign in for it. A few employees signed in; that also included me. The next day I got the promotion, and I was so excited. I had the new inspector job!

After I had been working as inspector for three weeks, I had a problem. I could not handle the job because I had too little education. I had so much emotion, and I felt so hurt, too. I decided I wanted to go back to my original job.

I really thought about my life: whenever I do not have to work anymore, I want to go back to school. That is why I am attending an ESOL class. Since I have been attending the class, I

have met students from other countries. I have learned a lot from the many cultures. I come to class everyday; in the ESOL class I have fun as I learn. Before and now, education is important to me.

*Kyong McChesney is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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### **What Does Learning English Mean to Me?**

I'm Destine Clair and I'm from Haiti. My native languages are French and Creole. I've been living in the United States for 23 years. I can speak English, but not good enough to properly read and write it.

I'm happy to be enrolled in the Adult ESL Program. In this program, I'm learning to read better and understand what I've read. The parts of speech and understanding sentence structure are helping me to improve my writing skills.

My goals are to continue to learn English and obtain my GED. With my GED, I will be able to get a better job. Thanks to the Jacksonville Public Library for giving me the opportunity to enroll in the ESL Program at the Chaffee West Regional Library. I would also like to thank Teacher Barbara for her kindness and patience.

*Destine Clair is an RSL student with the Jacksonville Public Library.*

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### **What Education Means To Me**

Education means a lot to me. All my life I wanted to know how to read and write. Now I have the opportunity. With God's help and the help of my tutor, I want to get my diploma. I'm grateful that the Alachua County Library District has a Literacy

Program. When I learn to read and write, I want to help others learn to read and write.

I am blessed with a large family. They all help me and support me as a new reader. I have twenty (20) grandchildren. Five (5) of them are in school. I would like to help them with their homework. I am a member of a church. When I have to speak, being able to read and write gives me confidence. This is what an education will mean to me. I will have the literacy skills I need to improve my daily life.

*Marion Strawder is a student of the Alachua County Library District's Literacy Program. Her tutor's name is Ray Jones and they have been a tutor/student match since June 2008. Marion enjoys the "Laubach Way to Reading" materials.*

### **What Education Means To Me**

To me, education is one of the most essential things needed to maintain a successful life. When you're educated you live with knowledge, and you are useful and able to help others. By being educated, you can choose a career and have the ability to inspire others.

Also education gives you the opportunity to have a stable lifestyle without living paycheck to paycheck. You have the knowledge to help your children. Education makes you proud and needed. It makes you live better without struggle. In this century, it's very hard to live without being educated. To me, as a plant needs water to grow, a human being needs education to live in this world. These days if you need a job, you have to be able to fill out an application online in most places or fill out a paper one. You are not allowed to take the application out of the store and ask for help so you should be able to fill it out yourself.

Education is key when it comes to preparing for our futures and our lives. It gives us the experience and confidence we need to live in the real world on our own. Lastly it is a very hard step to

take. However, if you want to do it, you can do it, and it is never too late to start. As long as you have determination, it's achievable.

*Daline Belizaire-Raphael is from Haiti and attends the Expanded Horizons Literacy Program at the Women's Center of Jacksonville.*

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## **What Learning English Means to Me?**

Learning a foreign language is difficult. Whatever language that is, it takes time, practice, and most of all, motivation on your part. When I started learning English, I was afraid of making a fool of myself, which made it harder for me to learn. It's a little difficult to start all over because that is how it feels when you have to try to communicate with people that do not speak your language.

Sometimes you will feel out of place or simply like you are not saying what you want to say the way it is supposed to be said, but that will start changing little by little. Take a baby for example, how do you think they start expressing their thoughts, at some point they would like to talk. They are not born knowing the language we speak already, they have to learn it by mimicking the people that are surrounding them, by trying as many times as needed even if they feel frustrated half way or annoyed because their efforts don't seem to be giving results.

It is often easier to stay quiet than to speak up. But if what you want is to become part of the society that you are living in, the best thing you could do is stop practicing the things you are good at and start doing what you are not so good at. Go out of your comfort zone, I am sure you will find wonderful people out there that you will be able to trust and who will be willing to listen to you.

However, there is one thing you have to remember, being able to talk using a new language that you are not familiar with is not going to happen overnight, that is why you have to put aside

your fears and stop being so afraid of making mistakes because that is the best way to learn. Just think always that if other people have been able to learn English, you can do the same thing. Learning a new language is one of the most satisfying skills that you can get, not only because you will be able to stand for yourself and answer whenever someone ask you something, but because you will be able to amplify your friends circle and be as confident of yourself speaking that language as if it were your native language.

I can say by personal experience that once you know a new language not only are you able to find your place in that new society, but you stop feeling disappointed at yourself if for some reason you come across a situation that requires that you understand or communicate with people that speaks other than your native language. In fact, you will start looking out for the opportunity to put in practice your new language skills and to keep improving them.

*Sandra Nino is a student at the Literacy Council of Manatee County.*

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## **Education Is Number One**

Education means a lot of things to me. I realize that in our life the most important thing we have to have is education. It is very import to me because I believe that without education I can't be what I want to be. To have a better life I know that education is number one.

When I first came to United States, I didn't know how to say anything in English, but now I know how to speak English a little better. I will not stop studying because I want to get a better job so that I can reach my goal. In order to have a good education, I need to study hard and have an interest in whatever I learn. Then, I will see how life is going to be easy for me.

## **What Learning English Means to Me**

I flew to America not knowing the English language and not understanding anything. I have been in America three years. I learn English mainly in the library in Jackson County's literacy program and I acknowledge my teacher Becky. At home I look at television programs in English and work on my computer. This helps me very much. I have a visual memory and learning is easier by looking at text. Understanding some words is hard to me and also I am not good at pronunciation. English has a lot of ambiguous words and also a lot of samples. I am often discouraged and ashamed. I try so hard to assimilate words. I think that because I do not know grammar it is hard for me. My teacher's methods please me. I try to use English at home but this has a different effect. There is no ideal method alone to insert English in my head. It needs time and persistence. I have hope that I will be successful.

*Janina Bobryk came from Poland in 2007. She is a student at the Jackson County Public Library Literacy Program. She is studying English and civics to become a U.S. citizen.*

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## **Why I Am Learning English**

I am learning English because I live in America. Also, I need English for my job. Lastly, I want to go to a college or university.

I am learning English to speak with people around me. In America, there are a lot of different nationalities and just one language to understand each other. All people who came here

knew that they would speak English. Some of them studied language at home before coming. Some of them got practice in English after coming here. When we want to talk to someone, no matter from where he or she comes, we use the English language.

I need to know English at my job. I work at an Italian café. I talk in English with my customers, and I have to understand my manager and coworkers. We sell thirty different varieties of ice cream, seven varieties of ice cream desserts, ten varieties of coffee, pastries, sandwiches, and Italian soda. With so many choices, the customers can get confused, so I need to have conversation with them in their language.

Someday I want to get a degree. I know that a good job is impossible without a diploma. To go to a college or university, I need to have perfect English to understand the meaning of every word and explanation. Until that day comes, I make small steps every day towards my goal!

I have told you the reasons that I am learning English: to live in America, to work at my job, to dream of an education. That is why I want to improve my English every day!

*Tatiana Voropay is studying English in an ESOL class at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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## **To Be All I Can Be**

Education gives me an opportunity in life to be all I can be, a productive member of society. I can get a better job and do something that I'm proud of, and others are proud of me for. I want to have enough education so that I can help my grandchildren grow in their school and college. I want to show them that no matter what, they can achieve all their goals in life.

*Norma Baty is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*



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## **What Reading Means to Me**

When I came to prison I did not know how to read. I was 38 years old and I never thought that reading was important. My brothers and sister always filled out all of my job applications, but they are no longer here to help me. When I came to prison, I realized that I need to help myself and needed to learn how to read and write so I could do things on my own.

An education will help me obtain a better life when I leave prison. It will enable me to get a good job and go to school to get a trade. That way, I will be able to support myself and not have to depend on others. Learning how to read and write will help me encourage young children and teenagers I know to stay in school so they do not end up where I am.

I know reading can make all of my dreams come true. When I read books, my imagination goes to far off places and I never have to leave my room. When I leave prison, the gift of reading is one that I hope to share with others who cannot read. Learning how to read encourages me to read the word of God and I look forward to helping others in the future.

*Mary Baker is Mandatory Literacy Program student at Broward Correctional Institution.*

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## **Why I am Learning English**

I always thought and said to myself that I would never quit. I have to take an adventure. However, the world makes many turns, and here I am. It is obligatory for me to improve my English. It will help me to get a great job. Most importantly, it will help my children, and will prove to myself that I can do it.

It is so hard when you take a whirl of one hundred eighty degrees in your life and quit all that you had to move to a strange place with a different language and start from zero. The job is one of the supports of our life. I have worked since I was eighteen years old. I do not like to depend on someone else. When you work, you learn something new every day, meet people, distract your mind, get out of the routine and you feel useful. I am making a lot of effort to improve my English. It is really important for me to get a job. In all aspects, this is difficult: the transition time, worrying, depression and exasperation.

I have other important reasons that move me to learn English- my children. From the first day that you realize you are pregnant, everything passes to a second place, and that little person takes the first place in your life. It is my responsibility to watch that the changes we make are positive to them. What mother would not want her children to be proud of her.

I am a consistent and persistent person for what I want. I am not defeated easily. When I take a step, I never tire until I obtain what I want. I like to demonstrate to others, but especially to myself, that I can reach any goal I set.

*Myriam Garcia is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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*Favorite Place:*

### **My Favorite Place**

My favorite place is a little town called Providencia; this special town is located in the Country of Panama. I love this place because it has many things that make me feel free and alive: the sound of the river, the lakes, the animals, and the different kinds of fruits and vegetables. The way people milked the cows to make cheese makes me feel like I am in a paradise.

When I travel from the city of Panama, I hear the sound of the city cars, buses, trucks and many other transportation noises disappear. The smell of smoke in the atmosphere from the trucks and buses becomes fresh air.

Once I arrive to the small town, life changes. The mornings are very joyful because I can hear the birds singing. The smell of the air is a combination of fresh grass and fruits mixed together. At the same time I hear the rooster calling the sun with his cacadododoo, immediately I start feeding the animals.

The breakfast is delicious. The fresh cheese, milk from the cow, the eggs, and the homemade bread are perfect. After breakfast, I like to go to the forest to see what kind of fruits and vegetables I can find. There are many different kinds of fruits like mango, orange, papaya, coconuts and much more. Some of the vegetables that I found are yucca, plantain, potatoes, cabbages and more. When I finish picking up the fruits and vegetables, I go dip in the forest, until I find the river with the waterfall. It is beautiful to see the waterfalls and the different shapes of rocks that are around the river. I also find different types of plants and flowers. The sound of the water falling is perfect. People go to the river in the morning to do their laundry and the kids love to jump in the water and play.

At 12:00pm, I like to go to the farm that is close to the river because I like to see how the farmers milk the cows and make cheese and cream out of it. The process of making the cheese and cream is very long, but they always have a show to teach the tourist how the elaboration of cheese and cream are. With this process, they can get different kind of texture of cheeses and creams, which are good for breakfast.

However the afternoons are different. I like to walk around the town to visit the people that I know. Sometimes they invite me down to the lake to see the kids' swimming competition; it's fun to watch them in a race. The prize for winning the race is a big turtle.

At the end of the day, I go back to the house, to eat dinner and relax. The meal is very healthy and fresh. The table is served with fresh fish, chicken, different kinds of meat and vegetables; this is the best food that I could ever taste. Once I finish, I sit down outside the house to see the moon and stars; I also can hear the sound of the little bugs like the cricket and the ladybug all around the place. This is relaxing. There is nothing better than this place, and this is life.

*Karyhadne Rodriguez is a young mother of three children: Josue, Ronaldo and Ashley. She is a Bright student of GED online TLC program at The English Center in South Florida Work Force North Miami Beach.*

## **Many People Have Special Places They Like to Be**

Many people have special places they like to be. I for one love to be at my house. First of all, because I can eat anything I want. Second of all, because I can chill out with my family. Third of all, because of how entertaining it is there. Here are some reasons why I love being at home.

First things first, the food at my house is endless. I can grab anything I want to eat. The food that we cook at our house is amazing. We have plenty of delicious snacks there, too. If I want food, I can have food at my place.

Second of all, I can hang out with my family when I get bored. They always know how to have fun when we're at home. We're usually always home, so it's always fun. We run around the house and have so much fun all the time. My family is what makes my house really fun.

Finally, I'm always being entertained. We can watch TV all we want. We have more than five laptops and computers, so we

can play on the internet. We also have different video games that we're always on. My house is entertaining in many ways.

So that about raps it up on why my home is my favorite place to be. I mean we have family, food, and entertainment, what more could you want.

*Cristian Vega wants to graduate from ACE and enroll in TCC to study in criminal justice*

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### **My Favorite Place**

My favorite place is the beach. I love the water. I can spend hours looking at the ocean. The blue water, the beach umbrellas and the sand castles are all very interesting to me. I can imagine myself sitting on my beach chair and looking the sailboats moving in the blue water. I enjoy watching the motion of the waves splashing against the rocks and the sunbathers laying in the sun. I am very happy in Key West because I can view the ocean every day from my home. There is a pier behind my house where I can leisurely sit and delight in the scenery at any time I want. I love the beach and it gives me peace and tranquility.

*Claudia Palmieri is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **Progreso – My Favorite Place**

My favorite place is Progreso. It is a beach located in Yocatan, Mexico. It is three times the size of Daytona Beach in Florida. I was a just a little baby when I first went to Progreso. I live in Merida which is really close to Progreso. We always celebrate my birthday on the beach. A lot of people take short vacations on the beach in March. Many of my friends go to Progreso also. We plan a reunion for morning breakfast in

“Mercado.” Then we go to the beach to play volley ball, football, baseball and surf in the waves. We always have a lot of fun there.

*Daniela Fajardo is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **Stephanie’s House**

Yayyyy! I get to go to my friends Stephanie’s house. Her house is soooo amazing! Her dad is the funniest guy I have ever met. Plus, her sister, Melynda, is so much fun to be around. Also, her brother is the best cook in the world.

First, I love Stephanie’s house because her dad is hilarious. Whenever I am over there, he is always telling us a funny story. I remember one time, Stephanie and I were laying in her bed, and her dad slammed the door open and scared us. Stephanie and I started laughing so hard that we wet her bed. That’s why I love Stephanie’s house.

Second, Stephanie’s sister is soooo much fun to be around. Whenever I am hanging out with her, I always have the time of my life. Whenever Stephanie and I are bored, we go and hang out with Melynda, and we are not bored whatsoever. Let’s just say her sister is spectacular.

Lastly, Stephanie’s brother, Erik, is such an amazing cook! When I go to there, I always beg Erik to cook us something. Whenever I eat the food that he makes, it feels like I am in heaven. That’s how good his food is. If you’re hungry, eat Erik’s food, and you won’t be hungry for days!

In conclusion, I love Stephanie’s house because her dad is so funny. Her sister is so amazing. Plus, her brother is an amazing cook. You should go to Stephanie’s, trust me, you won’t regret it. I surly didn’t.

*Kadie MacDonald is a student at ACE in Tallahassee. Whenever she finishes, and gets her GED, she will be attending Tallahassee Community College. She plans to get a degree in hospitality.*

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## **My Favorite Place**

My favorite place is my friend Duo's house. It's a calm place to do my homework. Also, he's great to spend time with. Another reason I enjoy Duo's house is because he keeps it very clean.

I like going there because he doesn't flirt with me, and he helps me with my homework when I can't study at home. He is amazing; he can do math in his head like it's nothing. He also helps me with my cooking and writing. Duo is also trying to help me learn how to drive, though I'm scared I'll break his car...

His house is a great place because he is great to spend time with. He cooks food so I don't have to take too much time away from my studies. I have tons of fun at his house; it can be very hard to beat him at games like *Monopoly* and *Life*.

I always feel like I can relax in that house because I know it's clean. I even help out with the cleaning when he needs it, like after he gets off from work. A clean place is a comfortable place for me.

Duo's house is one of my favorite places to go to because of his attitude, his helping me with no strings attached, and I always know it's clean.

*Faye Smith is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

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## **My Favorite Place**

My favorite place is my bedroom. This is my quiet place. I can think when I am in there. I can study there. This is where I go to think about my goals and ambitions. That is where I can think about what is out there in the world that I have not seen or explored.

I go to my favorite place to think about what all I want to do with my life. I think a lot about where I want to go, and I think of what I would like to do when I get there.

In order to get to where I want to go, I will have to have my diploma. I think about how I will achieve it. I think about how great it will be to show my grandchildren that you can achieve anything if you put your mind to it and work hard.

I can do all these things in my favorite place where it is peaceful and quiet. There I can think and study and meditate. I go to my bedroom to think about that diploma I will have in my hand some day.

*Rita Jarvis is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

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## **My Favorite Place in Florida**

Many tourists that flock to Miami throughout the year come to enjoy one of Florida's main attractions: the beaches. However, what many tourists and residents alike may not be aware of is the abundance of lush tropical life that is merely right at our fingertips and available all year round. One of these places is Florida Bay.

On a trip to Florida Bay I like to take hiking trips around the area. Throughout the trails I encounter many varieties of plants



and trees that are unique to the Florida atmosphere. The tall trees that rise well beyond my grasp provide a canopy over my head that keeps me cool while I walk and enjoy the bird song that creates a cacophony around me. I like to stop in silence and close my eyes; absorbing the sounds that flow around me and smell the unusual scents of earth, plants, and fresh water. I feel in that moment the true meaning of being alive. I turn slowly with my arms outstretched, reveling in the marvel of life. Later that night as I lay in my tent being lulled to sleep with the slow stirrings of the nocturnal animals, I think of how wonderful it is to be one with nature.

Florida Bay is also my favorite place because of its water ways, which are a mesh of intersections where the Everglades' fresh water meets with the salty waters of the Gulf of Mexico. This unique aquatic area is home to many species of animals, among them, the ever popular dolphin. I enjoy renting a canoe and paddling under the heat of the sun. I also look forward to sitting for a moment while the water rocks the boat slightly, as I search the sparkling water for other animals that might catch my eye. However, my favorite part of the bay is the mangrove island campsites. In the evening, I like to lie in front of a fire that gently pops quietly to its own tune, while I listen to the water slowly lapping at the edges of the shore. The slight breeze causes the sparse sea grass to tangle with each other and I imagine a slow dance among the reeds. I have a contented sigh for my muscles are sore from the past two days of exertion, but I have never felt healthier.

On my canoe trip back, I try to paddle slowly and drink in every last detail before I head back home. It may take time for another trip but I always return to this gorgeous land so wild yet tame. I only wish there was more time to enjoy those experiences before returning home. As I drive on the highway back to the city of Miami, I am exhausted from my adventures, but rejuvenated in my soul; for nature is the healer of the hearts, and my wounds have surely been healed.

## **My Favorite Place**

My favorite place is Cusco. Cusco is a city located in the southeastern part of Peru, near the Urubamba Valley, the Sacred Valley of the Andes. Cusco is the historic capital of the Inca Empire and was declared a World Heritage Site in 1985 by UNESCO. Machu Picchu, one of the new Seven Wonders of the World, is in Cusco.

I visited Cusco with my cousin William several years ago. We flew from Lima, Peru's capital, to Cusco in September when there were not so many tourists around. After we landed, we went to a nice well-located hotel. Before going to Machu Picchu, we went to Sacsahuayman fortress. Sacsayhuaman is one of the most amazing Inca constructions. Its Quechua name means "satisfied falcon". It was the falcon that guarded the capital of the empire, since it was possible to overlook Cusco from the hill on which it was erected. It is unbelievable the way this fortress was built by the Incas. Nowadays, archeologists don't know how the Incas built this complex or how they transported the stones. The stones are so closely spaced that a single piece of paper will not fit between many of the stones.

After visiting Sacsahuayman, my cousin and I walked around the main streets of Cusco. We loved the narrow streets made of stone. It seemed as if we were in a labyrinth. We also went to the Cusco Cathedral, which is made of stones. Within the cathedral's high walls are some of the best examples of the Cusqueña school of painting, including Marcos Zapata's painting of the Last Supper with a local specialty, *cuy* (guinea pig), as the main dish.

The next morning we went to Machu Picchu, the main tourist attraction in Cusco. The train was crowded with people from different countries, just to mention that the only Peruvian was me. Machu Picchu was discovered by Hiram Bingham, an American archeologist, in 1911. There are not enough words to describe Machu Picchu. The perfection of the way the huge, monumental stones were set is unbelievable. Its primary buildings are the *Intihuatana*, the *Temple of the Sun*, and the *Room of the Three Windows*. After visiting these buildings, my cousin and I climbed Huayna Picchu. Huayna Picchu is a pinnacle south of Machu Picchu. It was very difficult for us to reach the summit, but after seeing the magnificent view of the citadel of Machu Picchu, breathing the fresh air, and feeling so peaceful, we forgot about the difficulties.

After coming back from Machu Picchu, we went to the hotel and rested for a while before getting ready to enjoy the nightlife in Cusco. My cousin and I were astonished when we saw so many restaurants, pubs and clubs. Finally, we decided to go to a restaurant where we tried the typical cusquena food. Later on, we went to a pub where we enjoyed listening to native music played with quenas, the original flute of the Andeans, and charangos, a small guitar-like instrument.

*This student studies Advanced ESOL at Dave Thomas Education Center in the Broward County Public School System. Her teacher is Nancy Gardner.*

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### **A Favorite Place**

I was born in a small town on the western part of Ukraine. That part of Ukraine is famous because of its huge mines called Donbass, but without all of those mines and minerals, that part of my little country is very beautiful, with breathtaking views and places that make you feel proud of your Motherland. I love those quiet summer evenings with mixed feelings of freedom and liberty. When you can hear nature's sounds all around: nightingale's

warble, leaves whisper, mosquito's buzz and even frog's singing. The fragrance of violet blossoms will take your feelings away from you. If you go outside at sunrise, you will see the rainbow in every drop of the morning dew on every leaf. The quiet pine forest will hide you from the rest of the world. When you walk around it, you can hear only your steps on the fallen pine needles, and it feels like you are the only one in the whole universe.

Each season made me feel different, made me see things differently, had different colors, sounds and fragrances. What can have the richest colors than the colors of autumn leaves? You can see red, bright yellow, mulberry hues and it seems like some unknown artist painted every tree, every bush and every leaf of the grass with those colors. The name of the author is Autumn. When the winter comes, it covers the entire city under a white blanket and everything sinks into a fairy-tale sleep. Do you know that the brightest stars and sky in Ukraine you can see in the winter time? The stars became so close that it seems if you raise your hand you can touch one. The Milky Way used to help my ancestors, the Kazaks, find their way home hundreds of years ago.

I remember, when I was a little girl, I used to go to one lonely park. People forgot about that place a long time ago. I used to go there and for long hours I would sit and watch the river. I had different thoughts in my head. That place inspired me to write poems, which I do not remember now. My heart will always belong to my little hometown.

The time passed away, I grew up, life has changed and I left my town. I have always dreamed about living somewhere abroad. My dream came true. I live in Florida; it is a warm and sunny place. I love to watch the ocean, to hear waves, to watch happy people on the beach. Florida became my second Motherland, but my heart will always belong to that small, unknown town of the western part of Ukraine.

Probably, wherever you could be, what kind of beautiful places you could see in the whole world, the biggest feeling will be

only for the one place - the place you were born, your Motherland. Only the place you grew up, where you began to learn the world, got your first friends, the place your heart will always remember. That is why we have those strange, difficult, but such powerful feelings, when you touch your native land after a long separation from it.

It is not important where your special place is. It could be a huge town in sunny Florida or a little place in Ukraine. The place you will remember all of your life, the place that will remember you, the place you left your heart.

*Lyudmyla Shestakova is the student of Sheridan Technical Center. Her teacher is Suell E.Scott.*

### **A Favorite Place**

If I had to choose a favorite place, it would have to be my grandparents' house. Even though grandfather already passed away a few years ago, my family still takes care of the house because we have a lot of good memories. Visits to my grandparents' house were good family experiences. Being out in nature was very relaxing. I have my childhood memories with grandmother.

My grandparents' house is located in a beautiful and cozy village. In front of the house, there is a small lake valley with lots of fish and horn shells. When I was young, I learned from my dad how to swim at the valley. My family liked to take a picture as we took a walk around the house. There was a vegetable garden with potatoes, cucumbers, peppers and many kinds of fruit. We also had many organic vegetables. My grandmother liked to share those products with the neighborhood.

Nature is an important part of my grandparents' house, a place that is beautiful in its own natural ways. Standing there, I

take a deep breath and take in the smell of the flowers in the fresh air. This is one of my favorite smells.

Also, my grandparents' house has a very special place in my heart. I lived with my grandparents for one year when I was young. My grandmother was a big influence on my life. She was always full of joy and tried to spread her happiness to everyone around her. I think that is what I miss most of all. My grandmother always used old recipes for making foods. Her kimchi was the best I have ever eaten.

The place where I feel most comfortable is my grandparents' house. I think about these good memories all the time. They greet me with a friendly smile. I wish I could live there with my family.

*Heeyeon Kim is studying English at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

### **My Favorite Place**

In 1979 my husband and three other men from United States, along with their families, all went to Amsterdam. The men were offered a position and asked to maintain a computer program while the Dutch were sent to school to learn the program. We all left at different times and some families were going to stay longer than others. We were going to stay for seven months. By the time my husband told his boss that we would like to go to Holland we got all our passports and I packed up what I thought we would need. Two weeks later we were on an airplane headed for Amsterdam.

We stayed at the hotel downtown in Amsterdam for two weeks while the Dutch found us a place to live. It was very hard to keep our young children quiet in the hotel. They wanted to run all over the place. I would take the kids for walks while my husband would be at work. On one of our walks we saw an organ grinder with a monkey that was dancing all around my kids. It was so funny to see.

The Dutch people that my husband worked for finally found us a house to live in. It was outside of Amsterdam, and we were so glad to get out of the hotel. My husband and I found that we liked to travel all through the different towns in Holland. Like one town had sixteen windmills. They were everywhere and people were living in them, but there were often ones that you could take a tour of. It was very interesting to go inside and see how big they really were.

We went to a town that was famous for its tulips. Another town was known for its cheeses. Sometimes you could find a factory where you could watch the men make the wooden shoes. And you could order or buy a pair right there.

We were on the way back to our home when we noticed that the Dutch people are careful with their land because they don't have much of it. It seemed that all the farm animals were sharing the same pastures.

One day while we were at home the caretakers of the house came to visit us and they were curious about Americans: "Are they all rich?" they asked us.

In the town where we lived the doctors made house calls on their bicycles. Our town had a Wagon drawn by Clydesdales going up and down the streets and you could buy beer from the driver. There was a bus that sold vegetables and groceries. They would take orders and deliver. We had a bakery that made fresh bread for every little store.

We had so much fun living in Holland and getting to know the people. While we were there we made new friends. Our family got the chance to see and do new things. We still have lots of pictures.

*Carole Allstead is a student at Marion County Literacy Council. Her tutor is Libbie F. Gerry.*

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## **My Room, My Favorite Place**

My 12 foot sized room has been my favorite place, ever since moving to America. Here, I can do many things like my homework, study, watch T.V., eat, sleep, dream, rest and meditate. In my room I can concentrate better. I like a quiet, private place where I can be by myself. Also, I can lie down on my bed whenever I want to go to sleep. I can relax and be comfortable. In my room, I don't feel pressured to please anyone or have to work hard to meet deadlines. My room gives me peace and tranquility.

*Alison Narvaez is a student at Adult and Career Ed. Key West.*

## **My Favorite Place**

It all depends on what kind of favorite place we are talking about because I have many favorite places: a favorite place to eat, walk, fish, live, shop and many more. My favorite place to eat is anywhere I can eat yummy and fresh seafood. Seafood is my favorite food!

My favorite place to go fishing is in the Everglades. We always go there and catch many different kinds of fish. When we come home we cook the fish we caught. The fish we caught are more delicious than fish from the store.

My favorite place to live is Florida; almost all year round Florida is sunny. There are many places to go with my family, such as Disney and SeaWorld. When my family goes there, we spend all our days happy and funny because we saw many beautiful, incredible things and for a day the adults felt like children in the magical world. My last favorite place is my home where my family lives. It doesn't matter if it is beautiful or ugly day, as long as we are together.

*Sandra Espinoza is a student at the Immokalee Technical Center. Her tutor is Katherine Mominee.*



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## **My Favorite Place**

The Casino is my favorite place. The Casino is not just for gambling; they have different activities for the family to enjoy together. The swimming pool and spa is a good place to go visit. The food and entertainment at night brings good memories.

The Casino has a great swimming pool for the guests. My family likes to go swimming because they have a big screen TV to watch the game while they are swimming. For me, I like to get a treatment from the spa. They have a good massage to help relax my muscles and release stress.

The Casino has all kinds of good food, especially steak. For the best steak, you have to go eat at 32. You can also see the beautiful seaside. After dinner, it is time for the entertainment. The magic show is my favorite, especially by David Copperfield. He is amazing. He makes the audience excited every minute of his show.

The Casino is my favorite place. I do not like the gambling, but I like to watch people enjoy and scream when they hit the jack pot. The Casino has a lot of things to do for everybody. The beauty salon and spa make you feel confident after a visit. The entertainment with an amazing show makes for good memories. These are the reasons I choose The Casino for my favorite place.

*Yaowalak Boning is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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*How Life at Home Differs From Life in the US:*

## **Personal Space is a Beautiful Thing**

The United States has a lot of room, especially for a person like me, who is from a small country, Japan. Here in America, when people are in a line and waiting, they stand and keep a certain amount of space between them. When people pass each other while walking on a crowded street, still they try to keep a little bit of space between them. We are not able to see it, but it is beautiful.

When my husband and I were stationed in Japan, my sister visited us on the U.S. Naval base where we were living. Of course, it is a little bit of America, even if it is in Japan. My sister and I went to the hospital to see one of my friends who had just had a baby. We had a few bags, some flowers and balloons in our hands. When we were in the hospital and the elevator door opened, it was already crowded, but people made room for us to enter. First, my sister stepped into the elevator and accidentally bumped one of the people in the elevator, but she didn't say anything. She just stood right next to the person, and I said, "Sorry" to them. Once we left the hospital, we went to have lunch together, and again she bumped her shoulder into one of the other customers while we walked to our table. She didn't apologize to the person, so I said, "Sorry" to them again. As soon as we had our seats, I said, "Hey, I know you don't speak English well, but you could say, 'I am sorry' when you bump into someone." Then, she said, "When did I bump into someone?" You see, she did not even realize that she had violated someone's personal space.

Tokyo is the one of the biggest cities in the world, and it is also one of the most populated cities in the world. There are trains all over Japan for public transportation. During the morning on weekdays, a lot of people take the train to go to work and school, and rush-hour is so congested. During rush-hour, we don't have any space between the people on the trains. We are not even able to move our arms because the trains are so crowded. When the train hits the next station, as soon as the door is opened, more people shove their way onto the train. Each person has to push on the person who is in front of them so more people can squeeze onto the train. People keep pushing against each other, and that is

what it is almost always like standing on the train. Even while walking down the streets or through the train stations and many other busy places throughout Japan, people are bumping into each other constantly, and no one even gives it a second thought. If you keep your personal space around you, they might regard you with disdain, or people might think you are just being rude.

Personal space seems to make people close to one another. People look out for the feelings of those around them, caring for each other, and it also makes a chance to communicate and greet one another. People may keep a little bit of space around them, but it seems to me that they are actually closer to one another. I think it is a good custom, and that it might only work here in America because there is so much space.

I think Japanese people also have their personal space, but it is not around them, it is inside them. They are around so many people, so often, that they have to keep the space in their mind. Therefore, they don't really pay attention to others, and they don't really notice the small things that happen around them, even if it is happening to them.

Sometimes I feel comfortable when I am in Japan because I don't need to pay attention around me all the time, but once I step into this country, I realize how beautiful the personal space is!

*Taeko Harper has studied in the GED Program at WTI and is now in the Crystal River GED class. She moved to this country from Japan.*

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## **How Life in my Home Country Differs From Life in the US**

Living in Korea differs a lot from life in the U.S. The first big difference is the houses. In Korea the front door is made of wooden slats and goes into the open courtyard. The rooms are around the courtyard. When we go to another room, we go through the courtyard. Also, we take off our shoes outside the rooms. A

third difference is that we sleep on two blankets made of heavy cotton on a floor, one on top. Another difference is that we sit on a floor instead of chairs.

English word order is different from Korean word order. I would say, “You chair sitting.” Instead of “You are sitting in the chair.”

I miss many foods from Korea and my friends and family, but now I am happy and enjoy living in U.S.

*Ae Ryon Cho is a mother of two grown children. She has been studying English for 3 years. She enjoys learning the differences between Korean and English and finds some of the differences challenging.*

## **Why I Came to the United States of America**

Sometimes in life our lives change completely, either because of choices we made or things that we could not control. My life has changed a lot these last years and I will tell you why.

Five years ago I was working while I was making plans for my retirement. I had planned to stop working in 2006. I wanted to start doing the things I couldn't do because I didn't have time. I wanted to take painting classes, dance, travel, read books and even do nothing sometimes. I had two children (20 and 19 years of age) and no husband.

Then I met a man on-line who lived in Florida. We started talking every night through the internet. We became friends. I was very excited to talk to him every night for a couple of hours. In the meantime, I was planning to visit my friend Cristina who had worked with me in Brazil, but lived in Connecticut. Two months before my trip to United States, Cristina called me to say she was going to move because she had sold her house. Paul, my friend from Florida, asked me to visit him instead. I accepted and made reservations in a hotel in Fort Lauderdale. My friends told me I

was crazy for visiting a man I didn't know far from our country, Brazil. I didn't listen to them and I followed my instincts.

I spent almost nine hours in an airplane thinking about how that meeting would go. I think what happened between Paul and I was magic. When I saw him for the first time in person in some way I knew he was the man who I wanted to spend the rest of my life with, but I said to myself: "Don't be so excited! Be cautious!" He was so sweet, a gentleman. I could see some qualities in him that I admire in a man. To make a long story short we fell in love and two years later he proposed to me and I accepted.

We got married two years ago. I moved to Florida and I am very happy in my marriage. I miss my children, my family and my friends, but I keep in touch with them by phone, internet and web cam. Although I miss so many things, I don't regret the choice I made. I feel happy in my new life. I made a decision and it changed my life for the better.

*Sandra Broadhead is in the academic skills program at Piper Community School. She has lived here since 2006. Sandra has many interests besides learning English. One of her passions is painting, and she has been taking classes and exhibiting her work at the Art School of the Boca Raton Museum.*

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## **Why I Came to and Stayed in the United States**

The reason I came and why I live in the United States began a long time ago. This is part of my history. It all started the winter of 1982, with an invitation from my youngest brother. He was one of four friends planning to travel on February 22, 1982. I said yes to him, thinking what an opportunity to come and know this great and famous United States. As you know, most of the people from other countries have the desire to come here. I thought to myself, "This is my chance. I could make a lot of money." Of course when you live in a country barely making between 60-80 dollars per week, you think about an opportunity like this one.

I thought I could return to my home town after a year and live a different life, but I was wrong. As I am writing this part of my history, it has now been 28 years ago, and I still enjoy this beautiful Southwest Florida. God knows how long I will be here because God had a totally different plan for me. I never thought of getting married much less having a family, but all I can tell you is that God has been very good to me. He allowed me to meet my beautiful wife, have a family and now enjoy grandchildren. If you ask me if I regret being part of this great nation, I will say no. If you ask me for how long I will be here, only God knows.

*Max Garcia is a student at the Lee County School District's Adult Education program.*

### **I Want To Be An American**

What is different about America and my country, Haiti is the culture and education. When I came to America I had to learn English. English is not easy for me. Each time I come to class, I learn something different. In this country, I notice that you can find a job when you reach 15 or 16 years of age whereas in Haiti, we have to graduate high school and college before we can find a job. Being in America has opened my eyes to see that I learn so much each day and this means a lot to me. Someday I hope to be just like one of the good Americans.

*Gerda Guerrier is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **Why I Came to the United States of America**

First, I would like to write about my life in my country Iraq. I lived a good life with my mother. We had our own house and our own car. It never entered my mind that one day I was going to

leave my country, but when the war started in 2003 life became very hard and very unsafe for me and my family. Killers tried to kidnap my nephews, and so we moved out of my country to Jordan.

We stayed in Jordan for four years. We had a good life, but they did not give us residency, and my mother and my nephew became sick. My nephew got better, but my mother passed away in 2007 and we decided to leave Omam.

We registered at the United Nations. This organization helps Iraqi people who cannot return to Iraq. It allows them to come to America. After we got permission I was happy, but I was also sad because it was very difficult for me to leave my friends and the many places I knew.

So at last I came to the U.S. What I like here is that no one bothers me. I feel so free and here my nephews and I have the opportunity to learn English. Maybe I will get a job. My nephews can study what they want.

We have been here in the U.S. for one and a half year. I have a nice community at school and outside the school, but I still always miss many nice things about my country. I am still looking forward to visiting it one day.

*Selma Mohammed is a student in the advanced ESOL class at Piper Community School. She has worked hard to learn English, and continues to plan for her future.*

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## **Why I Came to the United States**

It was my dream of becoming an NFL cheerleader that first brought me to the U.S. from Japan. I first smitten with cheerleading, the NFL, and American football when I was in high school. It happened when I visited San Diego and stayed with an

American family for a summer program. Luckily, an assistant principal of the school was a former San Diego Chargers' player. He invited some of us program participants to a Chargers' pre-season, training camp game and WOW!—that was the first time I had ever seen cheerleaders. I didn't know the rules of American football, but for four hours I sat on an uncomfortable seat and couldn't have been less bored because the Charger Girls had the field! Each of them was shining, and from as high up as the third level where I was sitting, their energy kept me entertained. I was so impressed: the impact they made on me, a girl who didn't share the same language, culture, and passion for football, began to reverberate throughout my life. Shortly after the game, I said to myself, "I want to be a cheerleader!"

I started cheerleading and dancing at my college. Frankly, it wasn't easy to compete with ladies who already had years of training. With hard work, however, a team I was cheering on won a competition during my junior year of college. As a result, I was selected to captain my squad, and we won the competition again during my senior year, a first in competition history. I cheered for a semi, pro-football team for three years after college. In the meantime, an NFL cheerleader audition was to be held in Japan for the first time; of course, I jumped on the chance. I placed in the top four finalists representing Japan, but, unfortunately, I didn't make the 49ers' squad.

Now I was determined to really push myself. After returning home from tryouts, I quit my fulltime job and started dance training all day. I also held various part time jobs to save enough money to come to the U.S. Feeling no connection to any squad made me search for the best NFL team. Soon I found the Tampa Bay Buccaneers Cheerleaders (TBBC). One of the cheerleaders' favorite quotes was "If at first you don't succeed, try, try again." I lived it, so when I felt like I was not making any progress or making the right decisions, it pushed me to my dream. Leaving behind a career and friends and family in Japan was not easy. However, becoming a TBBC became my dream.



In March 2003, I flew to Tampa and knocked on the TBBC's audition's door—not knowing if they would allow a foreigner to tryout! I found out that I was the first foreign candidate, so I did my best at the audition and made it! I've been on the squad for seven straight seasons now: I am the longest running cheerleader on the squad. My American dream came true! Go Bucs!

*Ms Tomoko Kojima is a graduate of Brewster Technical Center's ESOL Academic Skills class. She is currently enrolled in its Early Childcare Program.*

### **Why I Came to the United States of America**

When I was living in Brazil with my family, I never made plans to live in another country. When I met my husband I knew that he had this plan for his life. My husband lived in California some years ago, before we met each other. I'm sure that it was an amazing experience in his life and that is the reason why he wanted to repeat it.

To be honest I always was afraid of this situation because I'm very close to my family. At the same time, I always tried to be open to change because I believe that it is the only way to learn and to become a better person.

To be that open person the only thing that I asked my husband was that he have a concrete plan and a job here. A few months later the company that he works for opened a position here and he was chosen to fill it. Then he said, "be ready, here is what you asked me for so now let's go."

We were planning to get married in December but we had to change the plans. It was very fast, but perfect because we had

the support of the entire family. For us it was a huge change in our lives because we started our married life in a new country with another language, another culture and far from friends and family. I always said that our marriage would be very successful or a disaster, but it is doing very well.

I changed my whole life for my husband but I do not regret it. Today I can see how much growth as a person I have made and I am still growing every day. I take advantage of every moment of this experience and today I am grateful to be here.

*Monica Utchitel is from Brazil. She has been living here for 10 months. She began in the advanced class, and quickly moved into academic skills. She is motivated and involved.*

### **To Be All I Can Be**

The main reason I came to America is for freedom and a better life for me and my children. With better education, we are free to do anything we like with our future. I will be very happy to see that my grandchildren are being raised properly by their mom and dad. There will be a day that I shall see all our dreams come true.

*Luisa Godoy is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **Welcome to the United States**

As I punctually landed after an 11 hour flight with DELTA Airways from Frankfurt, Germany into Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta airport, I immediately noticed how practical and uncomplicated the entry procedures at the immigration were. There were several counters in the large air-conditioned and beautifully decorated entry-hall and it was laid out with wonderful carpets. Also the

smell was pleasant, yet so different compared to Germany or Poland where you could often smell a mixture of garlic and sweat.

As my turn came after a short waiting period a nice African-American officer beckoned me over to him. He was an impressive officer with a broad smile and he wore a fancy uniform with gold braiding and many emblems. “Oh, you are from Germany, Welcome to the United States,” he said, “everything is fine with your papers. You can move on to the customs over there, and have a nice day.”

I was very nicely surprised with this kindness and courtesy since I have not seen this in any other places. I thought to myself: I really like it here, perfect organization, cleanliness, friendliness and simplicity ..... that was my first impression.

During my connecting flight to Fort Myers, FL, I wondered what I could expect next. After my departure at the Ft. Myers International Airport, I had a cup of coffee and I immediately noticed how clean it was everywhere. There were several cleaning crews taking care of the granite floor. My luggage was already there, nicely put together beside the baggage claim conveyor belt. Also the hall was very impressively decorated with typical Floridian ornaments.

Now it became clear to me that I was in the United States, famous for its organization and public relations. On the next day I slept until the sun woke me up. I was in the Sunshine State. The rental house had a wonderful location with a gorgeous lake view. There were so many different kinds of birds that I had never seen before and they were romping around. This was indeed a small paradise.

The next pleasant surprise came to me in the nearby Publix Supermarket where I bought my groceries. At the cash register where an older man packed my items, I was asked if I wanted my groceries to be packed in a paper or a plastic bag (excellent, how

Floridians think and care for their environment). This nice older man took my groceries to my car and refused any tip.

The next days were marvelous, with boat trips in the gorgeous Gulf of Mexico, shopping and terrain exploring. My neighbors knocked on my door and asked me if I was new to the neighborhood, and where I was from. They said, “Come over for a small barbeque in the evening. We will be delighted.”

The days of holiday passed as in a dream and I could hardly believe how fast my vacation went by. Also, as expected, the airport personnel endeavored to make everyone happy, simply super. The take off was problem free. On my return flight to Frankfurt, Germany, I had enough time to rethink everything that happened to me in the last 14 days.

This friendliness of the people, cleanliness, the organization of the life, made me think about the West Side Story song, “I like to be in America, OK be me in America, everything free in America, for a small fee in America.” And of course also: “Automobiles in America, chromium steel in America, wire spoke wheel in America, very big deal in America!” How true it is.....

All of this was so different from my past experiences in Europe. Therefore, the decision matured in me to do everything possible to move and live here. Said, done, now I am in the Great State of Florida and I have never resented my decision.

*Leo Romanowicz is a retired MD from Germany and lives here with his lovely wife Ewa and his two sons: Daniel and Alexander, as well as his Doberman-Puppy and tortoise Franklin.*

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## **How Life in My Home Country Differs From Life in the United States**

The life in my native country of Cuba is very different from life in the United States. For example, education, health care, family life and human rights are just four areas that are treated differently in the United States.

In Cuba, education is free for all people. You don't need to work to pay for your studies. In the United States, education is free through high school, but students must pay for any continuing education after high school, and this is expensive.

Health care in Cuba is free. The service of taking care of people's health and giving them medical treatment is totally free for all Cubans. In the U. S. it is necessary to have insurance or money to cover any medical assistance. This can be very expensive and some people cannot afford to have treatments.

Family life in Cuba is very different from family life in the U. S. In Cuba, it is usual for three generations to live in the same house. Grandparents, parents and children live together in the same house for years. They help each other, and this is a good thing. It seems that the American family usually lives separately and they communicate by phone and meet twice a year on holidays.

However, it is human rights in Cuba that are the most important problem facing the Cuban people. They do not have freedom. They can't speak any word against the government. The government has agents living in the neighborhoods. The agents know what the people are doing and what they are saying. It is their job to know this. The government agents call the police for any reason, and then the people are put in jail. In the United States, everyone has the same human rights and they are free to say what they think.

These are some of the interesting differences that I have found between the two countries.

*Maria Labrada has lived in the United States for 8 years. She studies English study at Edison College and with a literacy volunteer. She is now a US citizen.*

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## **Alejandra Went to Another Land**

In 1994, when Alejandra was sixteen years old she realized that she needed to move to the United States. She was working in a shoe factory with two of her sisters in Mexico. Suddenly, the factory closed and there began all of the problems for her family. The days passed and no one found jobs. One day, after they had been searching all day for jobs, they found their mom crying and staring at the kitchen range. Alejandra asked, “What happened mom, why are you crying?” Her mom answered, “I’m very tired and worried about everything. We have only three tortillas and a little salsa to eat, do you think that will be sufficient for seven people?”

Alejandra tried to calm her mom and said, “I’ve decided to go to the United States.” Her mom and siblings looked at her. “I know that it will be dangerous, but someone needs to do something; we can’t continue this way.” The next day she called her father, who lived in the United States, and he made arrangements with a coyote that would help her cross the border. She wanted to say goodbye to all of her family on March 17<sup>th</sup>, but she couldn’t because her oldest sisters were searching for jobs and her youngest siblings were attending school. Alejandra said goodbye with all of the pain in her heart to only her mom. She embraced, kissed and said “I love you Mom.” Alejandra then took her backpack full of dreams and left her home with the hope of helping her family.

*Miriam Mendoza is a student at the Family Service Center in Arcadia. She is transitioning from an ESOL class to an ABE. This is a story of her journey.*

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## **Why I Came To United States**

I came to United States because this country offers many opportunities, not only for jobs, but also for housing, health, art, culture, sports and education. Life is more joyful, people are more diverse and choices are plentiful.

Also, education is unlimited in America. There are all kinds of help for those who are in the low income group such as food stamps, free lunch at school, financial aid, low-income housing and many more. For all these reasons, I come to take advantage of these benefits which I didn't have in my country.

*Luis Baca is a student and Adult and Career Ed. in Key West.*

### **Learning in America, Helping in Haiti**

My name is Meprisa Louis. I was born in Haiti. I came to United States when I was 23 years old. I remember when I was younger, I did not think about my future and did not care about anything. Now, I have good school experience. I have better attitudes about my family and other people. My life is going to be different because I see many things that are available in this country. Now, I am learning English and soon will be going into an ABE program. I want to get into a profession where I can go back to help the people in my country.

*Meprisa Louis is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **Why I Came to the U.S.**

You are there at home, where your heart feels at home. I heard this many years ago; I can't even remember anymore where or from whom, but these words have become the truth. After the fall of the Iron Curtain in Eastern Europe, I came as a little

child in shelter of my parents to the much wealthier Middle Europe. I grew up there in material richness, but I felt a void in my heart unable to fill. Traveling around in different countries and continents I understood what borders meant. I also served in the Army for the United Nations Peace Maintaining Observer Forces, trying to help people living in peace in their homeland. Now I'm here on the other side of the world, in the Sunshine State. I don't know if my search will continue, but I know that in the end it would be fine.

The feeling in my heart is getting better, and I realize that the one who said this phrase must have been wise, but the man that lives after would be much wiser.

*Iova Dan-Raul is a student at Golden Gate Adult Learning Center. Her tutor is Polly Spring.*

### **Why I Came to the U.S.**

I was born in the place they call Iran, but my father and mother are from Iraq. I couldn't finish my education in Iran because of my Iraqi parents. In Iran, Iraqi children have very hard lives because the Iranian government is racist with Iraqi refugees. When I was born, my parents weren't able to get my birth certificate from the authorities. Also, our family, along with other refugees from Iraq and Afghanistan, had no other kind of legal documents, so our life was very hard.

In Iran, study is impossible. So we finally chose to move from Iran to Syria and from Syria to the United States to finish my education and to make a new life.

In the U.S., it is very hard to study, but I want to be someone special and give myself and my family knowledge. This place is the best place to study and finish your education.

I hope everyone comes to the U.S. wanting to study because sometimes the hard life and hard work lets us forget what happened in the past. Thinking and gaining knowledge is the best thing for us.



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

In Korea, I lived in a middle-sized city, population about 1400,000. I heard that each of the states in the U.S. is different. So my experiences could be limited. Anyway, I will describe different things from my personal experiences.

First of all, the system of public schools is impressive in the U.S. The library is located at the center of the school. The reading program called AR is practical and progressive. The number of students in the class is fewer than in my country. The teacher has various helpers. The health clinic is near the office and all visitors, including students, have to come in and go out through the office. Therefore, many people visit school easily, but rules are kept and someone does not interrupt the class easily without punishment. In the U.S., principals can be younger than in Korea. In Korea, the principal directs teachers to supervise safety at release time, but does not help supervise. In U.S, principals help personally.

Club activities out of school are also impressive in the U.S., especially after school sports team practice such as soccer, baseball and football. These are played on natural terrain, so children can play on the real grass near their house.

There are major differences in health care services. In my country, most of the people, whether they are poor or rich, can contact doctors easily and medical insurance premiums are not expensive. People who have money to spare buy special private health insurance such as cancer or long term illness care. At the beginning of my life in the U.S., my two sons had to have general physical exams before reporting to school. I paid \$100 a person.

My elder son needed an advanced urine test. It cost over \$200 even though we had insurance.

Another difference is that in the U.S., if people do not have a car, they are like house pets. They can rarely get out of the house. Shopping, visiting friends, school and most things are limited if they require travel. In Korea, public transportation is available. Also, if people do not know much about cars in the U.S., they may have to spend a lot of money. My husband is sensitive about safety, but he does not know that much about cars, like most of the people in my country. So he goes to his favorite car center for general check up. In Korea, if there are not any problems, he needs to pay about \$30. If the tire is changed and the car gets a general check up, he used to pay for just the tire. In the U.S., a major part of the fee for repairs is the fee for service, so repairs are more expensive.

I'm learning and excited to have this experience. I will go back to my country after six months, but this kind of experience never will be forgotten in my life.

*Kwang Suk Kim is a student in the ESOL program of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County.*

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## **How I Came to the U.S.**

Since I was a little girl, I always had a dream. My dream was to see the world! When I looked to the world map, and I saw all these countries, England, France, U.S. and others, I said to myself, "One day I will make my dream come true."

Egypt is my country, and I love it. I was born in Alexandria; it is one of the biggest cities in Egypt. It was built by the great Alexander, and since it has been named "Alexandria, a pearl of the Mediterranean Sea." I lived in Alex with my family: two brothers, two sisters and our great parents. My father was a

busy man with his business, but he never forgot his family. Dinner time was the time for all of us to gather around the table. I grew up with a warm, close family sharing love, honesty and dignity.

In my school, I was interested in three subjects: old English stories, history and geography. Through these subjects I could see the world. Every trip made during my school years, my name was at the top of the list. I saw most of the cities and the famous places in Egypt. I finished college and got a job as a trainer for the Alexandria University team. Two years later I became head of the Student Administration Fitness programs.

I met my husband and we got married. Our son was born one year later. I love my family. My husband is a good man, and we share for most of our life plans. He worked as an assistant manager at Cairo Bank in Alex.

In August, 1970, America opened the board for a special certificate as immigrants. My husband and some of his friends were not satisfied about the salary and the kind of life in Egypt at that time, so they decided to try to come to the U.S.

One day my husband came home excited to tell me, “Be ready. We will move to the U.S.” I was surprised, excited, confused, afraid, scared, happy and wary. My husband said, “Is this what you dreamed about?” “Yes,” I answered. “I had a dream, a simple dream, to travel to see some country and to come back home.” America was so far away!

In 1970, we did not know that much about the west. The life was vague, but now it is different. Satellites, computers and Google are a big help for any information we need.

My husband succeeded to make me calm down when he said, “Let us go for one year. Then we can decide if we would like to stay, or we can go back.” The idea was reasonable, and I accepted. In May, 1970, we came to the U.S., and we lived in New Jersey. We met some friends, and they were a big help.

Finally, after thirty years, I am still in the U.S. as a U.S. citizen. I fell in love with this country from the first year I came. I am glad that I listened to my husband from the beginning. I cannot say that it was easy, but with our love and through hard work, we made met our goal. My husband got a job in the Bank of New York and got his Masters in Business Administration in 1973. Also, I got a job in 1971 at the European Health Spa. I loved my job. Two years later I owned my business in the spa. We made a good income. My son did well in school. He became a doctor, and I am proud of him. He got married and gifted me with three granddaughters.

In the U.S., I saw a lot and learned more. I enjoyed my home, my life and my family. I enjoyed the natural life and the weather for four seasons. It was amazing!

By the way, I got the chance to visit London, Paris, Holland, Japan, China and Canada. I enjoyed my trips and saw many famous places. How lucky a girl I am! Thank God all my dreams came true.

*Sofia Rzek is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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## **Escape from Cuba**

On January 1, 1959, Fidel Castro took over Cuba. I was eight years old and my brother, Pedro, was seven years old. My father, Jose Maria Diaz, was scared because he knew Castro was a communist. My father spoke out against Castro's government because he didn't want to lose his freedom of choice. He left home to hide because the communists wanted him executed. He and his friend, Mr. Caraza, decided to escape to the United States with their families.

Mr. Caraza owned a boat and my father, a mechanic, built a motor. On August 13, 1961, 14 of us left Cuba in Mr. Caraza's wood boat. It was 21 feet long. The top deck was for the driver. The bottom deck was where we stayed for three days. We ran out of gas and food in the middle of the ocean but they saved the water for the four children. The boat started rocking and I got seasick.

After a few hours a helicopter circled our boat. We were scared because we didn't know what country it was from. We were hoping it wasn't from Cuba and then we saw U.S.A. painted on the door. The pilot pointed to something very little and very far away. About a minute later, the wake from the speeding 80-foot boat almost sunk ours. It stopped next to our boat. It was an American patrol torpedo boat, a PT109, and the sailors were putting on their life jackets. They lowered yellow rope ladders and we all climbed on. My father went to see the motor but he was returned to our group by the sailors with guns. They brought us food and drinks. They towed our boat. Near South Florida they transferred us to a smaller ship which took us to Key West.

The men were taken to jail. The rest of us were taken to a restaurant and then driven to a hotel in Miami. Each family had a room. I was excited, tired and happy. We didn't have any money or clothes. I didn't know if I would ever see my father again. The next day we went to the address we were given. They helped us with food and money but no one spoke Spanish and none of us spoke English. After a few days the men were brought to us.

My father's friend, Mr. Zusula, in Los Angeles paid for plane tickets for my family. He took us to his apartment. No families were allowed in his building so he snuck us in at night. Before daytime we all left the building so my parents could look for jobs. We did the same thing every day for two weeks. Mr. Zusula rented an apartment for us. My father and mother found jobs. When school started, my brother and I went to a Catholic school. Los Angeles was all English speaking. School was difficult at first but we learned English from our friends and TV.

*Gisela Villar is a student of Project LEAD in Miami. Her tutor is Joyce Moloney.*

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## **United States, the Land of Opportunity**

I came to United States for a better life for my son, daughter and myself.

This is my dream for all of us. Here, my children can get a better education because they will be able to go to college with financial support. Also, here there will be more chances for them to grow into more rounded, mature adults for the community. Besides the myriad of food, culture, choices, facilities, people, they will become more open minded that if one door closes, there are others that will be opened. I am so glad that we are here in America.

*Perla Rios is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **My Life**

My life in Guyana differs from my life in the United States in many ways. There are more opportunities in the United States for me; for instance, it is possible for me to continue my education. When I was a little girl, I was diagnosed with thyroid and I have been struggling with school ever since. I was taken out of Elementary School when I was in the fourth grade. When I wanted to go back it was hard for me to pick up the lessons. It was also getting too expensive for my parents to pay a private tutor since my mother was a stay home mom and since my dad had to provide for my two sisters and my brother.

After my mom and I went to the doctor we decided to start a new life in America. I felt better because I realized I could go

back to school. My main goal is to help myself by returning to school and learning the basics. My goal is to get a job and provide for myself. It is easier to find a job in the United States because you have different opportunities to choose from. For instances, I can take the bus to work, that way I don't have to depend on my parents. If I were living in Guyana, I would have to take a ferry and a bus to get to work.

With my salary, I can pay for my own health insurance, that way I can stay on track with my medication. Back in Guyana my medication was too expensive and was not available to me. Lucky for me, my aunt sent my medications from England twice a year. If someone in my town needed a special treatment they had to travel to the nearest city. Here in the United States, it is more convenient to find a health facility.

Another advantage is that I have more freedom to go out because it is safer here than in Guyana. I'm very thankful for having my family supporting me with my education. I'm very thankful for having the opportunity to move to this country and experience a new world and a new freedom. Now I know that I can continue my education with less obstacles and that way accomplish my dreams as planned.

My dream is to become an artist or fashion designer. I have always enjoyed drawing and I know that I can get the opportunity to study here in the United States at a later time. Right now I want to concentrate on learning the basics and improving my writing and reading skills. It would have been harder or almost impossible to study a career in Guyana. By having a job it will make it easier for me to save my own money and pay for my career. I know it will be a process, but with hard work and patience, anyone can make their dreams a reality.

*Tajewantie Hariprashad is originally from Berbice, Guyana. She is a student of Program L.E.A.D in Miami. Her teacher is Lissette Saballos.*

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

It's great back home, and, yes, it is different. In my home country, it is much nicer. I live in a country named Dominica; it is nothing like the U.S. We are an island in the Caribbean. Dominica is between two French islands -- Guadeloupe in the north and Martinique to the south. In my country, we have waterfalls, lakes, springs, a lot of beautiful beaches, and three hundred and sixty-five (365) rivers.

We have approximately eighty thousand people in my country and we are so kind, friendly and cultural. On February 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup>, we have carnival; on those days, we have bands on the streets, dancing, eating, drinking and having fun. August twenty-eighth, we have cultural day where everybody dresses up in their cultural customs. We eat cultural dishes like breadfruit and salt fish with coconut milk and drink natural drinks like sweetsop, guava, and banana mango mix.

We have the world music festival -- three nights of pulsating music. The music festival is where different groups and bands from all over the world perform in rhythm. There are bands like Kassav, Compa groups, reggae artists from Jamaica and our own bands from back home. Everybody from all over the world comes to have a thrilling time.

I don't know much about the U.S., but what I've seen so far it's a fabulous place to live; different people come together to live here. Starting a new life in the United States has not been the easiest adaptation for me. Moving to Miami was very exciting for me, but difficult at the same time. I was not used to two prices for clothes and food. I perceive that in order to make it in the United States, one has to work and have a steady income.

Making new friends was the hardest for me, but the biggest blessing was having my first child born in the United States. Even though I may encounter some obstacles in my life, I always put God first and then my family, which is also very important to me. Life is full of surprises, but I am determined to achieve my goals. My goal in life is to become a nurse and provide for my family.



*Valda Joseph is enthusiastic young student from GED Online –TLC program at the English center-South Florida Workforce in North Miami Beach. Her Teacher is Mrs. Liz Romero.*

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## **Why I Came to the United States**

I came to the United States in November, 2004 because I married a military man, and subsequently, to improve my English.

The first time I met my husband was in Sicily in a pub. He liked me immediately, but unfortunately I did not like him. I changed my mind. The first time we went out for lunch, I discovered this man was very attractive and interesting. From that day, we never separated, and our love that day and the next day grew. It was very difficult leaving my family because I am so close to them, but together my husband and I have built a beautiful family. That is why I am in the United States.

When I began living in the United States in a beautiful state, I did not expect this language! It is very difficult for me. I had studied English in high school; I believed I did not have a problem. That was a big mistake! I had a very hard time with conversation, especially when I went to the store. Nobody understood me; maybe after three minutes they understood what I needed. I was melancholy! I cried a lot because I felt alone, and it was very difficult to find a friend or somebody to be able to speak with, except the television. I remember one day I tried to call for an appointment at the hospital. The operator said, "I am sorry, ma'am. I cannot understand you. I need somebody to speak English." After she hung up, I was destroyed.

One day I woke up, and I had a new outlook. I knew I would stay in the United States for a long time. It is very important to understand this language to be a part of this society. I am very eager to improve my English, not only for speaking, but also for reading and writing. This is essential for me because one day I want to be able to help my kids with homework and to get a job to improve myself.

I came to the United States because I fell in love, and I would like so much to stay in this country. My first goal is to improve my English, and I know “I CAN DO IT!”

*Rosa Selio-Boylard is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College.*

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### **Why I Came to the U.S.A.**

There are a lot of reasons why people travel. Some people want to see the culture and the nature of other countries, or to learn a foreign language. Other people go abroad because of their job or some other business. Some individuals take part in different programs or just want to see certain places.

I participated in the student’s program “Work and Travel.” I had some defined purposes for why I enrolled in the program. First of all, I wanted to see the life and people in the United States. There are a lot of movies and TV shows about the U.S.A., and it was interesting to see real American life and compare it with the movies.

On the one hand, coming to the U.S.A. was a sightseeing tour; on the other hand, it was a trip to earn money. “Work and Travel” program allows students to work legally in the United States during the summer and to travel during September. Participation in this program gave me the opportunity to make my dream come true: visiting Walt Disney World.

Another goal of my trip was to improve my English language skills. The best way to learn English is communication with English speaking people. Fortunately, my job in the U.S. let me speak with people. I used to work as a shop assistant, where I met a lot of people and had to answer millions of questions. My English became better from day to day by small steps. Also, I am enrolled in an ESOL class to improve my English skills.

This is a different country and a different life than in Russia. I enjoyed everything; every small thing made me happy. I saw everything I had seen in the movies, and I felt like I was living in the movies. Since I had limited time in this country, I tried to see as many different things as I could. On my last working day, I met

a guy who was a customer where I used to work. We fell in love and married, and we now live in the United States of America! Money, which I earned working during the summer, I spent for my breath-taking trip to Disney World.

In conclusion, I can say that I achieved my goals for why I came to the U.S.A., and even more. We should not forget that traveling is a great chance to see the world, people and another ways of life. Try something new, and sometimes it can help you to find your love.

*Ksenia Bussard is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

## **Why I Came to America**

The first reason I came to America was curiosity. I heard so many myths about it: that Americans drink only Coca Cola, that even the poorest Americans have one or two cars, that you will be sued if you touch an American child, and so on. When I visited America for the first time, I realized that I could not live like I had lived before. For a long time, I had been living without any goal or dream. I attended college in Moscow, worked and spent time with my friends, but did not see the final destination of what I was doing. I had been thinking about moving here numerous times, so my decision was not spontaneous. Now, I have a dream. I strongly believe that through determination, I will reach it. That is why I need to learn English and to get an education in America.

I always admired people who knew more than one language. At school, I was doing my best in English classes, but that was not the same English. I was frustrated when I arrived at the New York airport. I could not understand any words at all. It was like an absolutely different world, but I should not complain. I

was warned about cultural shock. Consequently, American English you can learn only in America.

At school, my favorite subjects were biology and anatomy. When I started my college, as a civic manager, I felt that this was not my destiny. I even began to give in to melancholy because of this. On the other hand, it helped me; now I know exactly what I want. I wish to devote myself to medicine. It is hard because the main thing you need to be a good doctor is the ability to love and sympathize with people. I will ask God; He could give it to me. It is a long study, but I still have a lot of years in front of me.

All in all, I feel happy for now. I came to America with no idea about my future. Today, I have a purpose, and I just need to work it out.

*Kristina Gapeeva is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

### **Why I Came to the United States**

My name is Amy Wu. I am from China. I used to live in a large and beautiful city, but now I live in Navarre, Florida.

After I met my husband, my life changed a lot because my husband is an American. I left China after living 37 years in Guang Zhou and followed him to America where everything was new to me. I had to start to learn all things American.

In America, the air is very good and the people are very nice, but here the food, the language, and my life are very different to me. Cooking Chinese food is absolutely not the same as cooking American food. I am not used to food that is packaged and frozen.

My language has changed too. English has different letters. The words are hard to spell and to pronounce. There is no standard pronunciation in English. Chinese uses brush strokes to spell words. Chinese uses pinyin for pronunciation. English is very difficult.

Also, it is not very easy for me to find my way around when I am driving. The malls are so much smaller here than the mall in China. Going to see the doctor is also very difficult for me. I don't understand anything the doctor says to me.

Since I have chosen to live in America, I still need to strive to learn new things. I am willing to do this because of love.

*Amy Wu is a student in Santa Rosa Adult School's ESOL program. Her teacher is Vivian Anderson.*

*Someone or Something I Admire:*

### **Friends In Unexpected Places**

“Live so that your friends can defend you, but never have to.” If there is one quote that hits close to home, it is this one.

Throughout my seventeen years of existence, I have had the honor of becoming friends with a few amazing people. One of them, however, has earned an eternal place in my heart. Walking into class one afternoon, I noticed this guy who, for some unknown reason, decided to sit in the seat beside mine that day. Little did I know, that the smile I gave him and the smile he returned would bloom into the amazing friendship that it has. Justin, whom I have nicknamed my Mini Ninja, would always be prepared to “defend my honor”, if need be, and he and I will always have each other's backs.

One day during class, a kid I had never even noticed before, started harassing me over my choice of clothing. Seeing that I was growing upset as the insults continued, Mini told the guy to back off. As the kid continued, Mini, who is only five foot in height, proceeded to punch the kid in the face, knocking him unconscious. Since that day, that Mini of mine will always have a place inside of my heart.

*Amber Schellkopf is a student at Golden Gate Adult Learning Center. Her tutor is Polly Spring.*

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### **I Admire Nelson Mandela**

I admire Nelson Mandela because he is a great leader in South Africa. Mandela was the first black president in South Africa. He never wavered in his devotion to democracy, equality and learning. Despite terrible provocation, he has never answered racism with racism. His life has been an inspiration in South Africa and throughout the world, to all who are oppressed and deprived, to all who are opposed to oppression and deprivation. Mandela fulfilled his dream of making his own contribution to free his people.

*Wilson Dor is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **I Admire My Sister**

I admire my sister because I like the way she dresses. Also, she is really smart in school. Not only do I like the many ways she fixes her hair, I also like the way she speaks. I admire her because she loves me no matter what.

*Emmanuel Elias is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **Who I Look Up To**

The person I look up to in life is my son, Cayleb. If I didn't have my son, I don't know where I would be. My son has helped me become a better person. He inspired me to go back to school.

Cayleb is 9 months old and is such a delightful, bubbly baby. He has 6 teeth and loves to use them. He is my world, he is my everything. Without him, I don't know what I would do.

I look up to Cayleb because he needs me. When I am sad, he makes me smile. I'm never lonely with him around. Cayleb is there for me no matter what. He may not be able to talk yet, but he's a good listener.

My son helped me grow up. He's helping me to do better not only for myself, but also for him. When I had him, my whole life changed. He made my life better.

These are the reasons why I look up to my son. He has helped me become a better person, encouraged me to make a better life for me and him, and made my life better by just having him.

*Heather Norell is 17 years old and has a 13 month old son named Cayleb. He is her inspiration for staying in school to complete her GED.*

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## **My Mother**

My mother once told me that there are two kinds of people, those who do the work and those who take the credit. She told me to try to be in the first group. There was much less competition there.

*Rosealee Reed is enrolled in the WTI GED program. Her grandmother inspired her love of writing.*

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## **Sports**

Sports are one of the most important things in an active person's life. There's basketball, football, and baseball; personally, I love all three sports. Here I will share with you some of the reasons they are so important to me.

Basketball is one of my favorite sports; it's also America's number one sport. Also, I'm very good at it. I can dunk, lay-up, set a perfect alley and hit a nice dinner's serve. Is it any surprise that I truly love it?

Another one of my favorite sports is football, because in my eyes no one can stop me from scoring. My love for football started when I was nine years old playing for the Apac Falcons. My favorite positions were wide receiver and safety. I loved stopping plays just as much as I loved making them.

Baseball, my other favorite, is an all-time classic. I could never play it, but I loved watching it. My favorite teams are the Braves, Yankees and Angels. I'm really good at baseball on video games, but that's about it. So, even though I do not play, it is still a favorite past-time of mine.

Again, one of the most important things to active people is sports. They have been a very important part of my life. My three favorite sports are also some of America's favorites: basketball, football and baseball.

*Corey Clark is enrolled in Columbia County's Adult Education Program. Upon completion of his GED, Corey plans to attend Lake City Community College.*

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## **The Three Things in My Life**

The three things in my life that I am thankful for are my parents, my religion and my future! My parents are a big part of the reason that I am here. My religion teaches and shows me the way to live the right way. I have a beautiful future ahead of me, because of the way I live my life!

My parents have been there for me in the good times and bad. They taught and instructed me in the right way. My Mom has always been a best friend to me. I'm so thankful for having such an amazing mom. She taught me so many things: how to cook my first meal, how to work hard and do my best at everything I do! My Dad, he is the strongest man I've ever met! He goes day by day struggling with pain in his body, yet he never stops working. He pushes himself to the limit! I'm thankful to have such an example to go by.

I have been blessed to be a part of an amazing religion. I'm a Christian who goes to church on Saturday. I am weird for doing that to many people, but I know it's the right thing. For sticking up for what I believe in, God has blessed me with so many things! I'm very thankful that my parents have brought me up in that church. I have the most amazing friends there, and the kindest families. I can't see my life without it!

I have an extremely bright future ahead of me. I'm working my way through high school, graduating, and heading off to college! I'm applying to my church's college for the upcoming school year; I am more than thankful to be able to go to this college. There I will be surrounded by my closest friends and family, and learning about life in a way that no other college teaches. This is such a great opportunity for me to be thankful for in my life!

In conclusion, with me having two such amazing parents, who guide, love and strengthen me, why should I be sad or

depressed with the things in my life? I have an amazing church that backs and supports me, who shows me the way to give, to be joyous and thankful for all the many blessings I have. And last, my future. I need to be looking forward and pushing myself to where I need to be, instead of complaining about the things I don't have now! There is a lot to be thankful for, but these are the three most important in my life!

*Jessica Kay is a GED student at ACE@Lively in Tallahassee, Florida. She plans on attending college at TCC for Culinary Arts.*

### **My Favorite Person**

Last week I suggested this topic for our class to write an article, but when I think about it carefully, I feel it's hard to decide who I should choose to introduce to my classmates. Why? Because my parents, my children, my husband and my friends are all important to me, and I love them all! I can't choose one as my favorite person. So, today I only introduce one of my favorite persons, YangYang, my son.

When I think of my son, a little boy with bright eyes comes to my mind. He is 3 years and 7 months old now! The time goes by so fast! It seems that he was an infant, then a baby, just several ago. There are a lot of things that have changed, such as the shape of his face, the tone of his speaking, and the way he talks with us. But his curiosities about the things around him have never changed. I can remember when we took a walk in the neighborhood in the evening, he asked me to interpret why there was so much drainage and how it worked again and again, and I gave him the same answer at least 50 times. At that time, I hoped I had recorded the answer into the tape! This happened when he was two years old. He often asked me a series of questions from the first one, why and why, how and how, until I didn't know the answer. At that time I usually told him I needed to search for the

answer either from the internet or from the library, so he knew Google very well.

Although he is 3 and half years old, since he was born, my life has changed, which means not only my lifestyle but also some ways of thinking. Because he learned everything from us and we could find something that was inside of us, we never noticed. I appreciate what he brought to me because I'm growing up with his growth.

I forgot to introduce his name. His name is YangYang, which means sun in Chinese. I hope, just like the meaning of his name, he will have a bright and colorful life in the future and at the same time bring warm and joyous feelings to others.

*Yingru Liu is a student in the ESOL program of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County.*

## **Let Me Tell You About Someone I Admire**

I admire my mother. There are many reasons why. She was the seventh child of nine children, raised in a little town with probably five hundred citizens, called El Angel, Ecuador. She has been a hard worker since she can remember. My mother said that all of them had to wake up at five o'clock in the morning to work in my grandmother's bakery.

My mother got married to my father when she was eighteen years old. She was raised in a strict catholic-apostolic-roman religion. She is a very intelligent and active woman. She finished high school as a fashion designer. She is and always has been the healthiest person I ever knew. She has gone to the hospital only to bear her children.

As the children were born she started to organize how her job at home would be. She had her own studio where she designed clothes according to customer demand. She had a nanny to help in the house. My father was working far away for an oil company, so

we did not see him very often. Each of us was born two years apart. The house was in a good district school, we only needed to walk to enter it. We used to wear hand-me-downs.

Mother had a thousand and one professions. She was a great cook, great designer, hair dresser, strong farmer, an intelligent teacher and a great physician. She invented a wound healing cream made with very easy ingredients: zinc, baking soda and pure Vaseline. It is unbelievable how many times we used that one, especially the boys.

She was a strict catholic, but as time went by, and she heard a lot of horrible stories about the monks and nuns, she decided to change religions. My mother started searching for another religion. After visiting and studying every religion there was one in Quito, Ecuador. It was the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

After many years my mother has encouraged us to follow the new commandments and the new church teachings: "I already have showed you the right path to follow, in the end, you choose." By the age of eighteen, all of us had to make a decision to follow the church or not to.

She always thought about our future. She gave us the best education possible. At eighteen, she made sure we all got a driver's license. She is just the perfect example of what a MOTHER should be. She loves each one of us unconditionally. I realized how much I love her and admire her when I became a mother. Now every day I admire her more and more because I only have one kid and I am exhausted every day. I cannot imagine how she did it with nine kids. So for me she is a divine and admirable woman, mother, wife and now grandmother.

*Margoth Carolina Thomsen is a student at the ESOL Sheridan Technical Center. Her tutor is Suell E. Scott.*

## **An Extraordinary Woman**

This is about an extraordinary woman that through everything, still stands strong!

She continues to help others and asks for nothing in return. She was a barber, a seamstress and now owns her own daycare.

Through hard times and being abandoned by her husband with three children to raise, she refused to give up. She packed up and left her home in Brownsville, Texas with her three young children and moved to Florida. When she arrived in Florida, she found a job working in the fields to support herself and her children.

While working, she met a wonderful man whom she married a year later. With him not working anymore, he told her that he did not have to work that hard in making a family. He got the whole package. She would later go on to say, "it was love at first sight" or (with a smile on her face) the man would just not leave! Regardless of "him" not caring if they had more children, he was happy, but she always wanted to have six children: three boys and three girls. She got her wish. She stuck by him, even on his deathbed and always said, "until death do us part."

After raising all of her own children, she got presented the opportunity to become a temporary foster parent, asking for no help from the government, or any other organization. Sometimes she still continues to help the parents of the children that attended her daycare by telling them to pay their bills at home first. She says that God will always see her through. She also helped by saying that she had been there before and therefore understands their situation. With the economy being the way it is, she says we're all in need at some point in our lives.

I know that I don't know where I would be without this extraordinary woman. She now has my children, and stands strong

beside me, bestowing the same morals, respect, and hard working responsibilities on my children.

I am very happy to have such an extraordinary woman like her in my life, my mother!

*Emma Benevides is from Bonita Springs, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ABE III class at GCF.*

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## **My Family**

Let me introduce you to my lovely family. My family is very large. Celebrating the holidays with them was a fun and unforgettable time. When I traveled to Ecuador to see them, it was special and exciting.

When our parents passed away, the whole family came closer. We wanted to find consolation in each other. I have seven sisters and three brothers. We were in total-sixteen, but five passed away when they were young. Ten of us are married and one is single. I have forty-two nieces and nephews between all ages. I am very proud of our new generation.

Celebrating the holidays was a fun and unforgettable time. After twenty years, my son and I had the opportunity to visit our family in Ecuador for the holidays, Christmas and New Years, and my niece's wedding ceremony and party. For the first time, I was able to see everybody dressed nicely. It was awesome because of all the family pictures that we took. Christmas Eve, New Years and the wedding will be unforgettable for my son and I. Thank God.

When I traveled to see them, it was a special and exciting time. Almost the whole family came to the airport to receive me happily with hugs, kisses, tears and screams. They carried my luggage, and we all somehow made ourselves fit tightly into the car to go to my mom's house. I can tell you that the same hugs, kisses, tears and screams happened when I left.

In the end, I love my family. I really enjoy my large family. Celebrating the holidays with them was a fun and unforgettable time. It is always special and exciting when I visit them.

*Piedad Candell is studying English in an ESOL class at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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## **Women's Suffrage**

Women's Suffrage began in 1848, which sought to end all forms of discrimination against women. Before the Civil War, most women could not vote or be elected to office. Thanks to Susan B. Anthony, Women's suffrage came about. The lives of women have changed immensely. As we say, we've come a long way.

The lives of women can be very chaotic: being in the workforce, being a mother, being a wife, and cooking for her family. Not to mention picking the kids up from their soccer or football practice; then you have the single mom with a child and no dad around who depends on welfare to get by. She has to tow the line, being a mother and a father to this child and a role model. Being that she didn't have much education, she'll have to attend a learning center to obtain her GED so she'll get a good job to support her and her child. Then you have the modern woman, who chooses not to be in relationships and sees herself as a unique individual with family, friends, and a career. Women also don't compete over men as much as they compete over jobs and opportunity.

The feminist movement started in the 60's; it has been known women receive 57 percent of all bachelor degrees from American colleges and will soon be awarded more post graduate and doctoral degrees, which is making men feel uncomfortable and frustrated like women felt 40 years ago. The modern woman is

always thriving to make herself look better with all the magic cosmetics out here today, such as a contouring eye system to reduce eye bags and fat pockets and new ultimate Elixir, which erases up to 10 years from the look of skin. She can reduce lip lines by 19% and increase plumping by 24%. Women are ready to try something new, whether it's Avon products or Mary Kay.

According to a new survey, women are better drivers than men. Men are more inclined than women to exhibit a range of risk taking behaviors while on the road; men also speed more than women, showing aggression. 15% of men admitted going over the speed limit most of the time, compared to only 9% percent of women and their always trying to race the next guy. Women feel they don't have to do that, but men are always pointing out that they are better.

Women are still being made sexual objects. In today's culture; when a women walks down the street wearing a halter top, short shorts, right away, she's taken as a sex object, but maybe she didn't intend sending that message. We always have to be put on display. They are led to believe they're prone to getting heart disease, diabetes, or arthritis. When they get slim, watch out they don't become anorexic. Society is the one that leads them to believe all this. Today, a woman can be anything she wants to be thanks to Susan B. Anthony.

*Rosemarie Maxwell is a student at Country Oaks Learning. Her tutor is Monica Baxley.*

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## **My Sisters in London**

Souvenir, my eldest sister, lives in Central London. Central London is a busy city. There is traffic of every kind: people, cars, busses, trains and so much more. It's really crazy.



Souvenir is getting her Master's Degree and working a part time job, not to mention taking care of her two beautiful daughters. She is really a very busy woman.

She is so beautiful and tall (6'2"). She has that black beauty look that makes her a standout.

She is married to a handsome, tall (6'4") gentleman named Miko. They really make a good couple. Miko is a Nigerian raised in London. He's an immigration lawyer who has helped a lot of people that I know. He's a good man.

The funny thing about Miko and Souvenir is how they met. The two of them lived in the same building! Now they have two apartments: one on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor as the living room and the 15<sup>th</sup> floor as their bedrooms.

Last summer she came to visit me with her children Talulla (4) & Tigan (3). I was so happy to have them here. I was overwhelmed.

After two days of their arrival, we decided to take a walk and the kids were too excited, but we didn't make it to three blocks from where I live. It was so hot (above 80 degrees). Talulla said, "Mommy let's look for shade to chill for some time before we go back home." They are not used to heat. I found it to be so funny.

My husband Mark was very happy to have them around and so sweet to the kids, too. I don't drive so he drove us every place we went.

We put the kids in school for three weeks so that they could learn and get to play with the American kids. That also gave us time to ourselves, to do some shopping and other things.

Talulla said, "Aunt Grace, I wish that my school was here." I asked her why. "Because the teachers in America let us watch TV in class and they give ice cream at break time." I said to her "Maybe someday you will come and study from here."

Talulla, she is a very sweet and intelligent girl. She made a lot of friends. Her sister wants a lot of attentions and if she doesn't get it, she starts to whine (a mommy's girl).

We went to places that even I had never been. Places like Silver Springs, Chucky Cheese and Disney World. We all went to the YMCA to swim every weekend. Oh! The kids love swimming!

At Disney World we went to Animal Kingdom and Magic Kingdom. Souvenir, Talulla and I rode Splash Mountain. That was my favorite. The kids got to take pictures with all the princesses, Mickey Mouse and the rest. Talulla didn't want to let go of every character, while Tigan was scared of Mickey Mouse. We all had a great time.

Harriet, who is younger than me, is studying children's nursing and works. She couldn't come to visit. I like her skin color which is chocolate brown. She has very long black hair and brown eyes. She is my height (5'9").

She lives not very far from where Souvenir lives. Harriet has her own apartment. She loves serving God. So with her free time you will find her at church.

I really miss them so much. I hope that this year will be my turn to visit them.

*Grace Renaker's family is originally from Rawanda, but she was born in Uganda. She moved to the US when she was married. She is a student of the Marion County Literacy Council and her tutor is Debbie Penney.*

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## **My Beloved Mom**

When I was one year old, she fed me and cleaned for me.  
She was there for me when I cried all night.

When I was two years old, she taught me how to walk  
In gratitude, I ran away when she called for me.

When I was three years old, she prepared me a delicious meal.  
In thanks, I threw the plate on the floor.

When I was four years old, she gave me a pen to teach me how to draw in gratitude, I scribbled on the walls.

When I was five, she dressed me in fine clothes.  
In gratitude, I came home full of mud.

When I was six, she brought me to school.  
In thanks, I shouted that I did not want to go to school.

When I was ten, she was waiting when I come home from school  
To embrace me.  
In thanks, I ran into my room.

When I was eighteen, she cried at my graduation party.  
In gratitude, I asked her to buy me a car.

When I was twenty, she asked me to stay with the family.  
In gratitude, I spend all my time with my friends.

When I was twenty-five, she helped me with the cost of my wedding.  
In thanks, I lived with my husband as far as possible from her

While there is still time, while there is breadth,  
I must take the time to  
Tell her ‘thank you’ and ‘I love you’ from the bottom of my heart.

*Zanigor Fakhritdinova is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **Someone I Admire**

I admire my mother more than anyone else in the world. No matter how hard life gets, it only makes her endure and become stronger. She is the most positive, encouraging person I have ever had the privilege to know.

When my mom was a child she had it very hard. Her family was poor and deprived of everyday luxuries that we now take for granted. For instance, she did not have a bathroom, but an outhouse. She did not have central heat, but a coal burning stove in the middle of her dining room. She had to work extremely hard in the fields to make money for her parents and at the same time be sure to keep up her school work. Mom suffered from a lot of beatings and verbal abuse, but through all these things she became a stronger person who has endured many things and survived.

My mom, because of all she went through in her life has made her the best mother I could ever ask for. She had encouraged and supported me in every way possible. Whenever I wanted to give up she would tell me about a similar situation when she almost gave up, but didn't. Her stories would encourage me and give me the will to work and strive even harder for what I wanted. I would succeed because she never gave up on me. I am blessed to have her as my mom and I admire her for all that she is. Her encouragement, strength and love have made me the woman I am today.

*Glenda Quintero is a student at Broward Correctional Institution. Her tutor is Ms. John-Pierre.*

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## **My Family**

To talk about my family is a real inspiration. They bring me a breath of life. My grandmother is a beautiful person. She taught me to take life as a miracle and respect it. About my grandfather, I can only say, "We loved each other with all of our hearts." I really miss my grandfather. He died when I was six years old. My dear brothers and I, almost all of the time when we are together, talk about our infancy. Oh, beautiful memories! Mom tells us all of the time "I love you as you are." This phrase is the best present from her.

I miss my traditions and family in Ecuador. For example, last year I had the first Christmas without my family. When I am with my family, we usually wait until midnight. We give each other presents, hugs and kisses. We enjoy delicious food. Usually it is made by my grandmother. She usually cooks a turkey, potatoes, salad and rice with a lot of vegetables. We dance until the morning.

Another popular tradition is Valentine's Day on February 14. On Valentine's Day the people celebrate love and friendship. Husbands and boyfriends give presents to their wives or girlfriends. Sometimes women buy presents for men. The people usually buy chocolate, candy and flowers. The red roses are for true love, pink roses are for new love and yellow roses are for friendship. My family is very special to me. I miss them very much.

*Angela Obispo-Banegas is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach, Florida.*

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### **Let me Tell You About Someone I Admire**

I've always admired my mother. My mother Fannie Jackson has inspired me in so many ways. I'm the youngest sibling of four children. I admire my mother because she made life possible under our creator. She made it as a single parent. She's done an awesome job.

My mother made me realize that I can make it despite my adversities. I now realize that it's the possibilities that make life more interesting. I was taught to be a strong black woman, to have morals, to set standards, to persevere and most of all, how to be a God fearing woman. She wasn't perfect, but I admire her striving to be the best model that she could be. She earned a high school diploma and has since landed a career at Florida State University. I'm proud to have her as a mother and she's proud of me, as well as

my other siblings. I strive to be just like her. She listens to my problems and never judges me, instead she encourages me. Her favorite quote is "I want my children & grandchildren to be better than me." Don't get me wrong because she'll let it be known if she disapproves, and she'll offer advice. My mother is always here for me. We sometimes share diverse views, but she's very compromising and understanding. She's always available and she makes time for anyone, even strangers. She's always been able to adjust with my dilemmas. I'll always admire my mother.

*Tammy Mickens is from Tallahassee, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ABE III class at GCF.*

### **I Love My Mom Best**

My mom is the person I admire most. She has the mother's love that each mother should have. She cooks for me, she suffers for me and she is there for me anytime I need her. Though I will not be able to match the love, hard work and things she has sacrificed for me, I shall do my best to be a good son who will make her happy and enjoy the rest of her life with the family.

*Gerald Jean is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **My Husband, My Best Friend**

My husband is from Haiti. He came to United States before me. He worked very hard to make preparations for me and my children to come to U.S. Now, we are all together enjoying the best of our lives in this country. I have no doubt that my husband loves me very much. He cares about me and gives me everything that I need. Nevertheless, he is also a good father to his children. He is always there for us. We hope to have a great future together that lasts a very long time.

## **Admiration 9.0**

“Ours is a madness steeped in lore – The hardest kind for the hardest core...”

*-Slipknot*

Those are words full of subliminal meaning, spoken by the nine people that I admire above all others. These nine people, when joined together by their powerful music, create a force most commonly known as *Slipknot*. Through their influential music and personal battles, I have become deeply impressed and moved by what they have fought so hard to accomplish.

I was first exposed to *Slipknot* when I was looking through a music magazine around 2005. I knew at first glance who my favorite band was when I saw that group-shot of the nine members, each in their individual custom mask-and-jumpsuit uniforms, and I didn't even know what they sounded like at the time. With that picture of them branded into my memory, I later researched who and what they really were: Sid, Joey, Paul, Chris, James, 133, Clown, Mick, and Corey.

Together they have become something that never before could exist. There are no valid words that can explain their image, and there is no specific label for their genre of music. It has been that way for over ten years, and they will never change as long as they exist as The Nine. They have fought long and hard to attain such status. For that, they are known far and wide by their fans as The Maggots, who can be found in countries all over the world.

Why I look up to them is no secret locked in chains. In fact, I shall prove to you some deep and evident factors. For example, the lead vocalist of *Slipknot*, Corey Taylor, had no father growing up. He also spent some of his teenage years homeless. He later

became a blackout alcoholic during his young adult years, but he has overcome those things. Look at where he's at now – a world-renowned singer in an award-winning band. Another example is Shawn “Clown” Crahan, one of the two custom percussionists of the band, who lost his father while he was on tour. Clown put aside his grief and continued the tour because he understood what the Maggots wanted: a 190% performance. He couldn't let his eight brothers in the band down by not being there with them.

What I've come to see in them is the fact that battles can be won – even when all hope is gone. I grew up facing many hardships at an early age. Finally, by knowing *Slipknot*, I see that I am far from alone. Seeing nine people rise to power in the middle of desolate Des Moines, Iowa, I now truly understand that anything is possible. I no longer hold back my goals and aspirations, fearing seemingly imminent failure. The Nine have opened my eyes in ways that others couldn't. For this, I will always admire them and forever appreciate what they do.

*Quinten "Charles" Dangerman is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Navarre, Florida. His teacher is Ray Gentry.*

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## **Music**

There are lot definitions of music. They include features like structured sounds, relationships between melodies and harmonies, ideas about noise and sounds and a platonic ideal of music that defines the music.

I picked one: “Music is an art, entertainment, or other human activity which involves structured and audible sound.” It means that “The properties of music are the properties of sound as perceived and processed by people.”



There is a lack of consensus about the definitions of music and “By all accounts there is no single and intercultural universal concept defining what music might be.”

History tells us that human beings and music cannot be separated. There is a strong link between men and music; only styles of music vary from culture to culture.

Finally, I love the music that makes me dream with its melody. We find in Colombia a mix of concepts: Cumbia, porro, fandango and vallenato reflect sounds of the Caribbean. They were born in the north of the country and have a big influence of the Afro-Colombian culture.

In the mountains we listened to boleros, guabinas, bundes and other soft music, created under the influence of natives and Spanish conquerors. At the east of Colombia we have the joropo- a music which is performed using a harp and a special guitar named “cuatro.” I like joropo because it is real poetry.

I enjoy the Colombian music and my friends do, too. It is an important part of our culture that remains in my heart.

*Miguel Canas is a student in the ESL Program at the Jacksonville Public Library - Southeast Regional Branch. His instructor is Maureen Quinn.*

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### **To My Grandmother China Whom I Admire**

I admire my grandma for her bravery, fortitude and nobility, even though she is no longer with us. Grandmothers have their own particular traits. Some are lovely, while others are funny. Still, others are grumpy. However, each one has our love and attention. My special grandma, China, had a tough life being a single mother of five children whom she had to feed, dress and help educate. She suffered so badly with her sickness, but she never showed us weakness.

Regardless of my grandma being a single mother, there was no obstacle that stopped her. China was admirable because she was Mom and Dad at the same time. She led and treated all her children with the same hard hands. There was no unclothed, un nourished, or uneducated child in China's house. Also, she would help people who needed it, even when they were not her family.

Being a single mother at the time that my grandma lived was hard. "It was embarrassing not having the man of the house," my grandma had told me once. The reason was because at that time in Mexico, women did not have the same rights as men. Who would really care whether or not the women were being violently treated at home? The most important thing for Mexican society was keeping your man as long as you could, no matter what. Fortunately, my grandma did not care about being part of that society. She only cared about her children and her peace. Overall, she cared about her dignity and her values. China walked everyday with her chin up without worrying what people would say.

Her bones were breaking her life. She suffered from arthritis, but it did not defeat her. In spite of her sickness, China would not call for help nor complain of her aches and pains, even when they were killing her. Nothing stopped her. She would go to work and do her activities as normal. She was as strong as an oak tree, even much stronger—like a steel vault. No matter what my grandma's condition was, she was the leader at home, and nobody could disobey her orders.

I will always admire and love my grandma, China, regardless of her absence. She was the strongest woman I knew because of her bravery and fortitude. She went through life wisely. China showed us that no matter the obstacle, she always walked proudly. I am not a mother yet, but I can imagine how difficult it was for my grandma being a single mother, plus having her sickness. However, she did well. I am proud of being her granddaughter, and I hope I can resemble her at least in some way.

*Gabriela Leysath is studying English at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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### **Why I Like The Baby Sea Bees**

I like the Navy Seabees because of their bravery. In Japan in World War II the Seabees were master builders. Here are the three reasons I like the Seabees: they built roads, whole bases and air strips, all while under enemy fire.

They carved out and surfaced 100 miles of road in 90 days. That's a feat! They took a whole jungle and turned it into a full-blown air and navy base while in a combat zone. Now that's awesome!

They moved more than 11 million cubic yards of mud, rock and coral and built the world's biggest bomber base with six air strips. Now that's incredible!

The Seabees motto was nothing too big or too small for them. These are the three reasons why I like the Seabees: they built roads, bases and air strips. Now these were brave men. Now that is absolutely awesome.

*Rufus Brooks, Jr is in the ABE class at Jefferson CI.*

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### **World's Greatest Mom**

My mom is a very honest woman. Her name is Lucia. She is truly a very kind person. Lucia always wants better things for her children. She is a wonderful grandmother, as well. She is very sweet with her grandchildren. My mom is a very hard worker and she likes to do everything by herself. She is a perfectionist. Furthermore, she is very patient and possesses strong self-control.

I love my mom because she is always there to give me her whole support. She is my best friend for the rest of my life.

*Noelia Santilan is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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## **My Father**

If I had only one day to spend with any person, I would choose my daddy, Erick Delgado. I would choose him because I would love to keep his memory alive and to get the chance to be with him for one last time. I also would like to spend a day with my father because he has always been a very special person to me.

I know one way to keep my father's memory alive would be to be able to tell people all about him. I never got the chance to tell people about him because he passed away when I was just a little girl. I was so young; I can just barely remember the time that I spent with him. The memories I do have about him are that he was a sweet and caring person to everyone. That's why I would love to spend one day with him so that I can learn more about him.

Another reason I would choose to spend the day with my father is because I would love to get one more chance to be with him. I would tell him all about my life, his grandchildren and about our happy family gatherings.

Finally, I would choose to spend the day with Daddy because he was so special to me. He was my hero when I was younger and a good father figure as I got older. Last, but not least, we had a special moment right before he passed away. That moment I will never forget.

In conclusion, being able to spend a day with my father would be a dream come true. Not only would I be able to spend time with him and tell him what a special person he is to me, I

could also introduce him to his grandchildren. This would help me keep Daddy's memory alive forever.

*Priscilla Vazquez is a mother of three children. She attends the Even Start Program at Lealman Elementary. Her teacher is Anne Morgan*

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## **Music, The Point My Life Turns On**

When I was a child, I heard classical music in my home. My father who was not a musician liked to listen to records of Beethoven, Sebastian Bach, Mozart and Vivaldi. My favorites were Beethoven's *Fifth Symphony* and Vivaldi's *The Four Seasons*. Nevertheless, as I grew older, the music I listened to the most was romantic pop. I liked the Beatles, Elvis Presley, the Bee Gees and Frank Sinatra. I loved songs like, "P.S. I Love You," "Let It Be," "New York, New York," "Love You Inside Out" and "Love me Tender."

Through the years, there have been songs that have marked my life. When I was dating my husband, we often listened to the song, "How Deep is My Life." The song I remember best when I came to this country was, "A Moment Like This." At the time I felt down and missed my country very much, and the music helped me feel better. Although the music changed, it continued being food for my soul. People tend to feel better when they listen to music.

In conclusion, listening to music has been the best gift from God in my life.

*Rosa Abadie de Ajoy is working hard to excel in English so she can work in health care. Sharlyna Gold is her lucky tutor at the Literacy Council of Manatee.*

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## **Someone I Admire**

My mother is someone I admire the most. She is a very down-to-earth person and a wonderful woman. My mother was a great mother, a great wife and a great daughter, also.

I remember when I was at least five years old, that the only adult we saw in the house was my mother. She was our mother and our father because my dad used to work away from home. Our mother always reminded us why our father was not home most of the time. She said, “He needs to work to earn some money, so we can buy some food and whatever we will need.”

My mother was a great wife. She was very young when she married my father. She went through some obstacles during her first and second years of marriage. My mother told us what she had gone through with my father’s family. She was a very strong young woman, a real fighter. She would not let anyone destroy her marriage. My mother gave birth to four children; I was the second oldest of her children.

My mother was also a great daughter. When she was not busy, she would take us to visit our grandparents. She knew that we loved to visit our grandparents all the time. Most of the time when we visited them, my mother would take something like rice, coffee, sugar or salt—whatever she could give to help them.

My mother was wonderful. She did what she could on her own power to rear us to be great children. She was a great mother, wife and daughter. These are the reasons why I admire my mother the most.

*Marlene Viherek is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach.*

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## **Something About Mary**

Out of the many people that have come in and out of my life, I can finally say that I've found one absolutely true friend. Her name is Mary Murphy.

I moved from New York in October, 2009 to Citrus County and had my mind set on getting an education and bettering my life, as well as my daughter Breighyonna's life. I enrolled in the Even Start Program.

Not being from Florida, I knew no one, and Mary was the first to befriend me. I started having some family issues, which were greatly affecting me in a negative manner. I knew I could talk to Mary. We're different, yet so alike in our experiences, so she sort of guided me down the right path.

If it wasn't for her believing in me and being there for me, I probably would have irrationally chased a dead end dream back to New York, dropped out of school and continued to make poor choices.

Sometimes I feel I need to do something to show Mary how much I admire her, not only as a friend, but as a mother and a survivor too.

Among the great advice she's given me, the main thing I've taken with me is never to let my guard down, have faith and don't give up.

Now, I'm going to be graduating with my GED with special thanks and love to her and all of the terrific staff who remained supportive through the toughest of times, at the Even Start Program.

*Lancey DeRosa, mother of Breighyonna, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

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## Good Friends

Every baseball season the New York Yankees play ball in their ballpark and Yankees fans come to see them play.

The Yankees fans think the games are exciting when the players hit a homerun and the pitcher strikes the opposing team out and win the game. Many people attending the Yankees game become friends by watching, rooting and cheering the Yankees on.

At the game, there were two men rooting and cheering for the Yankees to win. The two men introduced themselves and found that they had the same things in common. The men told each other their names. When the game was over Ralph offered Joe a ride home. Joe accepted the ride. When Ralph told Joe where he lived, they were surprised because Ralph realized that he lived down the street from Joe.

When they arrived at Joe's apartment, Joe asked Ralph if he would like to come in. Ralph accepted his offer. Joe has a nice apartment and his couch was comfortable to sit on. Joe offered Ralph a cup of coffee and Ralph accepted. As they talked to one another they discovered they had some of the same interests. They loved bowling and they also enjoyed going to western movies, especially those starring John Wayne. They loved seafood and they enjoyed going to most of the seafood restaurants in New York City. They also loved steak dinners and Ralph knew where to find good restaurants that served the best steak dinners. Ralph and Joe also liked Chinese food and they enjoyed dining in Chinatown. They went to Chung Lee Chinese Restaurant in Chinatown where the food was very good. They had shrimp chow mien and it was delicious. Ralph and Joe told each other what kind of job they had. Ralph's job is a Librarian. He checks books in and out, issues library cards and places books back on the shelves. He gets a good salary. Joe's job is an ancient history teacher at New York City Junior College. He teaches classes on Ancient Greek, Ancient Rome and Ancient China. He makes his lectures on these subjects very interesting in such a way that his students won't get bored.



His former students tell the new students how interesting his classes are. He has been teaching a long time and he makes a good salary.

Ralph and Joe get along real well, which is important in becoming good friends. There are many common characteristics that Ralph and Joe have to continue a good friendship. They have patience with each other, they associate with each other, whether they have money or not and they know how to communicate with each other in an assertive way. These characteristics are essential in being good friends. They will always enjoy being together and always be the best of friends for a long time.

*Jeff Deutch is a student in the Learning for Living program at Florida State College at Jacksonville. He enjoys writing and has written many stories. His teacher is Margaret Mathis.*

### **Let me tell you about someone I admire.....**

That person to me is my mother, she is a virtuous woman. In all she does she places God our Father first and she also instills him in us. She says that “without Him you will be lost.” My mother was named about a very important lady out of the Bible and her name is Sarah. Because of the person my mother is, which is beautiful, she has chosen a vessel. My mother has taught me as a very young girl that I have to love. She never looked down on anyone due to their life or what they did or may have done, as long as they repented and asked God for forgiveness. You can move on. My mother Sarah is a role model for some, but especially to me, and that’s why I admire her and love her.

*Kim Williams is from Tampa, FL. She is in Ms. McCall's ESUBA class at GCF.*

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### **My Dad, My Good Exemplar**

My father was a typical Nicaraguan: he worked in a farm. My father was a good man. He was very nice to me and his children. I remember him as a very hard working person. He taught me to be respectful to others. My father was very friendly. He was very patient, full of good advice. He was very generous to people who were in need of help. When I was little, I saw my father helped people who were hungry. He gave them food. When he died, I was very sad. March 11 is the date that I will always remember my father. I remember his advice to be nice to people no matter what. My father lives in my heart daily. I miss him dearly.

*Alejandro Alvera is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

## **Let Me Tell You About Two People I Admire**

Let me tell you about two people I admire, my parents. I know they made the perfect couple, and I greatly admired them because they were hardworking, inspirational and loving.

My parents stressed how important it is to work for what you want in life because nothing in life is free. My father worked long hours to keep food on the table and a roof over our heads, but he always made time to take us to the park and movies. I have always felt that my mother was a diligent worker. She worked two jobs and took care of our family. She would come home from one job, cook dinner for us, make sure we were fed and bathed and that we did our homework. Then she would be off to her second job. I would sometimes cry, hating to see my mother leave the house and working so hard. I can remember a time when my mother said, “A good education can take a person far in life.” When I first heard the phrase, I didn’t understand it, but now that I am older, I understand what she was saying.

My parents were inspirational to me, my siblings and to other children. On my mother's day off, a lot of the neighbors' children would stop by our house just for some encouraging words. The boys always thought of my father as a father figure. He would tell them to stay in school and get an education and to listen to their parents.

I used to think my parents were the meanest parents on earth because they would discipline us when we were disrespectful to an adult and when we did something we shouldn't have done. One day my aunt came over and wanted me to ride to the grocery store with her. My parents were working that day, and I was being punished for making a bad grade in English. My sisters and brothers told my aunt I could not go because I was grounded. I was furious and wanted to explode. I told my aunt I had the worse parents in the world. My aunt explained that parents don't discipline their children because they hate them, but because they love them and want to teach them valuable lessons. I soon realized my parents couldn't hate me. They worked so hard to provide for us. They were loving parents. I always thought the world of them and could not have asked for better parents. They were the perfect couple for raising a family.

*This author is a student at Learn To Read of Northwest Florida. Her tutor is Jo Ann Jenkins.*

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## **Inspiration**

Inspiration is what drives you to succeed. The person who inspires me to pursue my dreams is my mom. My mom has always gotten back up no matter what life threw at her. She always tells me I can succeed, and she is always there when I need her.

Perseverance is continuing to do something over a long period of time with many setbacks. Perseverance is my mother. My mom started her life early with setbacks. She was pregnant at 15

with my oldest brother Andrew, but she did not give him up for adoption, even though people thought that it would be better for everyone. Then she had Cody and me, but it was not like it was a setback. Instead, she began working and raised us, even though, at times it was hard and she did not know if she could survive. She is stronger than anyone I know and someday I hope to be as strong as her. She keeps going even when life throws her things that would break most people.

My mother is always right behind, pushing me forward to pursue my dreams. She is my motivation and without her I would just fall apart when things get hard. She has taught me that you have to live through the bad to get through to the best. When my mom was younger, she made mistakes like many others, but she has always persuaded me to go in the opposite direction. She has never tried to push her dreams on me. If she would have, I would have done anything in my power to go against her to be in control of my life and dreams. That's what makes her so special to me; she knows I'm going to make mistakes and instead of being a hypocrite she takes me by the hand and tries to show me a better path to walk down. Instead of walking alone, she's always right there beside me to help me get through when needed.

When I see inspiration, I see my mother's face. No one compares to what my mom means to me. She is who inspires me to strive to pursue my dreams. If I didn't have my mom, I couldn't make it through a day.

*Summer Stephenson is enrolled in Columbia County's Adult Education Program and is pursuing her GED.*

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## **In Memory Of My Father**

José Libardo Jiménez Rios.  
May 11th 1930 – February 14th, 2008

To you, dear Father  
Today I want to praise you.  
I want to let you know how much I remember you;  
With deep respect  
And nostalgia in my soul....

Nostalgia of my infancy;  
Upon remembering the care you gave us.  
The things you always brought us  
When you took us to school and  
Waited for us after;  
When you reprimanded us, to teach us  
The correct side of life.

How I haven't stopped remembering you,  
Dear Father.  
To you and my Mother  
I owe my life.

I will never be able to forget  
Your looks, your counsel and your touch;  
Your strong handshake  
With which you gave us your support.  
Your strength, your good humor, your vitality and happiness,  
And so many other teachings about:

The Rectitude  
The virtue of being honest  
The achievement of those who study to better themselves and be  
somebody in life.  
To work with enthusiasm  
To go to bed early every night,  
So that in this way God always enlightens us...

You also taught us  
That one must honor one's parents with affection and gratitude.  
That anger serves nothing in life.  
That to forgive is an example of decency and manliness

That to speak well, to be polite, and to know the norms of courtesy,  
Is the best definition of a Lady  
And come what may, we shouldn't weaken in the life.

Thank you! Daddy...  
For everything you invested in my life  
And thank you for continuing here  
Because even though I know that God gave you welcome.  
Don't renounce this woman that continues to be your daughter,  
And although my eyes can't see you,  
Nor can my ears hear you,  
Nor my hands touch you,  
I feel you close every day,  
You remain in me for the rest of my days.

Forgive me, Daddy, for not being able to stop missing you  
In this my life.

Your daughter LOVES YOU!

*Olga Lucia Jiménez Rios is married to Edgar Valencia. She is also the mother of two children: Sara and Sofia. Last semester, She was a student of GROWS Family Literacy Council.*

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*Poetry:*

### **Changing the Colors**

Let's play for an instant.  
Let's change the colors  
That exist in nature.

If our sky were red  
Would we like this?  
Maybe the intense color red  
Would make us feel wrapped

And spinning into a BBQ.

Thinking in light blue and pink.  
To give color to our roads,  
We would believe  
That at Ken and Barbie's world  
We had stopped.

If our beautiful vegetation  
Would have been dark blue,  
A total darkness there would be.

With our sea, in color yellow,  
Our eyes would be  
Such as a flashlight.

If the bright light were black,  
We would not enjoy it.  
And if the rain were green,  
We would be similar to Martians.

Sometimes  
The people's wishes are too much  
And they are not happy  
Because they don't enjoy  
The beautiful things  
That our Lord has given us.

Our sky and sea  
Will continue with a beautiful  
Blue Color.

Our vegetation will continue  
Keeping us calm  
With its green color.  
The roads will be the same gray color.  
We will have the bright light  
From the sun.

And the crystalline rain  
Will continue such as always.

Since the first time,  
Our Lord was perfect.  
His beautiful gifts  
We will continue enjoying.

Thanks to our Lord!

*Nieves T. Nouelis a student at Boca Raton Public Library. Her tutor is Joan Marie Mueller.*

**“She needs that fast”**

She needs that fast,  
He has the cats,  
He hits that cat,  
She hits it fast.  
Is it that fast?  
He hits that fast.  
This fish has fins.  
She has that cat  
And that cat has fish.  
This fish has an ant.  
Had he cash on hand?  
She has seen the dish.  
Is it hit?  
Has he fed the cat?  
Has she fed the fish?  
She sat on an ant.  
Need this dish be fast?  
Had fast cash and hats  
If he hits the cats?



That has he hit.

*Antonio Del Toro is a student at LVLC. His tutor is Lillian Nieves.*

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**Trapped: A Poem**

*“Life and the choices we make”*

My mind keeps racing – I keep on pacing.  
I try erasing memories, but I gotta face'em.

All is lost without “a good enough” cause.  
I wish I could be reborn again;  
Maybe then, I'll get it right  
And everything would be all right.

But I can't.  
I just have to accept the challenges  
That I am left with and try my best.

But people keep pushing  
And I keep on losing.

It's hard to breathe.  
My chest is tight.  
I try not to cry, but  
That one tear just had to appear.

My heart has turned to stone  
Maybe that's why I'm in the state of mind.

It all consumes me and  
Has left me feeling woozy  
Without the drive to get up and try.

Life has been like a maze,  
Every turn that I make  
I end up getting smacked in the face.

I feel like I'm trapped in a cage,  
With the keys – but I'm too stupid to try and leave

What the matter with me?

God, can you help me please!

I'm trying to do what's right.  
I'm putting up a fight  
With the devil that's tempting me to go out at night  
And commit felonies,  
But I won't let him win.  
I'm better than him.  
NEVER AGAIN will I surrender my wings  
To be out on the grind, living life how I did.

*Lucia Ruiz is a BCJ student at ITT Technical Institute in Miami. Education changed her life and gave new career opportunities.*

### **Loving Person**

Roses are red, Violets are blue  
When I am sad, I always think of you.  
When I see you, I see the truth  
I'm not a beaver's dam, but you could be like my Sam.  
I hope you know that it is not going to snow.  
It is time for spring, so please don't let it rain.  
I might be a drummer, but it is soon going to be summer  
If I was in love, yes that means I am like a dove  
As I run nine, the sun oh it'll shine  
When I play, as the sun goes away  
I say, is this the way  
And so remember to have a God bless day.

*LA Sonya Booth is a student at Volusia Literacy. Her tutor is Sniadach.*

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### **Two Different Lives**

With you is a celebration, success of determination,  
Nothing but relaxation.  
A plan to make you mine, putting what I have on the line,  
Giving what I feel more time.  
It's only reality to have stability, not just one's ability.  
I want it to last forever, sharing life growing old together,  
Making you feel  
Better whenever you're feeling under the weather,  
Making it thru whatever.  
I want it to be more than love; I want to go beyond and above.  
Beyond space, a spectacular place, my hearts wrapped in gold lace.  
Only one of a kind, setting peace in my mind.  
Taking what I know is real and blaming it on the way I feel,  
And guarding it with armor or steel.  
I've been waiting for someone like you and the  
Wonderful things you do,  
Someone to fit those shoes, something I never want to lose,  
And it's you that I  
Choose, now I can say this depends on you.  
I want you to take me to that place; my heart's  
Wrapped in gold lace.

*Camille Fields is a 19 year old young lady who attends Manatee Technical Institute in Bradenton, Florida.*

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## **Who Am I**

Stop! Staring at me, like you better than me.  
Because you're not.

We all have on the same prison uniform, the difference is it's just  
pants or a dress.

Who am I? A child of God.  
Stop! Staring at me, you are no better than me.  
We are all in here for some kind of crime.  
We all had sin come our way.

Who am I? A child of God.

Look! Look around all you see is a whole lot of different inmates.  
We all come in different colors, sizes, height.  
Who am I? A child of God.

Let's stop pulling our sisters down, and lift them up with  
encouragement, love, and prayer.  
Who am I? A Child of God.

Don't look at me, like I'm crazy for being a Christian.  
Sister let's change our ways, like we change our life.  
Who Am I? A Child of God.

It's not who I am, it's who we are: Children of God.

*Chiquita Collier is a student in the ABE III Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility. Her teacher is Ms. Toole.*

### **I am Whole**

I am whole with moving parts.  
Feelings swim through me  
Like a fish in the sea,  
Flowing in the currents of life,  
Connecting to the sky of my mind,  
Flying high around my center,  
The star of all directions.  
Walk with me  
In the garden of my life,  
Ever growing,  
Every becoming,  
Moving into the depths of my spirit,  
Revealing my open secrets . . .  
Stories unfolding in all my parts.  
I am whole.

*Pepe Tortosa is an ESOL student. His tutors are Iwona Kijanczuk and Darby Hayes.*

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### **Known & Unknown**

I am known and unknown.  
My mind is learning  
The secret of success.  
My body is moving  
With strength and ability.  
My spirit is as free  
As the wind.  
My feelings reveal  
Passion of my genuine heart,  
Desiring to help everyone.

My footsteps follow  
The path of success,  
Giving hope to the desperate,  
Strength to the weak.  
People call me humanitarian,  
Others define me as universal.

I am easy and hard,  
Inspired and tasteful.  
I am naive and skeptical,  
Doubt and certain.  
I am the moon and the sun,  
Summer and winter.  
I am everyone's dream,  
Every breath taken.  
I am known and unknown.

*Anderson Honore is a student at ESOL. Her tutors are Suzanne Yach and Darby Hayes.*

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## Thru Our Eyes...

Thru our eyes we see the day pass quickly,  
Whether it is in rain, sunshine, day, or night we see it all.  
Who would of thought you would of have being reading my  
poetry?  
Something that's going to stimulate the mind and give your ears a  
call.  
A call that comes when you hear it from your own whisper  
Or maybe a friend reading this out loud to a group of you.  
You anxiously take a bite of some toast that couldn't get any  
crispier.  
Halfway thru the poem and I'm sure you don't have a clue.  
That's right, scratch your head or try looking out the window to  
clear your mind.  
Do you see anything, have you heard what it is and you're in it for  
the fun?  
Appreciate life, smile often, and always try to be kind.  
For not always will we see the nights filled with stars or the rays  
from the sun,  
We should not take for granted the giggles we hear from the  
children climbing trees,  
Or from the birds flying themselves and getting lost in the sky.  
Who are we to deprive our children of tasting honey made from the  
bees?  
Simple pleasures come naturally and that isn't a lie.  
We all have the privilege to enjoy the small but significant things  
in this world.  
Earth is where we experience it to take care of our Mother for  
every future boy or girl.

*Amilkar Borge is a student at Criminal Justice program at the ITT Technical Institute in Miami. He is an active member of the CJ Club and is an active participant at the College Community on campus.*

## **Guide Me**

Guide me, O Lord,  
Speak to my heart,  
Change my mind,  
And, from you, I'll never depart.  
Touch my soul,  
Make me whole.  
Renew in me a right spirit,  
So the whole world can see that the Holy Spirit  
Lives in the very depth of me.  
Shape me,  
Make me,  
Teach me,  
Keep me,  
Deliver me from my iniquities.  
In my darkest hour,  
Give me your holy power  
That the devil will never devour,  
Because in God I have power.  
In Him I can be what he wants me to be.  
He's the light in my path  
The love of my heart.  
He wipes my tears and  
Washes away all my fears.  
In His arms he holds me tight.  
He makes me feel complete  
For his face will I seek.

*Georgette Philpot is a single mother who attends classes at Columbia County's Adult Education Program. She is also involved in Even Start Family Literacy.*

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## **A Broken Hearts Prayer**

Now I lay me down to sleep tonight.

I pray my love will see the light.  
Just this once, please set me free,  
My love so plain that he could see.  
Give me the strength to trust again,  
Release the pain that dwells within.  
Please Dear Lord, help me stay strong  
Our love I thought would last so long.  
Help me to love him again,  
Even if as just a friend.  
If I forgive and he won't come back,  
Make my heart no longer lack the love and soul he took away.  
Help me love again someday.

*Felicia Watson received her GED this past fall and is currently employed with Columbia County's Adult Education Program. She plans to enroll at Lake City Community College this fall and major in Early Childhood Education.*

### **Birds**

They open their wings in the air.  
You can see how they avoid the cruel wind.  
It was intensive flight to go through.  
The bird will spread his wings wide open, and start all over again.  
Do not let any of your dreams out.  
Like birds, open your wings and fly.

*Eba Loyola is a student at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology I love to write because it helps me to express my feelings. My teacher is Miss Linda Bonas.*

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### **Rain Washing Tears**

Raindrops pulled down by gravity,  
Fall across my face.  
The sound of children's laughter,  
Drifts from a distant place.  
A working woman on her phone,



Runs from the wetness in stiletto heels.  
But the person who stands out the most,  
    Is the man walking slowly.  
His face not yet wet with rain, but tears.  
    In his eyes I see the pain,  
    That no one will understand.  
    Wrinkles show his worry,  
As he walks on across the muddy, wet land.  
    As he sits on a bench,  
    And hides his face in his hands.  
The shadow of a lost wedding ring,  
    On his finger stands.  
To him the little droplets don't matter,  
    For he can only feel his tears.

*Jordan Johnson earned her GED in October 2009 and has plans to attend Lake City Community College to further her education.*

### **You Should Know**

You should know how to forgive  
    So that you don't give up.  
You should know how to love  
    So that you tolerate.  
You should know who to smile  
Even though the atrocious make you suffer.

You should know how to listen  
At last that you know how to meditate.  
    To listen when love calls  
So you don't let your heart hurt.

You know now at last,  
    To never say at last,  
    And do not be the last,  
Even though it's the last.

*Garry Severe is a student at I-Tech in Immokalee. He is enrolled in the advanced ESOL/ELL class in the evenings. Garry is a single man who is 20*

*years old. He came to the USA from Haiti on Jan. 28, 2009. He is a field worker in the area.*

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## **Our Night**

I wait and wait and count the days,  
Until the time when we shall be together on a blanket,  
In the middle of a field under the stars,  
That this night shall shine their brightest.

With you I will share the special moments,  
And for only you I will be serious,  
To share our souls and be one,  
To experience what neither of us have ever felt before.

I want to hold you and be with you,  
I want to enjoy your presence,  
And feel your body against mine.

I want to give you everything I can possibly give,  
And still continue to adorn you with gifts,  
For you have given a greater gift,  
Yourself, your soul, and your love.

*Kristina Smith is a student in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. She has been so successful, and her success has naturally bred in her a leadership role within our classroom.*

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## **Love**

I know our times are getting hard,  
But I love my baby; she's got my heart.  
She makes it easier to see.  
Would you believe?  
That we... oh we're in love,

And I thank the Lord and his grace above.

Her eyes are blue;  
My eyes are green.  
(And you are the prettiest  
Thing I have ever seen.)  
Oh, we run all day,  
Yeah, we play all night,  
In search of the morning's sun light.

*Michael Magazzeni is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida.  
His teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

### **Whispers in the Night**

#### Precious One

The man has replaced the sun and the darkness  
Has replaced the light. My thoughts have turned to you,  
So I send you written whispers in the night. All is  
Quiet and all is still, the perfect time to express: exactly  
What I feel. Tonight I feel so empty and lonely,  
Missing you deeply: my one my only. I try to reach you  
By phone after five rings, or six, but I can't get through.  
The answering machine is once again impersonating you.  
I begin to question my mental health wondering is it normal;  
For a very lonely man; to talk to himself.  
I am heartbroken wounded soldier, but I will  
Continue to fight.  
I fight for your love; and at the same time I continue to battle.  
Whispers in the Night, can you hear them too?  
Eternally yours.

*Johnny Davis, the father of 7 kids would like to send his love to them all.*

## No Limits

I started out with ABC  
Boy, I am proud of me.  
Then came the sounds and blends  
Will this never end?  
I got hooked on phonics  
And took off like Sonic.  
Dr. Seuss and Dick and Jane  
Put a strain on my brain.  
Now it's reading, writing, nouns and verbs.  
Keep on reaching, don't get perturbed.  
The wool on sheep is called fleece  
One day I'll read War and Peace.  
What's next I fear  
Where do I go from here?  
I learned a word today  
It's difficult to spell or say  
Supercalifragilisticexpialidocious  
Isn't that atrocious?  
School is cool.  
Burn to learn.  
I think; therefore, I am  
 $E=MC^2$ ,  $C=\pi r^2$ ,  $a+b=b+a$   
Where do I go from here?  
Wherever I can dream.

*David Pogue is a 54 year old meeting the daily challenges of the classroom to keep growing*

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## Music Is Everywhere

The tapping of your feet, the rhythm and the beat  
Crack your knuckles makes up sound.

Imagine the beautiful melody of a merry-go-round.  
The popping gum outside of your mouth  
There is music all around us from the east, west, north, and south.  
The clapping of your hands, the drums, the guitar, the tambourine  
from different bands.

The bass you hear coming out of the speaker box.  
The frightening shrieks knock you out of your socks  
Music is everlasting and ever-changing.  
Here from the beginning, constantly rearranging  
The beauty from dance stops once the music is turned off.  
Music could be considered the sound from a cough.

Music can heal your soul.  
Music can put you back in control.  
Music gives you the ability to use your imagination.  
Brings a new vibration, a different sensation.  
Music can be meaningful for those who are blind,  
Giving you the help to seek what you need to find.

Music is all around us; it's found in different parts of the world.  
The best part about music is that you can always find a spot of it  
inside of your heart.

*Franceska Diaz is a student at Plantation Community school. She works part-time and attends school. In her free time, she loves to write poetry.*

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### **Ruben Dario**

Ruben Dario is some I admire  
Born in Nicaragua .... years ago  
He is a poet within his heart  
Many love to hear  
Many are touched and cry  
Reading historic poems  
Some are romantic

He also puts on big concerts  
The money he collected  
Are for the children in need  
And others without home  
No doubt that he makes a lot of money  
With the motif to help others  
In my town we are thankful for him

*Juan Mejia is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **I am my Freedom, I am my Prison**

In the beginning I was the center of my world.  
One gigantic vibrant center, full of pure passion,  
And filled with immense power.  
I was arrogant, a creator of independent ideas.  
My perfume generated incredible sensation.  
I was the only one.

One day my passion became impure.  
My power was clouded by indecision.  
The arrogant creator became  
The builder of a prison,  
A prison of fear, of withheld love.

I built a labyrinth out of questions,  
Too many,  
They concealed my vision to see,  
They misdirected my power  
They obscured my love.

Now I breathe deeply  
Awaiting the revelation of good news . . .  
Listen! It echoes from my center  
The good news, it pulses with power.  
Look there!

The secret is liberated freedom!

*Cosimo Bamonte is a student ESOL. Her tutor is Suzanne Yach and Darby Hayes.*

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### **Save the World**

I am union.  
Come in and join me,  
Together we unite the world.  
Union is the seed of success.  
Together we are powerful.

It is time to forget about race.  
It matters not. . .  
From whence we came,  
For we are citizens of the world  
Here to make it a better place,  
For us . . . for our children . . .  
For future generations.

Let us save the world.

*Kelie Simeon is a student at ESOL. Her tutors are Suzanne Yach and Darby Hayes.*

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### **If Yesterday were Today**

If yesterday were today  
I would enjoy more of the sunrise and the sunset,  
Back and forth from home to work.

If yesterday were today,  
I would fight for the love that I was waiting for,

Which I had but I let go.

If yesterday were today,  
I would not have made the mistakes that I made,  
Hurting the people who affectionately touched me.

If yesterday were today,  
I would have given more love and understanding  
To all the people who were around me.

If yesterday were today,  
I would have spent time to search for knowledge  
And not wasted time on unnecessary things.

If yesterday were today,  
I would have thought in a different way.  
I would have been more informed  
Before I make any decision.

Today I learn from yesterday that every day  
Is a page that we have to read.  
Yesterday I made my best decision,  
Now I wish that yesterday would be today.

*Ramires Pitta is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **The Sun Will Shine**

The sun will shine and the barren land will celebrate  
And blossom with flowers. Deserts will bloom  
Everywhere and sing joyful songs in the land of freedom,  
Land of the 13 colonies blessed from our Lord Jesus Christ.  
Those who were lame will leap around like deer;  
Tongues once silent will begin to shout and  
Water will rush through the desert.  
Thank you Lord to carry me to the new land



Before I feel the Darnes, now I see the  
Sunshine.  
I thought, I thought; I would die  
During my best years  
And stay as a prisoner forever;  
In the world of the dead,  
I thought I would never again  
See you Lord Jesus Christ, but you  
In your Mercy give me a second chance  
In the New Land.  
My life was taken from me  
Like the shepherd who  
Pull up and moves.  
They cut me off like thread from a  
Weaver's loom.  
They make a wreck of me day and night,  
Until morning came.  
Thank Lord for the New Morning.  
Rivers flow on mountain peaks,  
Streams fill the valleys;  
Dry and barren land flow with springs  
And become a lake  
Fill the desert with all kinds of trees  
pinos and acasias.  
I went up to see if blossoms  
Were on the walnut trees;  
Grapevines and fruit trees  
In the new land.  
Beautiful fruits and different colors.  
Blue, White, and Red in the distance  
Look like stars;  
Stars of the freedom denote the Love,  
The purity of great God who created a New Land  
The sun will.

*Geovany Mendoza is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. His tutor is Katherine Mominee.*

## **More Joy**

There is more joy in knowing Jesus in one day than there is in the  
world in 365 days.  
I know I have tried them both.

*Kenneth Carle*

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## **Him**

He makes it rains when it needs to;  
He dries it up with the sun;  
He lets the moon shine at night;  
He lets the birds sing;  
He wakes you up every day;  
He keeps food on your plate;  
All of this is Love from above;  
Keep in mind: God is with you all the time.

*Andrea Smith is an Adult Learner who is originally from Virginia. He has lived in Jacksonville for eleven years. He has been enrolled with the Center for Adult Learning since September of 2009.*

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## **My Special Friend**

I love your eyes, a frosty blue.  
I love snuggling up to you.  
You keep me warm and make me smile.  
Spending time with you is worthwhile.  
We share a bond of which some are not fond.  
You're my sweetheart, but not my lover.  
I'm so glad we have each other.

We'll show the world a friend is a friend.  
Hand or paw together until the end.  
I go to bed and can't wait to see you tomorrow,  
My beautiful cat named Samara!

*Taylor Stapleton is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. Her teacher is Garia Sanders.*

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### **This is a Country**

The native Country is far away.  
My mother is old and still living there.  
The time passes year after year,  
Her black hair is turning sorrowful white.

To remember everything of the past  
The row trees drop their leaves because they feel  
Compassion for the rambling one.  
The eyes have two tears at midnight when awake.

Even though I have a wife  
Why does living feel so much like a lonely life?  
Sometimes it's angry and cloudy.  
The birds incline their heads and sadly cry.

A life goes out of the Country  
To feel so bad in every storm,  
To hear something in the winds.  
Who is to blame me in the dark heaven?

There in the Country is a little house.  
The lovely mother may wait for me,  
A solitude cold in deadly winter.  
To separate from my Country chokes me!

*Tulee Lee is an immigrant from Kien Gian, Vietnam. He is a student in Advanced ESOL at Dixie Hollins Adult Education Center, Pinellas County, Florida.*

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## **Love Always**

When you know God, I mean really know God, He will make love to you every day. There is nothing like a relationship of intimacy. Just think of Him and who He is, which is love, and He will make you feel like a newborn baby. He will hold you, oh so gently, and make you scream out, “Thank you Lord. I need you. I want you and never leave me.” When you know Him, I mean really know Him, you won’t need to call on anyone else to make you feel loved. You can call on Him anytime of the day and it will always be, “Yes dear, I am here.”

To get that untouchable love you would have to listen to His word everyday or whenever you get the chance and always be obedient to your God.

## **Love always**

*Ingrid Wright attends Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St Petersburg. She gives all credit to her teachers, Mary Putnam and Hugh Tulloch, who give their hearts and souls to their students.*

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## **Alone**

When you are caught in the middle  
With no one to care,  
When you need a friend,  
But nobody is there.  
When you grow more afraid,  
Each and every day...  
Dreams come and go.

None come true.  
Hopefully, some day,  
The one with you will come true.  
I am waiting for the one dream  
Where I am in Heaven.  
So I will wait and wait, till that time comes around  
When you let me in.

*Rebecca Trefz is 17 years old and recently enrolled in the GED program at W.T.I. She is from St. Lucie County and is now living in Floral City.*

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### **It's About Time**

Without thinking about time  
That it not walking by my  
Whispering in the corners  
Of my beloved woman.  
Never mind that people;  
Hear me singing songs  
That nobody liked and  
Rummage through the waves.  
Love ridge blue or was it white?  
Rising or falling.  
Through the crowd an eagle marked  
Clean their claws caught  
And took what I wanted more.  
So full of malice  
That eagle was sent.  
I am sorry, you told me,  
Long time goes missing  
And I don't see you anymore;  
At least as I loved you.  
That devilish eagle,  
Theft among many people.  
The accompanying decency  
And it's almost a cry of joy.  
Away with my flowers wilted,  
Which were given to somebody else  
Of the hour that for me is

Barely begun.  
Alighted, fluttering  
And called me in my dreams.  
In its claws took my pain in the morning  
Because almost awaking, I realized  
That your time is over.  
Between my sheets is missing  
Someone I loved.

*Ricardo Sarda is a student at Sheridan Technical Center. Her tutor is Suell E. Scott.*

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### **Memories of You**

I promised to love you, I always will.  
You left a hole in my heart that no one can ever fill.  
The hurt that is here will always be here.  
I will never stop thinking about you and me.

The times we shared together each day is something  
I will cherish and never let slip away.  
All I have left is memories, and how sweet they are!  
I will never hold you again, only see you from afar.

I miss holding you until I fall asleep.  
Now I have to lay and weep,  
Hoping one night I will awake and  
It will be true; we will be together again,  
Just you and me.

*Lisa Wheeler, Adult Learning Center*

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### **Flowers of Peace**

Peace is a seed we all have.  
It gets watered when we smile.  
We nourish it when we laugh.

Peace is the soprano in freedoms ring,  
Victor of all things.  
Healer of wounds from broken dreams,  
The key to your future  
A levee to hold back your past.  
Plant it in the soil of your heart,  
Fertilize it with love.  
And watch your flower grow at last.

*Kellen Murray is currently studying at Broward Correctional Institution. She is a student in Ms. John-Pierre's GED Class.*

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### **You Left Me**

Heartache is something I just can't take!  
It feels like rape and I just can't break!  
So what's the use if it's going to hurt like this.  
All I wanted was you and you left me with a kiss, then a diss!  
What is this? The feelings that come over me?  
I fell for your games and now  
I'm looking for someone to hold me,  
And coldly, you left me with a message like no other.  
Said we weren't together and so you found yourself another lover.  
I never thought that this would be, but out of sight is out of mind  
And as I can see...  
You left me.  
When I was willing to except you  
You left me.  
Know about the issues  
But you, I could never reject  
And you left me.  
Didn't get to feel the best of me;  
Told me to be patient while...  
You left me.  
Saying you still want to be friends  
Just wait, it will be different in the end.

I can't even comprehend,  
You left me.  
And as I define  
All the reasons, I'm crying.  
All that keeps running through my mind is...  
Now you finish the sentence.

*Tana Watson is in Ms. McCall's ABE III class at GCF.*

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### **I Often Wonder**

I often wonder as a child, while I was so young, so innocent, and  
so wild.  
I often wonder when he touched me why didn't I run away why  
didn't I just flee.  
I often wonder when I grew older why would that moment just  
keeps getting colder.  
I often wonder when he would hit me, why does all the scars the  
pain the hurt still linger within me.  
I often wonder why can't I just die, instead all I do is cry.  
I often wonder the family that I have lost, will they ever  
understand will they ever forgive me for the hurt I have caused.  
I often wonder why can't I just fly, oh yea I could only fly in my  
mind because I was getting high!  
I often wonder why I sit behind these walls all alone and scared  
will I fall down, or will I stand tall.  
I often wonder why god put me here.  
It was to save me from the pits of hell, the nightmares the fears  
I often wonder now that he forgave me. Will I someday be happy,  
love again? Will I finally be free?

*Nancy Waller is from Titusville, FL. She is in Ms. McCall's ESUBA class at  
GCF.*

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## Gift of Love

You're in my heart, you're in my soul.  
I love you more than you'll ever know.  
I'm so tired, I want to sleep,  
But with one cry you give me strength.  
I pick you and hold you tight, in my arms you'll be alright.  
I sing you a song and rock you to sleep,  
With you in my arms I sit and think.  
How you've changed my life in a wonderful way.  
Now I look forward to everyday.  
So thank you Lord.....  
Up above.....  
For sending me this gift of love.

*Cynthia Valerio is happily married with four children. Mario, Nathaniel, Tomas Jr. and Marissa. She is a student of North West Florida State College, enrolled in the Even Start program.*

## Mommy

My dear, sweet mommy how could I ever say  
How much I grieve over not being there for your day.  
That special moment you were called home  
To sit right by Jesus on his heavenly throne.  
  
You waited and waited, bearing the pain.  
Jesus came to your rescue and called out your name.  
He said my dear, sweet daughter you don't have to fight.  
He closed your eyes and turned off the lights.  
  
Letting you go is so hard for me,  
Yet I know that one day with you I will be.  
With these words I send you my love  
With gentle sweet kisses to heaven above.

Know that you're living deep in my heart.  
I know with you there we're never apart.  
My dear, sweet mommy may you rest in peace  
And know, one sweet day, that your daughter will greet you.

*Angela Shepherd is an aide for PC Support Services under the leadership of Mrs. Jackson-Orange at Broward Correctional Institution. She is proud mother of two: Andrea and De'Anthony Shepherd.*

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## **Learning**

L= letting others help you  
E= expectations that will see you through  
A= ambition to keep going  
R= remembering your knowledge keeps growing  
N= never give up on yourself  
I= intelligence is not on a bookshelf  
N= necessary to see things through  
G= giving up is not something you want to do

Learning all you can while you have the chance will give you self esteem that will truly last. Don't let the past failures and pain hold you back. Keep your head up high and your self esteem will stay in tack. Don't let what others say affect your day. Remember, you can make it; you know the way. So when you're feeling discouraged and don't believe you can go on, encourage someone else and this will give you the strength to hold on. Remember you can't learn everything in just one day so don't give up, you truly know the way!

*Tammy Fairman Deleon is devoted to learning and teaching others. She enjoys helping others. Tammy is currently enrolled in Commercial Art Technology at Broward Correctional Institution.*

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**Did You Ever Notice?**

Did you ever notice?  
How life passes by in a whirl.  
How one day you'll be flying along with the birds.  
Did you ever notice?  
That everyone sees things in a different way.  
How some never even see the light of day.  
Did you ever notice?  
I bet you didn't,  
Because by the time you do,  
You'll find yourself turning around and saying  
"I'll make life the best I can, before I hit the forbidden".

*Katelyn Crumbley is a student at Fscj South Campus ABE Program. Her tutor is Ms. Perez.*

### **Why Me?**

Daddy, why me?  
I need my soul to feel free  
Why do you touch me like that?  
I hid from you under dirty clothes, as I sat  
I hear your footsteps, I start to weep  
In the darkness you search and you reach

Daddy, just let me be  
Only my eyes you can see  
Daddy, please. Why me?  
As he pulls my underwear down  
I'm pinned to the ground  
Daddy, don't! Why me?  
As I feel you violate

I cry as pain rips through my undeveloped body  
Daddy, please stop! Why me?  
As he walks out of his child's door

He sees her bleeding on the floor  
“Your mom will be in to clean you up”  
She hits me, and gives me a big lump  
“Damn it! You didn’t please him!”  
Is all I ever heard as my sight went dim

Daddy, why me?  
I’m your baby girl at the precious age of 10  
“Because I love you baby”, with a big wide grin  
I cry myself to sleep  
At age 38, I can still feel Daddy creep  
Daddy, why me?

*Sherri Givens is a strong woman still trying to recover from her past. She is enrolled in the GED class at Broward Correctional Institution. She teacher is Ms. John-Pierre.*

## Choices

Sometimes the wounds  
From life’s lessons run deep,  
But once the lesson has been learned,  
The victory is ours to keep.

The lessons get bigger,  
The consequences get steeper,  
The things you lose,  
The pain runs much deeper.

As I fight the battles,  
From the pain within,  
It’s so much easier  
When I let God step in.

We have to reach down  
To our core and choose.

Don't take it lightly,  
We have so much to lose.

So start with today.  
Do the next right thing.  
Just wait and you'll see  
The peace it will bring!

Life can be beautiful  
We can feel joy in each day,  
Or we can choose to waste it,  
Be that as it may.

*Tracy Johnson is currently incarcerated at Broward Correctional Institution. She is serving a 5 year sentence and has realized that life is easier when you make positive choices.*

### **Who Would Cry**

Who would cry for the little boy  
Who sings a song alone.  
Who would cry for the little boy  
The one who has no home.

Who would cry for the little boy  
Who sits and mopes around.  
Who would cry for the little boy  
Who never made a sound.

Who would cry for the little boy  
A man he tried to be.  
Who would cry for the little boy  
Who lives inside of me.

Who would cry for the little boy  
Who never had a friend.

Who would cry for the little boy  
The boy who became a man.

*Michael Hill is a student at WTI. He loves reading, writing, singing, and playing the piano. He spends most of his time doing homework and taking care of his mother.*

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## Fear

Fear is a feeling that you have inside.  
Fear is something you cannot hide.  
Fear stays and it goes.  
Fear comes from somewhere no one knows.  
Fear is darkness, fear is light.  
Fear haunts you in the daytime and also at night.  
I fear for my life when I'm out in the streets.  
I fear for those who have nothing to eat.  
I fear for places that have hurricanes, earthquakes and storms.  
I fear for little babies that are recently born.  
Fear is something you cannot see.  
God said in the Bible, "You should fear no one but me".

*Rosalind Ruffin is a mother of 2: Nateria and Curteria. She is also a grandmother of Jacobya and Samuel Jr. Rosalind loves to write to express herself.*

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## Missing You

I lost you, but I win everything from you.  
I cry over your departure, but you live in my soul.  
You hurt me, but I don't remember the sadness.  
I can't believe that you have gone so soon.  
I can't imagine that I'm not going to see you again.  
Now you are free; I can see your star shining in the sky.  
I remember every smile, every joke,

Every good thing you taught me.  
I miss you, MB

I have written this in memory of my friend who died in Haiti as a result of the earthquake on Jan. 12, 2010.

*Gaetane Philemon is a Haitian lady who lives in Immokalee, FL. Her family has been here for a year. She is a student at iTECH in Immokalee, FL.*

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### **His Love**

Like a beautiful sun He shines  
Illuminating every corner  
Of my mind.  
And I am free,  
No matter where my body may be.  
His love.

Like a single flower, He grows,  
In a field of despair  
He is hope.  
And I am at peace,  
No matter how lonely my spirit may be.  
His love.

Like the laughter after a smile,  
From the eyes and heart  
Of a child.  
And all sadness will cease  
No matter how burdened my soul may be.  
His love.

Like in the beginning, and in the end,  
There will be no enemies,  
Only friends.  
And we will all be complete,  
No matter what your sins may be.

His love.

*Pamela Quarles has been a Florida resident for 7 years. She enjoys video games, roller coasters, and rock music. She is a student of Hillsborough County Adult Education Program.*

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### **Change with Me**

Even though I'm in love with you,  
A part of me is afraid.

At times I have to watch what I say,  
For fear that you might take things the wrong way.

When things get heated, you lash out at me.  
My make-up hides what the aftermath might be.

It hurts at times when I try to stand strong,  
Then you apologize because you know you are wrong.

I can't take anymore of this pain;  
It is time for things to change.

If you love me like you say then be a real man;  
Respect me enough not to raise your hands.

Violent relationships lead to one thing...  
You behind bars and me in the grave

Our souls are intertwined and our hearts as one  
Let the past be forgotten; what's done is done

Let's make this change together and start anew.  
My love is for my one and only, which is you.

I respect you as my husband, so please respect me as your wife.



Stop breaking me down with violence and build me up in life.

I pray that we will be together from this day until the end,  
But let's make that change together and stop the violence.

I love you with all my heart and with you is where I want to be  
I respect you as the man you are...

So please, make that change with me.

*Jennifer Distelhurst is a single mother of two daughters Mariah and Jazmine. She is a student in Mr. Amos' Commercial Art Technology class at Broward Correctional Institution.*

*Personal Story:*

### **If I Were the President of My Country**

Being the president of one's country requires many responsibilities. As president of your country, you have to understand and be aware about what is going on in it, what the people need, and what things the country is suffering from.

As the president of my country, I would be focused on three main problems that my country and my people are suffering from. Those three main problems are corruption, crime and the economy. Take corruption for example. To fight corruption, I will have to enforce the laws that are already written in the Constitution of the Republic, which our government has obviously forgotten about.

Crime is another problem in our community. Our people are afraid and tired of this violence. I will try to implement new

laws that will protect our society against this problem. One of these laws could be to set up a death sentence to those who are not afraid of shooting or killing another person just to take away the other person's acquisitions. I understand that no one has the right to take away anybody's life, but if you are going to kill without any reason, you are going to be punished by law. Consequently, bad people are going to think twice before doing bad things to others.

Being the president of one's country is not an easy job. As the president of the country, you have to watch over its economy. The economy of my country is a bad situation. People, especially the lower class, work very hard--about sixty hours a week-- to be able to afford food, pay the bills, and pay rent, and sometimes they do not have enough. To solve this, or at least make it better, I will have to assemble many meetings with the representatives of each state to see and analyze what we can do to bring more opportunities of employment to those places where there is not enough work. I will have to meet with other countries' representatives to get good negotiations that will benefit my country and my people, such as giving them visas to go overseas to explore other job opportunities in other countries.

I understand that for many new elected presidents, it is not easy to change many things that the last president left behind, but if you want to be the first head of your country, you need to man up and become serious to make changes for the future of your country.

*Marvin Reyes is a GED student at Lorenzo Walker Institute of Technology.*

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## **Winning Even When You're Losing**

Who's a winner? One that takes on a challenge and endures to the end. A winner is one that says, I can and I will when others say you can't and you won't. A true winner at heart gets up after

he's fallen and bruised his knees. A true winner gives his all when there is nothing left to give. A true winner instills hope in those running the race with him. A true winner remains on the course so that he may obtain the prize.

*William Wallace, After 8 years of incarceration, has come to believe losing what we feel is essential, is actually gaining what is truly essential, that we may possess the ability to exceed above our failures. Prison has given his life a new meaning and he's thankful for this life changing experience that the life of crime led me to.*

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## **My Christmas Vacation**

I started my Christmas vacation by packing all of my clothes, sending emails and making phone calls to my family and friends. The next day I was ready to drive to Orlando. My drive to Orlando was great; there weren't many cars on my travel day. I arrived in Orlando just in time for dinner. The second day I was so excited; my whole day was planned for me. My dad made me a nice breakfast, and then in the afternoon I hung out with my friend Matt. Matt and I were old friends from high school, and we recently reconnected on Facebook. I met Matt for lunch at T.G.I. Friday's, and we talked about old times.

Christmas Eve was my favorite part of the whole vacation. In the morning, my parents made a very special breakfast. We had pancakes, ham, egg and cheese omelets, and a specialty coffee. In the afternoon I met up with some more friends that I also found on Facebook. Their names are Amanda, Ruth and Desiree. These girls were my old neighborhood friends.

Christmas Day I woke up at eight-thirty and went straight towards the coffee pot. I was so excited to see what everyone was going to get for Christmas. My family and I do things differently for opening presents: we all have to give a gift to someone else after we are finished opening one. I got everything on my list this year. My best gift was my new travel bag. This was a great gift for me because I travel a lot.

Saturday was a fun day for me; my parents took me ice skating at U.C.F. I haven't skated in four years. My dad was really amazed I could skate. After I was worn out from ice skating, my step brother Alex showed me a really cool ice slide! This slide was so addicting, so we were on it until closing. I was really happy with my Christmas vacation, being reunited with my old friends and having some good quality time with my family. This is what the holiday season is all about. I hope you find this adventure exciting and uplifting.

*Jay Stone is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, Florida. His teacher is Rhonda Currier.*

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## **Realization**

Perfect, we will never be. We must learn to accept others as we accept ourselves. For the person next to you is a brother. Though we do not acknowledge them as such, the fact of the matter is that we are all formed the same, we all bleed the same, and one day we all must die. Before we learn to accept others, we all must learn to accept ourselves. When we realize that we are not perfect, we will accept those who are not.

*Mario L. is a student enrolled in the Whispering Pines Program at GEOCare.*

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## **A Story About a Six Year Old Girl**

The first thing I remember in my life was the day John Glenn made his first orbit around the earth. It was a very exciting day for me as I sat with my sister Mattie and cousin Shirley in front of our old black and white TV set. My eyes were glued to the screen. I saw a man with his whole body covered up from head to toe. His suit was white. All I could see was his face through a piece of glass. To me, he looked like he came from Mars. We saw the rocket with the space shuttle take off, and suddenly, while it was

flying up in the air, we heard Shirley yelling, “the house is on fire, get out of the house now!”

Shirley, Maddie and I ran fast as we could until we reached the big, old Oak tree. It was about a quarter mile from the house. I didn't tell anyone but one of my sneakers was missing. The firemen came on a big, red truck. The house was already burnt so badly. The house could not be saved. I don't know how the fire department knew about the fire. They must have seen the smoke. We did not know anything about a telephone in 1962 in Hermanville, Mississippi.

When the fire was over, we went back to the house. We had lost everything we owned except what we had on. Then Shirley said, Kattie Mae, where is your other shoe?” I didn't remember I didn't have it on. I didn't care. All I wanted was my hula-hoops. You see, I had three of them. They were made of plastic for twirling about the body by movement of the body. I had a blue one, a yellow one and a red one. I was so, so, so, good at putting them on my arms and waist or even neck and legs at the same time and hooping. And I didn't drop them. I could put two of them on part of my body and keep them hooping.

Ok! Ok! I know where the other shoe was. I ran out of my shoe running from the fire. Maddie found the shoe. She called Shirley and they were laughing so hard until I had to go see what was up. I laughed when I saw it. It was burnt and looked like a dried up prune. I was a girl size seven shoe and at the time I was only 6 years old.

*Kattie Mae Harris is a student of the Alachua County Library District's Literacy Program. Her tutor's name is Len Ringel and they have been paired together since August 2009.*

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## **I Was Born**

I was born on June 16, 1982. After I was born, mom and dad separated. I never had a dad I could talk to about different things. My brother Tavaris and I would talk about everything. I also have a sister who lived with my grandmother. I would go over to my grandmother's house everyday as a little boy and although my grandmother would try to teach me right from wrong and explain to me about the things of God, I still did everything I wanted to do. I am grateful for what she taught me.

At the age of seven I played optimist football. I really enjoyed it. I was the running back and I was great at it. I loved school. I was very smart. My favorite subject was mathematics. I also loved to go bike riding with my little brother Tavaris, Keith and Robert, my two childhood friends. Unfortunately, December 26, 1991, all those things stopped when I was hit by a car doing what I loved to do: ride my bike. After the accident I was in a coma for maybe two weeks. When I came out I couldn't talk, walk or eat. I ate out of a feeding tube through my stomach. I went to physical therapy. I had to start my life over and learn everything all over again as a baby. I began to do everything again slowly. It is through the grace of God that I am still here because the doctors had given up on me, but God didn't and I am grateful.

By the age of eighteen, I got into a little trouble. This was my first and last time getting in to any trouble. That one incident was a holdback for me: it was trying to hold me back from achieving my goals and fulfilling God's plan for my life. I could never understand how people could live life with no dreams, goals or faith because the dreams I have in me are going to come to past someday. I believe it before you know it. Although it seems like I have been waiting forever, but I know it will come true.

Since I was about weight years old I have been a lover of music, but especially for rap music. I also love freestyle rap. I learned to write my own lyrics. Although after the accident, I could never spell very well, but all my life I continued to never give up. I keep to myself. I'm going to be a successful person. I am young

man who loves to rap Gospel and loves to act. I also want to become a business man.

I am blessed with two children: Elijah and Eugene. My oldest son Elijah, lives in another town and Eugene lives with me. I don't get to spend a lot of time with Elijah because he lives with his mother, but some weekends and holidays I get to visit him. My youngest boy lives with me, so we are always together, but I love them both the same. On December 30, 2003, I was married to Jeannette. I always talk to my wife about my dreams. She tells me she prays all my dreams come true and I tell her that "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence of things not seen." Until then I do different things. I talk to different people about my goals and everyday life. I've been doing it for years. I love to go to the old folks homes and talk to the elderly about God. I do it also in public when I am doing my daily things. This is just something I really love to do. It really means a lot to me. I feel at peace and it does my heart good when I talk to people about God and about life.

*Eugene McElwee is a student at Project L.E.A.D. /Miami Dade Public Library.  
His tutor is Joyce Groves.*

### **Me, Myself and Ichigo**

Like most people in this world, I have a demon. Ichigo Kurosaki is a teen just like me, but his demon is a little bit different. His demon has to deal with Tokyo and its spirit problems, having to fight to keep it safe for all the spirits that wonder around its city street. Despite the evils (Hollows) best effort, Ichigo still prevails and overcomes his demon and moves on with his life protecting other realm like Wako Mundo and the Souls Society. Well now that we have covered the basics I think it is time to move on.

When I was a little bit younger than 13 years old, I found out something I didn't want to know, I have to pass school to get a good job and be able to live on my own with help from my mom and dad. It was around the same age that Ichigo found out he had to help Tokyo with his powers. My powers are nowhere near as

complex as his; my powers are to be used to help me in school (The power of Knowledge). With school getting harder and harder as time goes on, it's hard to keep track of what you need to learn. That is what I think my demon is (school getting harder). The only question I have is how I will deal with my demon.

Fight, that's how I will deal with my demon, fight for my right to get a good job, to get a good place to live, and to keep food on my table. Ichigo had to do the same thing, he must fight to keep Tokyo safe, but there are obstacles that stand in his way just as mine. Ichigo's obstacle is the lost souls (hollows, demons) he must fight that keep getting stronger, just like school is getting harder. So how am I going to deal with the long and tiring fight ahead of me? I prepare, arming myself with the willingness to learn and the courage to push forward, so that many may follow in my footsteps.

What must I do? I must win this battle, this fight to the death so to speak. I must construct my own way to do so, like going to (Daytona State College) to rip a gaping hole in the enemy I call school. There are very few ways I can do that though, I must keep myself up on time to get to school and not sleep in. Sleeping in when you are trying to go to school is not a good idea (maybe I should stop sleeping in). Funny thing is Ichigo had the same dilemma (sleeping in), but he got over it. Now that I am working on getting over my demons I think I can sleep a little better at night, knowing I am on my way to a better further.

Well my loyal friends, I think it is time we let this story come to a conclusion. The hollows (demons) have been defeated and all the fights are over; it is time to rest and let the next day's light wake us bright and happy, willing to go on with the day and do it all over again. The day that you do not get up on time and you don't feel like facing the day, just call it a sick day!

*Zachrey Dawson is a student at ABE Language Arts. His tutor is S Wallace.*



My name is Tori Rawlins and I'm 16 years old. When I was 15, my mom took me out of school because I wasn't doing very well and I became very unhappy. One day my aunt came and talked to me about returning to school. I wasn't sure if I wanted to go back to school. What teenager wants to be in school? I decided to talk to my mom about it. If I decided to go back to school, I would have to move from Jacksonville, which is where I was currently living with my mom, to Lake City with my aunt.

At first she told me she didn't want me moving, but I told her this is what I wanted to do. She told me she was proud of me no matter what I chose to do. At this point, I decided to move to Lake City with my aunt and enroll in the Columbia County Adult Education Program. Now that I'm here, I am working really hard towards my GED and I also have a job doing what I love. I'm doing well in school, and I'm happy with my life. I'm determined to become a successful massage therapist after receiving my GED. This is my story.

*Tori Rawlins is 16 years old and is the middle child of 3. She is enrolled in the Columbia County Adult Education Program in Lake City, Florida.*

## **Why I Came to Florida**

I came to Florida for several reasons. First, my wife and I were having problems, so I thought I would come down to be with my family. Another reason I am here is because my mother was having some medical problems and I wanted to help her and my stepfather. Finally, getting a GED diploma and finishing school has always been a goal of mine and I knew being here with my family's support would help me do that.

Being with my family is very important to me right now. Helping out my mother and stepfather with their medical problems is the right thing to do. Being here with them also gives me the chance to spend some quality time with my daughter Bethany. Bethany and I go to the same school; she is in fifth grade and I go to GED class. The great thing is that we get to have breakfast and lunch together.

Now that I am in Florida, I am finally getting the chance to finish my education at the same elementary school I went to as a child. When I was younger, I did not have the chance to get the education I should have. My Mom and Dad were not the greatest parents. They separated when I was ten and I went to live with my Dad. I was not going to school and half the time, I was just running the streets and hanging around with the wrong crowd. Soon, at thirteen, I was locked up and stayed in the Marianna Boy's Home until I was eighteen. I never really got the chance to be a kid.

Now, I am thirty-six, but I finally know that I am on the right track. After I get my GED, my goal is to get a skilled trade like Electrician. I also would like to own my own business someday. Now, to earn money, I clean houses and offices and someday would like to own a cleaning business with my own crew. With the help of my family, my school, and my commitment to reaching my goals, I know I will be successful.

*David E. Weese is in the GED program and hopes to earn his diploma this year. He and his daughter, Bethany, both attend classes at Lealman Elementary.*

## **This is Me**

In my eyes, I am a beautiful black queen. I have my own look and my own unique style, there is no one like me because, this is me. There is not a person in the world that can bring me down, because I know what I can accomplish. I have six children and I get them up every morning for school, five days a week and I do it alone. I also attend Adult Education classes to get my GED because, this is me.

Now tell me what twenty-seven year old that can do that? My children's ages range from nine to one years of age. They drive me crazy at times, but they are mine and I have to raise them because, this is me. On the weekends is when I get my time, they are gone with grandparents, godparents, and aunties so I get some alone time with my boyfriend, Antonio. If he is working, I hang

out with my home girls The Dixie Chicks: Shalonda, Temprest, Ebony, Teroscher, Renita and Shatile. We go out to the clubs, go shopping or we just hang out. On Sunday my job begins with the children, but I don't complain because, this is me.

*Trishina Cooper has four brothers and five sisters and her parents are Patricia Dunning and Roscoe Cooper. She enjoys shopping and hanging out with friends, but is currently solely focused upon earning her GED.*

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## **Life Experiences Really Do Make You Stronger**

When I was a young girl, I did not have a normal life like most children my age. Like most children, my parents were divorced. I never knew who my father was. When my parents got divorced, a judge ordered my father to have no contact with us for as long as he or we lived. So, I never knew who my real father was until I turned 19 years old, but even then, I only got to spend two days with him before he passed away. So I never had the chance to get to know him.

My mother remarried a man whom at first seemed to be a very kind, gentle and loving person and he became our stepfather. As I got older, my mother became really sick and passed away on Mother's Day in 1976. After her death, our step father was awarded custody of us children. The four of us were left at the hands of a monster. We were abused by this man in more ways than you could imagine. There was physical abuse as well as mental, verbal and sexual. This is the same man who claimed to love our mother and then when she died, took her insurance money and did lord only knows what with. Instead of giving her a proper burial, she is buried in a county cemetery with people under her and on top of her.

I was only eleven years old when my mother died and finding someone to listen to what was going on in our home was hard to do; no one wanted to acknowledge it. I thought I was getting the better end of the stick by getting out of the situation, even if it was only to stay the weekend with my oldest sister. Even then, those were few and far between; it wasn't until I got older that I learned that the only way I could go and spend time

with her was if she paid my step father to take me for a weekend here and there. He made her pay him to take any of us for a short time and this was the only way we could see our sister.

This man is now serving a three year life time sentence in prison for what he did to us as children. Out of the abuse came two children that were born to two children and I am one of those. I may have been raised in abuse, but I did not let it follow me. I am a stronger person today from it and I have been told I am a person with a big heart. My story is not meant to make you feel sorry for me, it's meant to show you that people can come from a bad situation and become someone special. I always tell my children and grandchildren, "Your life is what you make it." Only you have control over who you are and what you become. Make the best of what you have and turn it into something positive as you only get one life. There is no starting over. Life experiences can make you a stronger person.

*Zena Reville is a 45 year old mother of 4 children. She is a grandmother to six (5 boys and 1 girl) and is married to a wonderful man and is loving life. She is currently enrolled in the Adult Education program seeking her GED.*

## **Student Testimonial and Speech of Gratitude**

My name is Nancy Tamayo-Galvez. I am married and have a beautiful seven-year-old son named Jose Manuel.

My childhood was difficult and my life has had many ups and downs. I was born in Mexico to a mother who only had a 2nd grade education and could not read or write. My father left us when I was three.

We lived in a house with my grandmother, mother, brother and six others. My grandmother, mother, brother and I all slept in one bed. My mother worked every day: morning and night. It was my grandmother who watched and cared for us. When she died I was six years old. I had to take care of the house and my little

brother.

When my brother and I went to school, I continued to work. Before school I would get up at 4:30 in the morning and sell fruits and vegetables. I would clean houses after school. All the money that I made, I gave to my mother. She left us when I was just 17.

When I came to this country, I reunited with my father. I lived with him and his new family in Chicago. I knew no English. I remember one day I was hungry and found a can with the word tuna. I opened the can and fixed it with mayonnaise. It tasted funny but I was hungry and ate it anyway. Later that evening, when everyone was home, I offered them some of the tuna I made. They laughed at me because I ate tuna flavored cat food. I knew then I better learn English but did not know where to go.

I moved to Florida next and began to work at a plant nursery with only Spanish speakers. I did not have the need to learn English because I lived in a Spanish speaking area too.

When I was 25 my son was born. He made me so happy. Everything was good until he entered school. I could not talk to the teachers and I was scared that I would not be able to help my son with his homework. Education is very important to me. I did not want to be like my mother. She was unable to help me in school and did not value education. I know as a mother we have to show our children the importance of an education so they can succeed. I just didn't know how.

I knew my life had to change. I knew I must learn English and that's when I became part of the Parent Power Family Literacy Academy. I heard about this program because it was at my son's school. It has changed my life! The most important decision I made was to take English classes with Mrs. Julia Clark. My teacher has taught me many things. I learned English but most important, I learned that I CAN change my life and my son's life for the better.

Now, I volunteer in my son's 1st grade class at Freedom Shores Elementary. I continued to study very hard and I passed my G.E.D.

I dreamed of going to college. With the support of my Parent Power Program and the Volunteer USA Foundation, I received a scholarship to Keiser University and I plan to become a medical assistant. My dream is coming true.

I am here to say that while everything in our lives may not be easy, with a lot of effort, hard work and opportunities, you can achieve your goals and dreams.

I would like to thank the Parent Power Family Literacy Academy for helping me achieve my goals. I can speak English. I have my GED and now I am going to college! Most importantly, I am a good role model for my beautiful son.

*Nancy Tamayo-Galvez is a mother of one son and is a recent graduate from the Parent Power Family Literacy Academy in Boynton Beach.*

## **A Love Story**

*One heart, one love: learning.*

Living in this world can be a hard task sometimes. People are always struggling in order to succeed, but one thing is sure: there has to be a road to success. Well, my Godmother showed me this road. Here's the story.

Once upon a time in a poor suburb in Haiti, I had the opportunity to live with one of the greatest people I have ever met hitherto: a poor, illiterate, and courageous elderly woman who succeeded in life by trading books. She was seventy and could not write her name. The fact is she could not go to school because she was a girl. She lived long enough to suffer from her illiteracy; it left her feeling as though she was missing something. She swore to

herself to at least be able to write her name before she died and made me help her every day. She died the same year she wrote her name and was proud to be able to do so before she passed away. She left me, a teen, with this message: Give your heart to school and make it your girlfriend.

Five years elapsed after this story when I lost all I had: my mother. I was now alone in a cold world. I was depressed and my self-esteem was diminishing. I was angry at everyone and everything including Jehovah. I was down, period, almost to the point that I was going to vanish and maybe release myself and join my mother in a better place. However, when I remembered my sweet godmother, I recalled our souvenirs—her signature—and her courage inspired me. I heard her voice whispering to me: “School has to be your first love,” and my heart smiled.

From that day on, I embraced life again. I was not scared of this cold and savage life anymore, for I had the key to open every door. Far from taking learning as my sole girlfriend, I have now married her because she saved my life by giving me hope again. Sure we have our problems sometimes as every other couple; however, what is certain is that the attraction and the magic between us keep us tied together no matter what. By this relation, I am sure success is going to accompany me even when the world tumbles down. We belong together until the end of time. It is simply a true love story.

I breathe learning in.

I breathe success out.

*Krevin Charles is in Brewster Technical Center's ESOL Academic Skills class.*

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### **All Things Are Possible If You Only Believe**

There is a dream that I have always wanted to achieve. Of all the wishes and purposes, I will make it a reality. Out of the

many steps that I will have to take, I have great faith that I will pass the test and get selected to become a professional model. Though this is my biggest dream, I will not neglect my education. I will go through the highs and lows in getting to the highest level of learning. To become an educated, professional model is not easy. But it will be because I will put my whole body, mind, and soul into it. I know that nothing is impossible. If there is a will, there is a way. One of these days, you will see me in the magazine, on television and other media. When you see or hear about me, remember that “All things are possible if you only believe.”

*Aime Scott is a student at Adult and Career Ed., Key West.*

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### **My Vote Counts**

I vote because it is the right of every citizen in the country. Other people don't because they don't like certain candidates who are running for the election. Some people don't vote because they have seen many politicians do not 'walk the talk'. They don't keep the promises they made during the election. After the election, they forget about those promises and the people who took time to go to the voting station to vote for them. I vote because my vote counts. Each vote can make a difference in the election as to who will win and who will lose. Because I vote, I won't complain if my party doesn't win. Likewise, because I vote, I will be happy when my party wins.

*Jean Rolby Louis is a student at Adult and Career Ed in Key West.*

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### **The Bridge**

In the beginning I never knew, from game to game, in a child like manner, I grew. Through various seasons you become known and introduced. I never knew a love like this. In Him is Eternal Life that truly exists. From faith to faith I'm purposed to



stand. No matter where I go and what I do, I'm in your hands. With the knowledge and wisdom you've given me, through trials and temptations, I've grown spiritually. Though once separated and now reconnected you are "THE BRIDGE" that has heaven and earth connected.

*Christopher Dunlop is a single father of two children: Christopher and Savion. He currently received his High School Diploma, through Adult Community Education in Tallahassee, Florida. He is on his way to college and headed in the path that GOD leads me in.*

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### **My Name is Gwenda Gibson**

My name is Gwenda Gibson. I'm twenty-five years old with three children. Responsibilities are a major part of my life. Living my life can be hectic at times. Living my life can be confusing at times. My life has brought me a lot of pain and suffering to my heart. My determination has me fighting for hope. Hoping brings me to reaching my goal.

Viewing my life and other women's lives I feel I missed out on my childhood. It should not have been the way it was. Wondering why my mother let that happen to me. So should I make changes in my life, or should I let the past build my future for me? Hurting memories can destroy your spirit if you let them. I have held on to these memories, which tell the story of my life. Letting go and fighting the battle makes me more of a conqueror. So, ask me why should I make changes in my life? How do you view my children? I see them as beautiful creations.

These creations are full of love for me. Love that my life has been missing since birth. God finally gave me something to live for. So, why am I making changes in my life? My children need to be happier. My joy needs to be found and not lost. My heart needs completion. People always doubted me. Some people not related to me give me encouragement, which was needed. So,

why make changes to my life? Why make changes to your life? To live life.

*Gwenda Gibson is a twenty-five year old single mother who attends GED Classes at Manatee Technical Institute in Bradenton, Florida.*

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## **The Ruby of the Caribbean**

A country rich in culture and tenacity was discovered by navigator Christopher Columbus in December, 1495. This country has not slept since 1804, when Jean Jacques Dessalines and his army won her freedom. This country is Haiti.

Now, the Ruby of the Caribbean is the trash of the Caribbean. Haiti was destroyed by a terrible earthquake measuring 7.0 on the Richter Scale on January 12, 2010. She is a poor country defenseless, helpless, with nowhere to turn. Thousands are dead. Families are gone. Houses have collapsed, leaving behind multitudes of homeless and starving peoples in the streets.

Haiti has been blessed by the power of love from God and the international community which is doing all it can to rebuild the beautiful island. Little by little birds built their nests, and step by step Haiti will one day stand up again.

“L’union fait la force” means “united makes power.” That slogan gives Haitians hope and courage to achieve a better future. Haiti is like a crystal plate, broken into a million pieces, but Haiti will be put together through donations and the assistance of the international community. The Ruby of the Caribbean will be reborn and rise again.

We are Haitians. We are born soldiers. We will never give up fighting for what we believe in. Haiti is our mother. She got hurt, so let all of her children put their heads, hands, and hearts together to save her.

We are unable to do anything for those who have died; they are already with God in heaven. They will be in our memories; their names will always be blessed. God does not give a country more than it can handle.

Haiti, my country, in my heart you will always be the Ruby of the Caribbean.

*Regine M. Dessalines is a student at Immokalee Technical Center. Her tutor is Michele Antonia.*

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### **The Weird Noise in my Backyard**

It was a hot night during the summer in July 2009. My husband, my son and I were sitting in the living room watching T.V.

Our dog, Caramel, was outside in the back yard. Around 9:30 p.m., Caramel started to bark in a different way. A few minutes later my husband went outside through the sliding doors from the living room to the back porch. He heard a weird but very loud noise coming from outside,

He approached Caramel and surprise!!!!!!! There it was, a six foot long rattlesnake, ready to get inside; the snake was really defiant to my husband. Immediately we moved Caramel to the garage to avoid any bites,

This kind of snake is one of the most poisonous in Florida. The loud noise came from his rapidly shaking rattle on its tail. The age of a rattlesnake is measured by the number of rings on the tail, and the one in my back yard had 13 rings.

We decided to call 911, so the police took the snake.

*Ruth Hernandez is a student at Flagler Technical Institute. Her tutor is Martha Doherty.*

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## **In Haiti**

In Haiti I had no work, nothing to do. In Haiti if you have money and contacts, you can find work.

I left Haiti and went to Santo Domingo, then St. Maarten, then St. Thomas. I lived in St. Maarten for 1 and 1/2 years. I cried every day.

In Miami my cousin told me to go to school, she drove me to school. In Haiti I went to school for only 3 years. I liked the school in Miami.

In Miami there are many people speaking Creole. In Tallahassee I must speak English. I like English. I like reading and writing. When I go to the doctor, I must speak English. I try. Sometimes I don't understand when people speak English, but I try. Now my English is better, that makes me very happy. In my work I use English – everybody speaks English.

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

## **Tutoring Can Make A Difference**

A tutor is someone who extends or gives his or her time to help you. A person usually acquires help from a tutor when they are weak in an area. Tutoring can make a difference in enhancing your studies and give you a different outlook on how to solve different problems.

Tutoring has done a lot for me. I was can now read my Bible and Sunday School lesson and I was able to teach vacation Bible School. Now God has called me into the ministry. I am so glad I can read my Bible.

My tutor Bobbie works with me with different books. Bobbie and I have solved a lot of different problems. Also, Lori has been a great assistant, and I thank her also.

*Lonzy Harrison is a student of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County in Tallahassee.*

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### **I am Free**

I could not have lived during times of slavery because so many things happened that were unfair. We were beaten, and a lot of other things happened to us blacks. We were put in jail for no reason at all. The men were accused of rape. We were sexually abused. Mothers had to give their daughters to white men when they were up in age.

There were a lot of bad things happening to us blacks, for just being black. It was sad. They didn't want us to have voting rights. There were a lot of things we couldn't do.

I would have fought back. I would have refused to obey. I would have run away from my master. I would have been killed. I would not be here on earth if I was back there in those days.

I am glad I live in 2009 instead of the times of slavery because in this time I am free.

*Neltrecia Jones is a student of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County in Tallahassee.*

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### **Back-to-School Party**

My name is Eridell Hill. I enjoy helping my family and friends and neighbors' children.

A few years ago, I helped some family and friends by giving them a back-to-school party for their children.

The party was held in the clubhouse of my apartment complex. The clubhouse was decorated with bright colors and pink flamingos.

My daughter and I prepared all the food for the party. We gave the children party favors. We also gave them school supplies such as pencils and pencil sharpeners, folders with paper and stickers.

We had the time of our life. We talked, danced, and always said a prayer, whether it's a gathering, a party or a special meeting. They all thanked me. Also, the children thanked me for the party. I was glad that I had this party. I was glad to see all of them happy.

*Eridell Hill is a student of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County in Tallahassee.*

## **Remember to Work Hard**

After reading Paula Deen's book, *It Ain't All About the Cookin'* I realized that I am living proof that the American dream is alive. You can be whatever you want to be. You have to work hard for the American dream. You have to take charge of your life and don't let someone else choose it for you. Do it for yourself, and you can be whatever you want to be.

Every day I try to improve my reading. Remember to work for what you want in life. Never underestimate what you can do. If

someone else can do it, so can you. I feel like I am doing better every day and I feel good about myself. I have also learned how to accept pain and disappointments as a part of life, and to see life from other people's perspectives.

Learn how to show enthusiasm, even when you don't feel like it. It is also important to not waste time grieving over past mistakes. Learn from them and move on. Become the most positive and enthusiastic person you know!

*Blanche Collins is a student of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County in Tallahassee.*

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### **My Tallahassee “Carpe Diem” Experience**

In Korea, people often say that you are presented with three big chances in your lifetime. “Maybe I'd better be prepared since I don't know when and where I will face one of them,” I have said to myself. This is why I started to learn English years ago. I would watch videos, read books, and listen to news in English almost every day.

One of my three life-time opportunities came when I was given the chance to come to America for about a year. So when I got here with my family, I was hoping that I would be able to find something special and rewarding having to do with English.

Fortunately, I got a chance to be a volunteer reporter with the Tallahassee Senior Center. Rosetta Stone, who is the editor of the *Golden Review*, the official newsletter of the Senior Center, had me participate in activities at the Center. I took classes in pottery, tai chi and bridge. I then was able to interview class participants and their teachers in order to write stories about them for the *Golden Review*.

I was impressed that senior citizens are offered so many opportunities in various activities that promote physical and mental health. I found people making friends and enjoying their free time

by creating art works, working out, playing games, and just socializing.

People at the Center were very nice to me and they were eager to be interviewed. What a fun and rewarding way to practice English! I had fun just talking to people, playing bridge, and attempting to do exercises with the people of various ages and backgrounds.

Writing, however, was not so easy for me. It took me days of research in books and on-line to gather background information for my articles. Thanks to the ESOL program of the LeRoy Collins Leon County Public Library, I had a tutor named Jeanne Lancaster. Jeanne helped me enrich my writing through her editing. She tried to help me with whatever I asked of her. I was able to finish my articles before deadlines with her help. I take my hat off to Jeanne.

I'm going back to my country of Korea in two weeks. I will miss so many of the people I have gotten to know and become friends with here in Tallahassee.

I wish them all good health and happiness.

*Eunjeong Han is a student in the ESOL program of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County.*

### **A Perfect Good Woman**

I was a perfect good woman when we first met. I did all the things that you thought was perfect. I cooked, cleaned, and helped pay the bills. I'd even pay his half when he didn't have it. I'd make sure all the children, both his and mine, were dressed and wore the finest clothing. I loved and gave the best of me and in return all you really did was use and verbally abuse me! Called me names, talked down to me! I even tried to leave you, but you would not let me. You tried to hold me back and make things harder for me, you



pretended that you loved me, but deep down inside you were holding me back because you did not want me to move on and continue to be the perfect good woman I am. I broke the cycle, I got away. Good Lord I got away! Sorry to say I came to prison for 2 1/2 years. I left him alone, no more worries with him. My family and I came together when the Judge sentenced me and we did this time together. I will return home to be "A Perfect Good Woman."

*Sandra Jones is from Jacksonville, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ESUBA class at GCF.*

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### **Being In Prison**

Being in prison has broken me down. Things I use to do, I can't do any more. I use to like drinking. I thought that was the best part of my life and the only way to spend my day. I have four kids that I did everything I could for, but that wasn't enough; I still used to party, and drink day and night.

After drinking so much, one day I got in with these girls, and ended up in jail, then to prison with a lot of time. You see, when God wants you to be someone or to make a change, He will intervene in one way or the other. This is when He got my attention, and I finally got it right. This is where I stay day and night, and I get it all the way right.

I know my God is going to open these doors and then my bad dream will be over. My life will begin again with God first, then my children.

*Tammy Hendrix is from Haines City, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ESUBA class at GCF.*

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### **Make-ups**

I'm sorry for what I did to you, what I did that  
broke your heart in two. The trust and Faith you had  
in me, and I just let it be. We'll work everything out, alright!  
When I'm free, you'll be able to count on me.  
I'm sorry, Please forgive me!

I LOVE YOU MOM!

*Ruth Cosme is from Tampa, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ABE III class at GCF.*

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### **Broken Code of Silence**

All these years I've kept quiet, telling myself over and over again, "nobody's going to believe you and no one is going to buy it!" At one point I thought I was going to go insane, I would lay and pray to God asking him, "Why God, did you allow me to endure so much pain?" While I sat and waited for him to answer my prayer, every night, when the lights went out, I would feel someone's hands sliding off my underwear. Deep down inside me there was a little girls' soul who wanted to scream, but all I did was close my eyes really tight and said to myself, "it's all a bad dream."

Ripped of my innocence, pride, and dignity, he got me at my weakest point, when I had no strength and no energy. In this big ol' world lost and confused, I didn't know where to go or who to tell that I had been sexually abused. I would sit and wonder what was the purpose of my birth? A total stranger stepped to me and said "read your bible, it will tell you your life's worth." I started reading and learning about my Heavenly Father from up above, giving him all the thanks and all the glory. Meanwhile, He's showering me with his love. It's time for me to tell my story to the world, about the sexual abuse of the innocent little girl.

Now, since my story has been told I've broken the code of silence, And I must say, I feel so much better being able to talk

about this sexual violence. If there is just one person that I've touched through my story don't thank me, thank God because he made it possible for me to grow and learn from it. With that being said, "I give God Almighty all the praise and all the glory!"

"I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Phil. 4:13

*LaTonya Robinson is from Oviedo, FL she is in Ms. McCall's ABE III class at GCF.*

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### **My First Impression of the U.S.**

I am from Bulgaria. I am a cook in a restaurant in the U.S. And I am studying English as a second language at the library. This is my third year in the U.S. My first impression of the U.S. was a meeting with a staff member in the American Consul in my country. He was very polite and very motivated to help me. He made it very nice for me because I was very nervous and a little afraid.

When I came to the American airport, I had to go to the immigration office. When they understood we didn't speak English, they didn't send us away. They gave me and my husband a man who went with us to my daughter who was outside.

I believe Americans are very polite, kind, and helpful. Three years later, my first impression did not change.

*Todora Koleva is a student in the ESOL program of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County.*

### **Luis Garay Autobiography**

I'm Luis Garay. I was born in Honduras. I came to this country October 29, 1967. My parents had been here since 1964, and my mother sent for me in 1967. I was 16 and a half years old. I came to Miami. My dream was to go into the military and become Secret Service. In 1968, I went to enlist, but since I didn't speak the language, they refused for me to sign up.

I wasn't able to go to high school because I had to work. I didn't really start going to school until 1976. I got my GED in Spanish to obtain a job. When I went to school in 1976, I had a teacher—he was an Italian guy—he suggested to me that I read the newspaper and listen to music and watch TV, and that's how I learned to speak English—by hearing and seeing.

They told me I had to get a GED in Spanish to get a decent job. I don't remember my first job. I had so many jobs, but most of them were in construction. As a matter of fact, I built the building where I work now—the school where I have my present job. I started working at the School Board part-time in 1980 doing security. Then in 1988, I started working full-time.

All of my brothers and sisters went to school except me. I found out that after the age of 16, you didn't have to go to school. My mother and father said I would be able to go to school when I got here, but one week after I got here, I was told I had to go to work. One week after I got here, I was washing dishes at a hotel. I'll never forget that hotel—the Crown Hotel at 41<sup>st</sup> Street and Collins Avenue. I think I made about seven dollars per day.

I got married in 1989. My son was born January 28, 1991. I'm very proud of my son. He just turned 19 and he's in school. He just started in Atlanta in August. I talked to him and told him about doing this tutoring, and he was very happy because he knows I only went to school up to the sixth grade back home. But I'm good in math. I'm so good because it was my favorite subject.

I started with this tutoring in October of 2009. I read about the tutoring in the newspaper. I know how to read, but I want to learn writing. I love to read. When you read, you learn something. For example, I had a book about Kadafi, Fidel Castro, Malcolm X ... I even had a book that my brother gave me from the Marines called "How to Become a Marine." I'm reading a book now about that guy who was freed from prison in South Africa. What was his name? Mandela. I love to read.

## **The Truth about Conceiving**

I often wonder how the human race has managed to exist for so long. There are three reasons I believe that getting pregnant is one of the most challenging goals for a couple to accomplish. Figuring out the right timing for sexual intercourse is crucial, yet very difficult. There are hundreds of factors that have to fall perfectly into place for implantation to occur. Within each cycle, a couple has approximately a 15%-25% chance of conceiving.

First of all, timing sexual intercourse is difficult because most women have irregular cycles, and/or they cannot predict when they ovulate. Sperm must meet the egg in the fallopian tube in order for fertilization to occur, which is why timing is so crucial. A woman's egg is viable for about 72 hours after leaving the ovary, but it's only capable of being fertilized for the first 12-24 hours. Some believe that a man's sperm can live 5-7 days from coitus, but are only capable of fertilizing an egg for 48-72 hours after ejaculation.

Additionally, hundreds of factors must fall into place for implantation to occur. Your brain and pituitary gland have to create the hormones that stimulate egg development. The egg must be of sufficient quality and develop to maturity, which then reaches final maturation if the brain releases a surge of hormones to stimulate such action. Next, follicles in the ovaries must rupture to release the follicular fluid and the egg, which then needs to be picked up by the fallopian tube. Then, sperm must survive their visit in the vagina, enter cervical mucus and swim to the fallopian tube to find the egg and fertilize it. The egg must be able to divide and develop normally so that it can be transported to the uterus, which is where it will expand and hatch out of its shell. Finally,

implantation can then occur when the egg burrows itself in the uterine lining.

To continue, with the number of unexpected pregnancies each year, it might be hard to believe that the odds of getting pregnant each month are fairly low, but it's true. Normally fertile couples have only a 15%-25% chance of conceiving each cycle which is like playing a game of Russian roulette. Also, most fertility specialists won't consider seeing a couple until they've been trying to conceive for at least one year.

In conclusion, getting pregnant is one of the most challenging goals for a couple to accomplish. Timing is everything, a bevy of factors must take place for implementation to occur, and most couples have a minimal chance of conceiving each cycle. In this temporary little world, where contraceptives are extraneous and maladroit, your dream can seem so far out of reach. Every child born is nothing short of a complete miracle, which is why I continually wonder: how has the human race survived for so long?

*Krista Lynn Kockler is a student in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. She accepts the responsibilities of adult education with the fervor and focus undeterred by daily challenges.*

## **The Scariest Day of My Life**

Have you ever woken up thinking, "Ah, another day in paradise," then suddenly realize that you've been thrust into a nightmare?

I started my day off just like any other day by getting up and getting ready for work. Everything was going smoothly and I

was in a good mood. Amazingly, on a Monday, I was excited to go to work. In the past years of chaos in my personal life, work has become my safe place.

A couple hours into my shift I noticed a very suspicious man standing outside the grocery store. The majority of the time he stood right next to the movie machine, all the while eyeing me as a jeweler inspects a precious gem, taking in every detail, facet and carbon fault. With the suspense found as a tempo in a horror film builds, he entered the store continuing to fix his gaze on my every move of my hand and shift in my stance.

I went to the manager and in a hushed whisper said, “Something’s up with the guy, I think he’s going to walk out with a cart full of groceries or something.”

The manager, distracted with his other duties, turned around busy as a school teacher and made eye contact with the man. Content that he had made his point clear to the man, he turned back to me and said, “Just watch him. If you need me, call me.”

The young man walked outside far from my vision, breathing a sigh of relief. I assumed he has left.

Just as my nerves steadied and my breathing returned to normal, I realized the business has slowed down. I had just done about \$1000 in money orders and bill paying services. Unbeknownst to me, he has been lurking in the shadows watching the whole time.

He came back into the store and sauntered towards me, as he pulled a bright orange ski mask over his head. At the moment I humorously thought, “Really? It’s a little late now!” As he stood just a few feet away from me, he pulled a handgun out of his jacket, pointed it directly at me and demanded, “GIVE ME ALL THE MONEY YOU HAVE IN YOUR REGISTER!”

I sat there for a long but slow second, trying not to panic, stumbling while opening my register. I couldn't seem to remember my password, and the longer I took the more he yelled at me. At last, I finally got the drawer open, and I gave him every last bill.

"No cops until I'm gone," he yelled, while shaking the gun directly at me. I was terrified!

Finally, as fast as it all happened, he was gone. The cops were there within minutes, asking hundreds of questions. "What did he look like? What was he wearing? How was he acting?" there were so many questions that I could not think straight. I just wanted to go home to be with my family. I couldn't wait to be in the comfort of my own home, knowing my doors are locked and I'm safe from any crook with a gun.

*Megan Harrell is a student in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. She has a passion for writing that emanates though our classroom like freshly baked brownies.*

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## **My Love Narrative**

Falling in love with someone who brings out a part of me I could never find on my own astonishes me, even now. You are probably wondering what is so great about this man. To begin with, he is my soul mate and everything that I'm not. Because of him I have two of the most amazing step-children. After only a couple of weeks of dating, he proposed to me at least twice a day. I finally accepted on his birthday in 2008. The feelings and emotions this man and these children evoke in me flabbergast me to this day. The love he renders is not narcissistic or self-contained nor is it greedy or virulent. His love for me is like a porch light that has been left on throughout the night. It shines in the darkness and it never dissolves when I need to find my way. In his eyes, he thinks he is the lucky one. This man I have fallen so passionately in love with just so happens to be my soul mate.



When I met Tyler and Destiny it was the most intimidating day of my life. At that time Norman and I were starting to take our relationship to the next level. In my heart I cherished him so much and I could not imagine what would happen if the kids decided they disapproved of me. So, I devoted my time to get acquainted with them, and they loved and accepted me. Don't get me wrong, I have never been a parental figure for any child in my life so I was terrified, but like their father, they love me unconditionally as I do them.

Our children are most certainly two of a kind. We have Tyler who captivates me because he is so tender hearted and altruistic. Then we have Destiny who intrigues me with her tall tales and chicanery. Every day with these children is an exciting new adventure and a learning experience as well.

To sum it all up, “our love is patient and kind. It does not envy or boast nor is it proud. It is not rude or self- seeking nor is it easily angered or frustrated. Our love keeps not one record of all our wrong doings; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things” (1 Corinthians 13: 4 – 5).

*Jennifer Baliles is a student in the GED program at Lehigh Senior High School. She has a passion for her family that motivates her in her drive to achieve her goals.*

## **True Love**

No matter how far the distance, no matter how tired and busy we are, no matter how much time it will take, honey, I'll wait for you for our love's sake. I may not always be here for you, I may not always say “I love you” but in my thoughts, my heart and soul, you will always be my knight in shining armor. There will always be trials and struggles in the road of life. There will always

be songs sang out of tune. There will always be poems written and unread. Honey, your love will always find me waiting even in my deathbed.

*Michele Osterman is a student in the ABE program at Florida State College.*

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## **The Uncommon Common Man by Roger Miller**

Most people believe that working for the county government is a good job that requires a variety of skills to be successful. Granted, they feel that there are better departments than others to work in, but overall, it's a respectable occupation. I've worked for the county for many years now, and more recently as a supervisor. Working as a supervisor requires you to hone all of your skills including working with the public, communicating effectively with your teammates and motivating the people on your crew to be efficient and effective. These skills are critical to being a successful supervisor with the county.

I can recall a time when my skills working with the public were tested. It was a blistering hot summer day in Southwest, Florida. We had to repair an OCD receiving line that had burst in the middle of an upscale neighborhood's golf course. As fate would have it, in the middle of the trickiest part of the repair, one of the residents furiously approached us to reprimand us for ruining her golf game and trespassing in her neighborhood. I had to use all of the finesse, professionalism and charm that I could muster to convince her that we were not doing this on purpose to ruin her day. The pipe was county property so we were not trespassing, and the repair was necessary to allow her to play golf again soon. Although this did not soothe her immediately, after sever threats that she was going to contact her county commissioner, my perseverance held strong and I was able to convince her to calm down and listen to reason.

One week later, I was able to flex my supervisory skills with my crew as I used my communication skills between a leader and a crew member, and some motivation to accomplish a very difficult asphalt repair. We had all been working very late and were called in on overtime to help with a tricky asphalt repair. While we are grateful for the overtime money, we had been working for fifteen hours, so the money was no longer motivating to us. Just give us a good, hot shower, and a home cooked meal and we would have given our paychecks back to our boss.

As the repair progressed, there were five of us working diligently while we noticed one of our team members just watching us. Immediately the big boss called him on the carpet and started a power-struggle with the employee ending in shouts from the employee of, “If I don’t want to work, I don’t have to!” This stance is not going to help anyone, so I took the opportunity to speak to the crew member quietly off to the side. To make a long story short, he just needed to call his wife and check on their sick baby. I had him apologize to the big boss, the crew’s feelings were spared, and everyone finished the job in no time flat.

People often think that working for the county is a fairly easy job. Like any occupation, working for the county is not without its challenges. It takes excellent skills working with the public, motivating your crew, and communicating with many different types of people to be an effective leader with the county.

*Roger Miller is a dedicated student of the Lehigh Acres Senior High School GED program. He is committed to achieving his goals and getting his GED.*

## **Where to Start?**

In life, we always know that taking the easy road is not always the easy way. For me, this is true. I started the Even Start Program in 2008 to gain my G.E.D. I did this to prove to myself and to others that I was worth something.

At this point, my oldest was going through a lot of problems, from short hearing and lack of social skills. I used this as my way out of the program. After leaving Even Start, I went for my CNA. I would have gotten my CNA, but I got pregnant and had to leave the class. This got me to think that if I tried to take the easy way, it turns out to really be the hard way.

I'm now back in the Even Start Program and I know this will pay off in the long run, even if it's hard.

*Peggy Guiden is a mother of three and a student in the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

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### **Her Thirty Three Years**

This woman was born in Fresno, California in 1953 to Manuel and Guadalupe Salazar. She had four sisters and seven brothers. The family left Fresno and moved to a small town in West Texas named Levelland in 1953. Then, in 1963, they moved to Delray Beach, Florida.

She was nineteen years old when she met and fell in love with her husband. In 1975, she married and had two boys Rolando and Joe. One year later they had another boy named Johnny. She was happy with this man and her three boys. Time passed and they moved to Naples, Florida. In Naples, she and her boys started a new life. Her husband became an alcoholic and a very bad drug user. To this day she thinks he is still one. In Naples, she had three more children: a girl named Sara and two more boys, Ruben and Roman. Her husband never changed and now he was very abusive, too. The three older boys grew up and started playing sports in school. Rolando, played trumpet in the band, while Joe played football and Johnny played baseball, but Dad never went to see them play; however, Mom was always there. Then the younger

kids started playing baseball. Sara played softball. She was a good outfielder and hitter. Ruben loved to play first base and he also played outfield, too. He could get away with stealing bases. That's my little Ruben. Roman was my pitcher. He could pitch a no hitter game. Sometimes Mom would work late and Roman would get upset with her because she was not there. One day the coach pulled her aside and told her that she really had to try to be there on time so he can pitch well. Mom tried hard not to be late.

Time passed and the kids grew up. Some got married and some are still single. Mom is a grandmother now: six grandsons and four granddaughters. Her daughter Sara had a baby girl on July 9, 2009. Little Haven was born with a bad heart. She had a double inlet left ventricle and pulmonary hypertension that will need to have four surgeries. She was eight days old when she had a shunt put in. On February 18, 2010, she had a procedure done called the Glen Norwood. Baby Haven is doing very well. She is a very happy baby. She has light brown hair and few curls. Her smile can brighten any day. She is just a beautiful baby girl. God has so many things planned for her. If anything was to happen to her I don't know what I would do. Well, by now you must know that this woman is me. Yes, I am her, I am Mary and yes I am going to divorce this man, Juan. Women out there please don't do what I did, leave. There is help out there for us. I blame myself because I should have left a long time ago. My children tell me I am the best Mom and that they love me because I was always there.

*Mary Lopez is a student at Collier County Public Schools. Her tutor is Polly Spring.*

## **Smile on Your Face**

I dropped out of school at age 16. Since sixth grade, I had trouble focusing on my school work and behaving like a responsible student. Eventually, I let myself become very careless about having an education. Until I had Destiny, my first

daughter, I was just drifting along without many cares. Since, we've had our two daughters and the struggles of life got harder. My girlfriend, Jessica, was enrolled in the family literacy program called Even Start. I was very proud and excited for her. I watched her go to school every day. She was supposed to go no matter how stressed or tired she was. Watching the way it made her feel about herself and how much she enjoyed the program and the staff, was really an inspiration. I really felt comfortable in this program as a learning environment before I even enrolled.

Jessica later took her test and passed every part except the writing. She was a little down, but she kept at it just as hard, if not harder. Later, she took the writing part over and passed. The day she came home with her balloons and congratulations cards, I was watching her come into the yard from the window. She was so happy. She was glowing with the feeling. I was so happy for her, and was ready to re-open my brain and try to go back at the books for myself. Since then, I've been going to Even Start and it's just the greatest feeling to be in a comfortable learning environment and to really have this second opportunity at my education.

From age sixteen to twenty six, I tried to live without an education and I haven't made it very far. I really feel this program is the first step to better things to come. I owe all the appreciation in the world to Jessica, my lady, and the Even Start program and staff for leaving those windows open for people like me to catch a second chance. Thank you!!

*Brian Kelley, father of two girls, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

### **Krystal's Story**

When I was 16, I dropped out of school because my mom was real sick with diabetes and she needed help with my brothers. I didn't want to drop out, but my family needed me, so I did. I thought I was never going to graduate.

A couple of months after I dropped out, I moved to Lakeland. I got a job at CiCi's Pizza. I wanted to go back to school, so I enrolled myself into Lakeland High School. Unfortunately, work and school was too much for me. I needed the money, so I dropped out once again.

About a year later, I lost my job and moved back to Inverness. A year after that, my daughter was here. I thought to myself, "I want my little girl to graduate, but if she sees Mommy didn't graduate, then she may not want to either." My daughter inspired me to go back to school. I made some phone calls and I found out about Even Start. I thought to myself "here is my chance." Some things prevented me from starting right then. Two years later, I was finally ready to go to school. I started school on November 30, 2009. The first day I thought to myself "I don't think I can do this, it seems hard." I was working on math and I couldn't figure out a problem, so I raised my hand and Mrs. Seijas came over to me. She sat down next to me and helped me for like 10 minutes until I figured it out. After that I knew was going to be ok, because the teacher was so "one on one and she didn't make me feel like I was stupid (like other teachers had done).

I have only been in Even Start for a little over 3 months now, and I hope to be graduating this year. I couldn't have done it without the wonderful help from the wonderful teachers and staff from Even Start.

*Krystal Johns, mother of Lawrencia, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

## **My Life Struggles**

When I was fifteen, I went to school in a small town called Bell. I loved going to school there. It was out in the middle of nowhere, and everybody knew everybody. My little brother and I had all the same classes. On April 9, 2004, my whole world was

turned upside down. My little brother was tragically killed in a car accident. I had never felt so much pain in my life. I couldn't eat. I couldn't sleep. I quit going to school because I couldn't handle walking into my classes everyday without him, so I dropped out.

I started working. Over the years I had several jobs, but nothing that kept my attention long enough. When I was eighteen, I found out that I was pregnant and at that moment I knew I wanted a better life for my son. After 2 years of struggling to take care of my now 2 year old son, I decided I wanted to go back to school to better our future. I found out about the Even Start Program through a friend. I couldn't ask for a better program. It is a program to help parents get their G.E.D.s and everything is free, even child care.

As a single, struggling parent there was no way I could get my G.E.D. without this program. This program is amazing. Everyone is so supportive. With a lot of studying, I should be able to graduate.

*Tiffany Loeffler, mother of Jayce, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

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### **The Day I Thought I'd Explode!**

I like my job. I am a groundskeeper at TMH. Some of my jobs are weed eating, blowing leaves, picking up trash, and keeping the parking lot clean.

On Tuesday, the first of September, I was blowing leaves off the parking lot. Every day I put earplugs in my ears to keep me from going deaf. After about an hour, I noticed my pants were burning hot! I switched off the blower on my back and tried to figure this out. There was a hole in the tank. My pants were covered in gasoline. The tank had EXPLODED!

Yes, the earplugs saved my ears...but they did not let me hear the explosion. I am just glad my pants did not catch on fire!



## **A New Beginning in Life**

I am thankful for the Even Start Program. It has given me the opportunity to learn math. Fifteen years ago, I took the G.E.D. test in the state of Texas and failed the math and essay part two times, and I gave up. I thought I could hide from math, but that is not the case. You can only run from it for awhile. I was always told I was stupid in math and I always believed that until I came here.

Mrs. Neuges and Mrs. VanBebber have shown me that I can learn math. They're very nice and patient, and very smart. I'm thankful for Mrs. Seijas for being nice and helpful, and giving me some self esteem. I am thankful to Mrs. Stokes for always having something nice to say to me and building my self esteem. I am thankful to Mrs. Quinn for being nice to me and always helping me with my daughters' education and helping me with my parenting. Thank you, Even Start.

*Mary Segura, mother of Sophie and Jenna, is a student of the Citrus County Schools' Even Start Family Literacy Program.*

## **My Worst Day**

March 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 is when I thought it was the end: the day I lost everything. I was Daddy's little girl. No one was ever changing that.

My daddy was in the army when he was diagnosed with diabetes. From that day on, everything went downhill. He started to ignore his health. He was very stubborn and always had to be right! He joked right through his pain, though, which always made me smile.

In 2000 Daddy had a callous removed from his foot. Due to complications from diabetes, his leg was amputated below the knee. Daddy was always in the hospital, sick with something new. In 2005-04, Daddy had a lot of chest pain, and was losing too much weight. We learned he only had two arteries working and bad kidneys. He needed a triple bi-pass. I freaked! We were afraid he wouldn't make it. After surgery, with his new pacemaker, he got better and came home.

Months went by with just me and Daddy home, when he had a stroke. As he slurred his words, I didn't understand. I called Mom. She panicked, "Call 911!" she said. Daddy said "No!" We got him to the hospital. The pacemaker had been put in wrong. Daddy struggled bravely in pain.

On February 19<sup>th</sup>, 2007, I was fifteen years old, went out with friends, not listening to my daddy. I got arrested and charged as an adult. Things had been blown out of proportion. He got worse worrying about me. I blamed myself.

Two months before I was going to be released, he was on dialysis, barely alive. As I did my time, I remember him saying, "Baby girl, I am going to stay alive for you!" All I did was pray for him. My mom and godmother got me a three day furlough and met me when I was released. I was nervous and confused about what was happening. Mom said, "We don't know if Dad will make it." I was blank. We arrived at the hospital. He was sleeping. I woke him up softly, whispering "I'm here, Daddy!" He woke up, tears rolling down. He was confused that I was there. I explained that the judge let me visit him. For two days I lay by his side. He got out of ICU. Then I had to leave and say my goodbyes. I said, "I'll be home soon. Stay strong."

Two days later I was called to the front desk, guided to a room, and handed the phone. Mom was crying, barely catching her breath. I already knew. She said, "Daddy passed." I dropped the phone, and fell to my knees screaming, "No! No! Not my daddy!" Everyone tried comforting me. Nothing helped. It was the end of the world to me. My mom got me another three day furlough for his funeral. I stayed as strong as possible. I knew he wouldn't want to see me sad. My father was a strong man who suffered many years of life. I'm thankful that he's not in that position anymore. He feels no pain. He's healed and happy now.

Daddy wanted me to finish school and do something with life. When I was gone I completed ninth grade. When I got out, I enrolled in high school, but they told me I had no credits. I couldn't do anything about it. Discouraged, I stayed home and tried to stay out of trouble. The next thing I knew, I was pregnant! While pregnant I looked back into school. I had a beautiful baby girl named Aleigha. Now I'm at Even Start. It's a wonderful place for your GED and for your children. I'm getting my GED and making Daddy smile down at me. This is the first step of my new life.

*Josephine Pugliesi is a student at Citrus County Even Start. Her tutor is Seijas.*

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