

# **Opening a New World**

**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 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 provider throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.



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

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## **Preface**

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

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

## Table of Contents

Abadie, Rosa: <i>Grandmother Love</i>	1
Adams, Mai: <i>Beautiful Morning</i>	2
El Addala, Amina: <i>Amina's Story</i>	3
A.L.J.: <i>Doing the Right Thing</i>	4
Alderman, Cynthia: <i>Here's to Much Enlightenment in 2008</i>	5
Alston, Cynthia: <i>Cynthia's Story</i>	6
De Anselmi, Maritza: <i>Letter to a Lost Love</i>	7
Anwaar, Farina: <i>My Two Homes</i>	9
Arocho, Maria: <i>Angry About My Foot</i>	10
Arreola, Nohemi: <i>My Dreams and Goals</i>	12
Avalos, Miriam: <i>My Special Day</i>	13
Balu, Poonkadi: <i>Studying English</i>	15
Barker, Rebecca: <i>I Have a Dream</i>	16
Baxley, Monica: <i>Opening a New World for Me</i>	16
B.C.: <i>Famous Amos</i>	17
Belaid, Rachida: <i>Living the Dream</i>	18
Bewey, Beulah: <i>My Struggle with Reading</i>	20
Biguens, Laurent Jean: <i>There's a Lot More Here than Back Home</i>	21
Bligen, Sabrina: <i>Sabrina's Dream</i>	23
Boles, Jeremy: <i>What I am Going to Do</i>	23
Boning, Yaowalak: <i>Yaowalak's Gift to the World</i>	24
Bowers, Stanford: <i>The Right I Value the Most from the U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights</i>	25
Brooks, Patricia A: <i>Advocate for Abused Women</i>	26
Brown, Nidia: <i>Nidia's Gift to the World</i>	27
Bryan, Sophia: <i>Stand Up</i>	28
Buckalew, Sara: <i>Maybe</i>	29
Burdette, Lorendia: <i>Surviving the Struggle</i>	30
Callahan, Brian: <i>Some Things Hurt Even Though They are Funny</i>	32
Cano, Paula: <i>My Life's Treasured Moments</i>	32
Campbell, Lorenzo: <i>How I Felt When I First Lost My Daddy</i>	34
Del Carmen, Maria: <i>History About Me</i>	35

Carothers, Adam S: <i>My Cultural Enlightenment</i>	36
Castillo, Wilfredo: <i>Autobiography of Wilfredo Castillo</i>	38
Centeno, Jacqueline: <i>Autobiography – Jacqueline Centeno</i>	40
Charles, Diane: <i>Polly</i>	42
Chen, Chun Ping: <i>The Christmas Visit</i>	43
Chiang, Eugene: <i>Superstition</i>	45
Collier, Chiquita: <i>A fool for Love</i>	46
Collier, Brittany: <i>Ode to My Baby</i>	48
Cortez, Jill: <i>The Falling Star</i>	48
Coulliette, Eddie: <i>Continue to Learn – My Story</i>	50
Courts, Sandra: <i>I Know I Can Do It</i>	51
Coy, Alice: <i>Alice’s Dream</i>	52
Coyle, Melody: <i>Would you Rather Live in the Country or the City</i>	53
Cruz-Perez, Juan Mystic: <i>The Web of Dreams Tangled In Creeds...</i>	54
Davis, Tashasia: <i>Motivation</i>	55
Daniels, Joshua: <i>If Only...</i>	56
Davis, Berlynn U: <i>A Story About My Life</i>	57
Davis, Tamika: <i>Tamika’s Dream</i>	59
Davison, Jessica: <i>To My Papa</i>	59
DeCroos, Mary: <i>Mary’s Gift to the World</i>	60
Dendy, Theresa: <i>Life Long Learning</i>	61
Deutch, Jeff: <i>African Animals</i>	62
Duffy, David: <i>From Darkness to Light</i>	64
Fernandez, Lauren: <i>Untitled</i>	65
Figuroa, Marielys: <i>My First Chicken Pot Pie</i>	66
Fox, Nina: <i>My Personal Hero</i>	68
Gabriello, Victoria: <i>Runaway Gypsy Girl</i>	69
Garrett, Annie M: <i>Spending a Day with My Mother</i>	70
Gee, Susan Brown: <i>Please Dad</i>	72
Geiger, Shannon: <i>Mom</i>	73
Georges, Wista: <i>Flight for Your Freedom</i>	74
Glenn Jr., Thomas C.: <i>A Mystery in the Making</i>	75
Anonymous: <i>I’m Just Ready</i>	76
Goodale, Joe: <i>Heart and Mind</i>	77
Gordillo, Sam: <i>A Golf Course Foreman</i>	77

Guandong, Gatwech: <i>Learning in Old Age is Hard</i>	79
Hall, Kimberly: <i>The Positive Impact of Prison</i>	80
Harris, Tina: <i>Tina's Dream</i>	81
Henderson, Sylvester: <i>The Environment I Grew Up In</i>	81
Hernandez, Gonzalo: <i>My Adventures in English</i>	82
Hernandez, Linda: <i>Change</i>	84
Hobbs, Carrie: <i>Getting My GED</i>	85
Isensee, Carmen: <i>A Short Story of Brazil</i>	86
Jahan, Sharmin: <i>Nothing is Impossible</i>	87
Jakomeit, Luzia: <i>The Whistle of the Contact</i>	89
Jarvis, Rita: <i>My Mother's Bookshelf</i>	91
Jasso, Ana: <i>Looking for Happiness</i>	91
De Jesus, Margarita: <i>My Feelings about Life</i>	93
Jimenez, Olga Lucia R: <i>Poem</i>	94
Anonymous: <i>Coming to America</i>	95
Kelley, Debra: <i>Cocaine</i>	96
Kent, Debbie: <i>Debbie's Dream</i>	97
Lacina, Lori Fulton: <i>What Even Start Means to Me</i>	98
Landon, Teri: <i>A Rough and Ready Start</i>	99
Le, Tuyet: <i>My New Life</i>	100
Le, Quang: <i>Living in a Dream Country</i>	100
Leonard, Tonya: <i>Tonya's Dream</i>	101
Lin, Francis: <i>Redefining the Dream</i>	102
Loggins, Quatreass: <i>Moving for the Best</i>	104
Loredo, Abigail: <i>Little Dreams</i>	105
Louis, Jean Winston: <i>My Lifetime Goal and How I Plan to Get There</i>	106
Louis, Yves Jean: <i>An Unforgettable Date</i>	107
Louis-Henry, Marie-Flaure: <i>My Sister In-Law</i>	108
Love, Stephanie: <i>What I Like about Adult Ed</i>	109
Lugo, Roselyn: <i>Evie's Valentine's Surprise</i>	110
Macario, Alejandrina: <i>Difficult - but Right Choice</i>	111
Maloy, Marketta: <i>Marketta's Dream</i>	113
Major, Magdalena: <i>To My Lovely Father</i>	114
Marcano, Nilsa: <i>Love at First Sight</i>	115
Marino, Hyna: <i>Life Changes after Learning to Read</i>	116
Marius, Oline: <i>The Hardest Parts about Being a Parent</i>	117
Matos, Maria: <i>Respect</i>	118
Maxwell, Rosemarie: <i>Honoring our Solders</i>	118

McKellar, Jessica: <i>Meeting My Father</i>	120
McGlocking, Jedadiah: <i>To All God's Children</i>	121
McMillen, Zachery: <i>Addicted to</i>	122
Meagher, Josh: <i>Dreaming</i>	123
Mesidor, Micael: <i>Learning English in America</i>	124
Miller, Nick: <i>Nick's Story</i>	124
Moore, Elbonie: <i>An Opinion I used to have but now I've Changed</i>	125
Morgado, Juan (Angel): <i>Changes in My Life</i>	126
Morin, Jean Normil: <i>What a Life Change!</i>	126
Moring, James E: <i>A Place in my Mother's Heart</i>	128
Munoz, Rosa Elena: <i>My Autobiography</i>	129
Murillo, Efrain: <i>Dreams</i>	130
Murzyn, Chet: <i>The Baseball Fan</i>	132
Nelson, Kim: <i>Kim's Dream</i>	133
Nguyen, Duyen: <i>No Thanks!</i>	133
Nguyen, Hien: <i>My American Dream</i>	134
Nguyen, Tuyet: <i>My Long Journey</i>	135
Nouel, Nieves T: <i>A Sweet Smile</i>	137
Peachy, Amy: <i>Paint Brush</i>	138
Peppers, Barry: <i>Struggles to Earn my GED</i>	138
Peraza, Edward: <i>My Childhood Dream</i>	139
Permer, Joyce: <i>Joyce's Dream</i>	141
Pfeiffer, Wendy: <i>A Mother's Love</i>	141
Philpot, Georgette: <i>Finding a Blessing</i>	142
Pierce, Makaylee: <i>If I Told You I Loved You...</i>	143
Pinder, Tammi: <i>Tammi's Dream</i>	144
Pitt, Timothy: <i>Just Fish</i>	145
Pompia, Leroy: <i>Leroy's Mother</i>	145
Pogue, David: <i>Awareness</i>	146
Polek, Yen: <i>Remodeling</i>	147
Ramirez, Oswaldo Perez: <i>I Was Thinking...</i>	148
Ray, Delynda: <i>Poem</i>	150
Razek, Sofia: <i>Sofia's Gift to the World</i>	151
Razzaghi, Venous: <i>How My Life Has Changed</i>	151
Reed, Lola: <i>Lola's Life</i>	152
Reese, Shayquan: <i>Why am I getting my GED?</i>	152
Rilea, Carla: <i>My Significant Event</i>	154
Rincon, Sheila: <i>My Life</i>	155

Rittman, Jermane: <i>Ode to My Life</i>	156
Rivera, Alberto: <i>Where There is a Will there is a Way</i>	157
Roa, Edna: <i>My Country – Colombia</i>	158
Roa, Liliana: <i>Autobiography of Liliana Roa</i>	159
Rodriguez, Lillian: <i>Vocation</i>	161
Rojas, Leticia: <i>Thank You</i>	162
Roman, Ana: <i>Becoming a Better Person by Learning English</i>	163
Romero, Raul: <i>The Blue Man</i>	165
Ropel, Kelly: <i>The Election</i>	166
Salvador, Fernando: <i>The Beliefs and Thoughts of My Ancestors</i>	167
Sanfeliz, Adriana: <i>Why I am Studying English</i>	169
Simmons, Klaihai: <i>Me and My Family</i>	170
Simpkins, Antonio: <i>My Life and Goals</i>	171
Simmons, Monic: <i>Untitled</i>	173
Simmons, Tracy: <i>Tracy's Dream</i>	173
Smith, Douglas: <i>From Rags to Richness</i>	174
Smith, Lynn: <i>Thoughts of a Displaced Parrot</i>	175
Smith, Michael: <i>A Thug's Life</i>	176
Soles, Audrey: <i>Conscience</i>	178
Solomon, Catalina Minnig: <i>My Next Summer Vacation</i>	179
Soria, Magdalena: <i>The American Dream Becomes a Reality</i>	180
Spencer, Nina: <i>Studying English</i>	182
Stewart, Jamie: <i>The Effects of Losses</i>	183
Anonymous: <i>A Long Wait</i>	184
Summerlin, Sarah: <i>Sara and Caleb's Story</i>	186
Silvester, Larry: <i>Heart's Hope</i>	187
Thaxton, Aaron: <i>You can Travel but There's No Place like Home</i>	187
Thomas, Robin: <i>The Effect My Dad Had on Me</i>	189
Toussaint, Francia: <i>If I were President</i>	190
Tran, Khuong: <i>My Dream</i>	191
Turner, Donna: <i>The Happiest Day of My Life</i>	192
Umizaj, Rexhina: <i>A New Life</i>	193
Anonymous: <i>A Good Day</i>	194
Valasquez, Besy: <i>Honduras</i>	196

Vasquez, Luz Angela: <i>How I Learn English</i>	197
Velez, Ailed M: <i>Ailed's Gift to the World</i>	198
Vilchez, Yudelkys: <i>My Expectations</i>	199
Vu, Thu: <i>Why I Admire My Mother</i>	200
Walker, Anthony: <i>Give Thanks</i>	201
Walker, Kolada: <i>My Granny's Funeral</i>	203
Wallace, Levi: <i>I am Anne Frank...</i>	203
Washington, Lonniesha: <i>A True Friend</i>	204
Wells, Robby: <i>An Invention that has Affected My Life</i>	205
Weng, Benqi: <i>The Lunar New Year</i>	206
Wheeler, Mary: <i>My Life</i>	207
Whitaker, Jack: <i>My Teachers Shel and Sandy</i>	209
Winter, John: <i>Working In the United States</i>	210
Woods, Norman: <i>A Touch of Life</i>	211
Wright, Cassandra: <i>Cassandra's Dream</i>	212
Yeckley, Heather: <i>My Life Story</i>	212

## **Grandmother Love**

Today many families are falling apart, and it is important to keep the bond between the grandparents and child. Grandparents offer secure unchanging love. For many children this love is all they have.

My son and his wife are separated and their child does not get the love and attention he needs. Grandparents can give that love, attention and security.

I have a grandson. He is 4 years old. His name is Cameron. He is a cute boy. He is smart. Cameron is my first grandson and he put into my life the mature love a person feels when she is a grandmother.

To be a grandmother is the perfect gift God gave to women. It is a feeling of tranquil, secure and perfect love.

Being a mother is much different from being a grandmother. When I was a mother, I wanted my children to be perfect, intelligent, orderly and educated. I was always busy and feeling anxious and nervous about them, without feeling tranquil and lovely peace and I did not have time for little things.

I take time now with Cameron. We walk at night and I show him the moon and stars. I make up stories for him. I tell him one star is me and a tiny star is him. I tell him that my heart is in his heart and his heart is in my heart and we will always be together.

Cameron was born on January 6, 2004. This date is Epiphany. Epiphany is the day that celebrates when the three kings brought gifts to Jesus Christ. I think God gave me the best gift of my life when Cameron came into my life. I will love Cameron forever.

By Rosa Abadie

*Rosa is a student at the Literacy Council of Manatee County. Rosa's grandson Cameron is the lucky recipient of stories she tells him in English and in Spanish. Rosa's tutor is Sharlya Gold who is the lucky guide in Rosa's search for English fluency in reading, writing, and speaking.*

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### **Beautiful Mornings**

Normally, I wasn't free in the mornings. I would prepare to go to work and later I would go to school. Recently, I lost my job and I've been going to school late because I wanted to enjoy the beautiful mornings.

I have three or four things that I enjoy in my back yard in the morning between 7 a.m. to 9 a.m. I study my GED vocabulary and exercise at the same time. I enjoy listening to the natural music. The music from the ocean waves hitting the sea walls, the wind hitting the sailboat's masts in the canal, and the birds singing in the trees all bring joy to me! These are wonderful mornings, the best I've have had for a long time.

Many birds have different voices, and their voices are beautiful. The seagulls' voices are not as nice as the land birds' voices, I feel. The smallest birds' voices are sweeter than the larger birds' voices. Even the music from the banana trees is different from the music from the big pine trees. What do you think?

There are a lot of activities I can enjoy in my back yard. I can swing lying in the hammock, I can swim in the pool, I can paddle my kayak, and I can use the exercise equipment. But I have to take care of the back yard, too. If I don't it looks bad; it doesn't look clean. It's very bad looking now! I haven't taken care of it for at least a month.

I hope and wish that I would have enough money to live on. Then I'll continue to go to school and enjoy beautiful mornings in my back yard. I would have time to take care of it. I'm going to pray to God to give me my wish, and I'll also buy some Lotto tickets.

When I finish my GED, I'll invite all my teachers and my classmates to my house. I'll have a party in my back yard. That's my inspiration! I've never had a party at my house since I moved there in 1997. I'm very afraid of the GED test; by the time I pass it, I may be very, very, very old!

By Mai Adams

*Mai is from Vietnam and has been a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg, FL. for some time. She is a mother and a grandmother. Mai works very hard at her school work and hopes to take the GED soon. Her tutor is Ann Palmer.*

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### **Amina's Story**

My name is Amina and I am originally from Rabat, the capital of Morocco. It is located in north of Africa I was born and married there. I raised five children; the oldest is 34 and the youngest 25. My husband is a businessman and owns his own factory. The factory makes animal meal from fish.

When I was very young I remember visiting the American military base in Morocco. It was one of my first memories of this country and I have never forgotten it. I come to America every year to be with my daughter, who is an international student at the University of Central Florida.

I like this country because everyone is friendly and very nice. I think the Adult Literacy League is one of the best schools to learn English.

By Amina El Addala

*Amina El Addala is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. She attends ESOL classes there and her teacher is Vince Scalise.*

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### **Doing the Right Thing**

This story is about me trying to do the right thing as a father. I am a single father. I have five children; 5 beautiful girls. The oldest ones are 12 years old. I also have a 5 year old and 3 year old twins.

I work 3 jobs. I deliver party supplies during the day. At night I work part time as a chef and also as a dishwasher. On the days I am off I hang out with the kids. We like going to the park, the movies and the library.

One of the 12 year olds is now living with me. This is the first experience that I have with having my child live with me. I did not get to see her too much because she was living in Pennsylvania. It bothered me that I did not get to see her that often, but I do get to see the other children on a more regular basis. Having her in my life is another step in being more responsible. It makes me feel good as a father.

I feel better by going to class every Monday. Since I have been going to class, I take my daughters to the library to check out books and movies and to play on the computer. I have this nice, wonderful tutor. If it weren't for her I would not be where I am today. It is my way of trying to do the right thing as a father.

By A. L. J.

*A.L.J. is an adult student of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County. He and his tutor Michelle Ingram have been working together since September 2006. Doing the Right Thing is the first story that the student and his tutor have written together, and both are very proud his first essay.*

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### **Here's to Much Enlightenment in 2008**

Just a few words for you:

1. Life isn't fair, but it's still good.
2. When in doubt, just take the next small step.
3. Life is too short to waste time hating anyone.
4. Don't take yourself too seriously. No one else does.
5. Cry with someone, it's more healing than crying alone.
6. It's okay to get angry with God. He can take it. Yell at Him if you need to.
7. Don't compare your life to others, you have no idea what their journey is all about.
8. Make peace with your past, so it won't screw up your future.
9. Everything can change in the blink of an eye, but don't worry God never blinks.
10. Life is too short for a long pity party, get busy living or get busy dying.
11. You can get through anything if you stay put in today.
12. The most important sex organ is the brain.
13. No one is in charge of your happiness...EXCEPT YOU!
14. Always choose life.
15. Forgive everyone...everything.
16. What other people think of you is none of your business.
17. Time heals almost everything, give time.
18. However good or bad the situation, it will change.

19. Believe in miracles.
20. Whatever doesn't kill you really does make you stronger.
21. Read Psalms, they cover every human emotion.
22. If we all threw our problems in a pile and saw everyone else's, we'd grab ours back.
23. Envy is a waste of time. You already have all you need.
24. No matter how you feel, get up, dress up, and show up.
25. Life isn't tied with a bow, but it is still a GIFT!

***Every sixty seconds we spend sad or upset, is a minute of happiness we will never get back.***

By Cynthia Alderman

*I want my sons to know I love them very much, Curston, Corey, and Roger. I love my family too. Teacher: Ms. Chaundra Whitehead, Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE II.*

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### **Cynthia's Story**

Hello. My name is Cynthia Alston. I would like to tell you a little bit about me. I have lived in New York City, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Charlotte, North Carolina, and St. Petersburg, Florida. I have four beautiful children: Maurice 19, Trevor 18, Cineal 15, and Nequae 10. I have a wonderful husband whose name is Maurice. I also have four sisters (not including myself) and four brothers, one of which resides in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania.

I went to school in Brooklyn, New York. I did not graduate from high school because of a pregnancy. I was young, but over 18. Even back then I realized I had a problem with my reading. I was not able to get back in school because I was trying to raise a family. Years later in my adult life I felt I needed to get back in school, and at least improve my reading, and maybe even earn my G. E. D.

I was introduced to Tomlinson Adult Learning Center where I began literacy classes. I have a wonderful instructor by the name of Ms. Mary Putnam. I also have a great tutor whose name is Ms. Ann Palmer. I am grateful to have them both in my life. They helped me so much. I also was introduced to someone in class, who helped me to improve my life, and her name is Beulah Hill, but I call her Cookie. She is not only a good friend, she is my sister in Christ Jesus. She is so much fun to be around.

Outside of the classroom I volunteer at the Salvador Dali Museum where I am a greeter. I have learned so much about the surrealist Salvador Dali. When I am not in class or at the museum, other things I enjoy are fishing, swimming, and just being outdoors. I also enjoy working with children. I consider myself humble and easy going.

My ultimate goals are to earn my G.E.D., re-unite with my children, and strengthen my faith in Christ Jesus to become a better Christian.

By Cynthia Alston

*Cynthia is a mother of four and a literacy student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg, Florida. She works very hard to improve her reading skills and better her life. Her tutor is Ann Palmer.*

---

### **Letter to a Lost Love**

Today, I woke up full of energy and wishing to write the letter that I had promised you, long time ago.

I took my car and I went to the beach where we used to go and enjoy those beautiful sunsets. This morning the sun was trying to

*Opening a New World*

get up when I arrived at the marina. As always, the water was as blue as your deep and profound eyes.

You left me, but you planted in my heart wise advice that I still have in my memory and in my life. It was very difficult for me to start a new life without you, but my only consolation was something that has been growing inside of me: GOD. You taught me that the only one who is going to be always with me is him, the father, who takes care of his beloved children, even if they are not the best.

I am still trying to learn your language that beautiful, but difficult English, that you so many times full of patience and love tried to teach me.

My mother came to visit me. She is very preoccupied with the political problems in our country; she thinks that it is a matter of the people power and decision to kick out the President who is leading our great country to the most extreme disaster.

Do you remember my French teacher? Well, she got married to her eternal lover and they are living now in Paris.

The house that you and I transformed into a home is still waiting for your return to light up the old chimney that used to warm up the family room and our hearts.

I know that I am going to suffer for this emptiness, for that date is never going to happen, but for me it has arrived the time of loneliness and silence.

Your eternal love,  
Catalina

By Maritza De Anselmi

*Maritza De Anselmi and her husband are from Venezuela. She is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Lee County, FL Inc. Maritza took the initiative to enter this contest and determined that her theme would be a letter to a lost love (purely fictional as Maritza and her husband have been married for over thirty years). She wrote the 1st draft of her entry without assistance. Once written, only minor changes were made. Maritza works in the food service industry and is studying very hard to improve her writing and speaking skills. She is a joy as she always carries a positive attitude and many smiles with her wherever she goes.*

---

### **My Two Homes**

Last summer I went back to visit my family in Lahore Pakistan. I looked forward to enjoying authentic Pakistani food, socializing with friends and relatives, and play dates and activities for the children.

Lahore is famous for Pakistani food. Restaurants stay open till midnight. In my country there are many American fast food chains. Some of them serve food with Pakistani spices that make those food items very popular. American food helped my kids get adjusted in a new environment. I enjoyed staying with my family and the homemade meals made by our cook. Having the chores and our meals prepared by the servants was a luxury that all of us cherished. Knowing that our laundry and other household duties are taken care of enabled us to socialize more frequently with friends and relatives.

Most of my free time involved watching movies, going shopping and trying different restaurants. Since my children had a nanny who entertained and nourished them, I even had more time to pamper myself with a facial and other beauty treatments. These treatments could be done in our home or at the local beauty parlor. These pleasures were sorely missed when I returned to America.

My relatives often came to visit and we would talk and share thoughts about our jobs, their future goals, jokes and sometimes secrets that only siblings share. There were many picnics and family outings throughout the three months of my visit.

My children had many cousins of their age so they used to have play dates all day long. There were grandparents, uncles and aunts to talk to them and play with them. The kids loved to go to my parents' farmhouse which was a one hour drive from my parents' home.

Although we really enjoyed our trip, but we also missed our home and friends in America. We looked forward to our return to the states as now we are eager to begin with new memories and experiences.

By Farina Anwaar

*Farina Anwaar entered the Volusia Literacy Council on July 6, 2006. She is a dedicated wife, Mom and student. She loves her tutor. Ever since they have been working together she has had more confidence to speak English in public and pursue her goal of continuing her education. She is able now to help her daughter with her homework and encourage her schooling. Her tutor is Kathleen Masely.*

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### **Angry About my Foot**

I'm angry about my foot  
when I fell to the floor  
and everybody thought that it  
happened at the store.

I'm angry about my foot

when the pain and suffering strike  
and I see nowhere to hide...

I'm angry about my foot  
when the time is almost near  
and people used to say:  
"you've got to be here."

I'm angry about my foot  
when I'm walking thru the stairs  
feeling like Kunta Kinte running downstairs

I'm angry about my foot  
when the day goes by  
and I don't see the time  
I will say goodbye...

I'm angry about my foot  
when the time is almost near  
because I know one day  
the healing time will be here....

By Maria Arocho

*Maria Arocho is a student at the Clewiston Library. She is married and lives in Montura. She goes to Clewiston Adult School and is studying math and for her CDL on the computer. Her tutor is Barbara Oeffner. "I wrote this little poem after an accident that I had on June 27, 2007. I have to keep working at the same company under light duty. After three months, I returned to a regular job. After less than two months, I reinjured the broken foot and returned to use the fracture boot until today. I have been waiting for several months to get rid of the fracture boot and use the normal shoe."*

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## **My Dreams and Goals**

My name is Nohemi, I have several children. I came to the U. S. A. about three years ago looking for a better life. The reason I came here is to pursue my dream, which is my children's future and opportunity for a better life. I have been faced with a lot of challenges since I have arrived here. I didn't know much English and I didn't have much of an opportunity for a job.

After several months I found a job working at McDonalds in Atlanta, Georgia. I worked there and I did not know how to speak English; therefore my job opportunities were limited. Many people tried to help me learn English; however it was difficult to understand English. I was unable to get a better position which limited my opportunities. Next, I was able to get another job at a Mexican restaurant, Los Toribios, where people spoke my language. Therefore I had a better relationship with others.

Then I relocated to Marianna, Florida where I'm presently living. I'm now employed at San Marcos Restaurant. I worked several months and desired to get my high school diploma as well as learn how to speak better English. I heard about the program at the Jackson County Public Library Learning Center. This program helps people to study for their GED, English as the Second Language, computer skills and workforce skills. I made the call there and signed up for the program. Mrs. Akilah, who is a nice person, has helped me a lot with my ESOL course.

Since I have started this program I have been able to understand, speak, and associate with people better than I could before.

Now my dreams will fall into place. One of my best dreams is to work at the school as a teacher's aide as well as be able to mentor the children. Now I feel as though I'm beginning to live the American dream.

By Nohemi Arreola

*Nohemi is originally from Mexico. She has five children and lives in Marianna, Florida. She is very happy about the program at the Jackson County Public Library. Nohemi feels that she can now understand and read English much better because of the help recieved there. She plans to seek her GED in English as well. Her mentor is Akilah Rushdan.*

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### **My Special Day**

One of my special days was when I started to attend GROWS Family Literacy, but the exception was the first week. The first week was so difficult, because Leonel and Leone would not behave. They never had rules before so when they came on the first day, they ran all over the classroom and climbed up on the tables. Ms. Martha couldn't stop them and she called me for help. I stayed with them in the classroom the rest of the class.

The rest of the week was same as the first day. Ms. Martha continued to call me for help and their discipline was poor; I remember that one day I got so mad that I took them and left the school. When I was in the parking lot Mrs. Frances the program coordinator, came to me and asked me "What happened Miriam?" I told her, crying, that I was tired and that the twins weren't doing well in the class and I would not come back.

Mrs. Frances told me that it wasn't a good idea; that they needed to be here, because they had to learn the basics. Mrs. Frances told me, "You and your children need help and we can help you." I decided to continue to attend. The second week was the same I stayed with them in the classroom.

The next month, they did better, but still not so good. It was so

hard for me to see that their behavior was not good. I felt sad and I knew that it was my fault because I had always let them do whatever they wanted; there were no rules for them. I knew that Grows would help me a lot.

After 2 months, they stayed in the classroom without me. They did well and were no longer running, or climbing. They started follow the rules and started to love books.

The rest of the year they did even better. They knew the schedule and how to behave. I'm not going to say that they changed in every way, but they became better than on the first day.

In Grows they learned the ABCs, colors, shapes and the love of reading but most importantly to follow rules. Today they attend Pre-K at Lovell Elementary. They came to Lovell with a lot of knowledge they learned at GROWS that maybe I couldn't have taught them.

I'm very Grateful to the Grows program for all they did; especially Mrs. Martha Vega, Ms. Betzaida Vega and Ms. Ashely Salzman for all their dedication to my kids. THANK YOU!!!!

By Miriam Avalos

*My name is Miriam Avalos. I'm from Mexico. I'm 25 yrs old and I'm a mom of 4 beautiful children: Leonel and Leone (twins 5 yrs) Pamela(4yrs) and Paola (3yrs). I'm a student at GROWS Family Literacy and my teachers are Ms Hillary Smith and Ms Beatrice Beardsworth.*

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## **Studying English**

I am studying English at Okaloosa Walton College. I need to improve my English skills. Speaking English is difficult for me. Also, I need to practice writing English at a higher level. My goal is to get a job in the United States, so I want my English to be very good.

When I try to speak English, I am not confident. I would like to communicate with other people. My pronunciation is not good now, but I am trying to speak English very well. Writing English is harder for me than reading English. I need to use correct grammar and spelling. If I am able to write better, I will be more confident writing papers in English. When I learn English better, I hope to get a job. If I want a better job, I need good pronunciation. If I want to work somewhere, I need good communication with other people.

My purposes for studying English is to speak better, to write more clearly and to get an interesting job. That is why I am studying English at OWC. I want to stay in the United States, so I really need to learn English.

By Poonkadi Balu

*My name is Poonkadi Balu. I am married and have two children. India is where I am from. I am an ESOL student at OWC in Ft. Walton Beach. My teacher is Mary Ann Adams. The ESOL class is very helpful for improving my English, reading and writing skills. My goal is to get my GED, so I can get a good job.*

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### **I Have a Dream**

To make the world a better place ...

I may not be able to make a difference in everyone's world. I do have a dream to make myself better, to make my son, and everyone else in my family's world a better place to be. If I'm not making things difficult in my world, then life would be easier; to me that would make the world a much better place to be. I feel that we are somewhat responsible for the things that happen to us. Every action has a reaction so while I can't change the whole world and make it a better place for everyone, I can do the best I can to make it a better place in my part of the world. You've got to start small and work your way up one step at a time. Dreams don't happen over night.

By Rebecca Barker

*I'm 23 years old. I have a 4 year old little boy named James. I am currently in prison because I made bad choices. All the dreams that my son and I have—I plan to make come true. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon ABE IV, Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **Opening a New World for Me**

Hi my name is Monica Baxley and literacy has opened a new world for me. My reading skills were very poor and my life was very hard. Now that I have improved my skills, there is a whole new world open to me. I can sit down and read a book and go to all kinds of places I never knew were out there. What I mean about a new world is that I can do things now I never dreamed I could do, like buying my first house. I always wanted to buy a house, but was too scared to check into it. Now that dream has come true for me and it can happen to you also.

The world has opened up in a lot of ways. People look at me as

an equal now, I still don't feel that way but I am getting there. I will keep working to improve myself, learn new things, see the world in books and do some traveling one day.

This is something that we all can do by just going back to school. It is not easy to go back and start all over but it is worth it in the end. No matter what anyone thinks, it is worth it in the long run. I feel like a new person now that I can read better and write better. A few years ago I couldn't have written this essay but thanks to some wonderful people in literacy, I can write better. I still have a ways to go but I will get there.

Read and open up the world for yourself. It is worth all the hard work, I promise.

By Monica Baxley

*Monica is a wife and mother of one daughter Felicia. She is a tutor and student at County Oaks Learning Center/Library. Literacy is her life. She is an AmeriCorp VISTA with the Florida Literacy Coalition and works for literacy volunteer of Washington County. She is a board member of VALUE and she loves working for literacy. Her dream is to see that all people can learn to read.*

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### **Famous Amos**

I would like for Famous Amos to live next door to me, because he is a very famous person to live next to. What I like about Famous Amos is that he is a very good person to everyone. Famous Amos always tells people to think positive. Negative beliefs will not let you believe in yourself. Since I have been reading a book about him, I have learned how to think positive about everything in my life. By reading this book I have learned a lot about life. I am learning how to have a positive attitude.

Sometimes life can be hard. Famous Amos says keep on thinking positive, and everything will work out for you in the end.

By B.C.

*B.C. has been a student of Literacy Volunteers of Leon County for several years. During that time she has progressed many grade levels in her reading and writing skills. B.C. enjoys reading autobiographies and writing personal essays.*

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### **Living the Dream**

My name is Rachida Belaid, I am originally from Morocco. I have been living here in the United States of America since September 29, 2001. When I first came here I lived in Boston Massachusetts. I lived with a family in Ipswich, Mass who were very nice to me. After a month I got my own place and my first job here at McDonald's restaurant. I had to speak French on the job because everyone who worked there knew French. I did not know how to speak English.

After one year I moved to Tallahassee, Florida where I got married. I wanted to learn English so I went to Tallahassee Public Library to learn English so that I could communicate better with people. English was my third language. I spoke Arabic, French, and now English. After a few short months, I found a job at Sierra Gaz Mart. I worked in the kitchen there for three years.

Next, in 2005 my husband's Visa permit was up and he had to return home. I stayed and continued to work in Tallahassee for another year. I then relocated to Marianna, Florida in 2006. I started to prepare for my American Citizenship. At first I applied by myself. I did all the preparation for the Citizenship process and was given an appointment to appear in Jacksonville, Florida on

October 16, 2006. I had to take a Greyhound bus from Marianna, Florida to Jacksonville, Florida for the interview.

The next morning of the interview, the interviewer called me in the office for my appointment, introduced himself and then the interview began; however, it did not go very well. He told me he would have to give me another appointment to allow me time to prepare. Next, my boss helped me find help at the Jackson County Pubic Library Learning Center. There I met some wonderful people, Mrs. Lois Schairer and Mrs. Akilah Rushdan. Both of them helped me learn what I needed to know for the interview about America. They also helped me find good books to read and study for the immigration test. I was glad to be a part of the program. It really helped me to learn not only the test but the American language and culture.

The next interview was January 2, 2007. I was better prepared. Once again I took the bus one day before and slept over the night. The next morning I went to the office where my interview was to be held and found a notice on the door stating that the office was closed due to the death of President Ford and to come back Jan. 5, 2007. I went back home then I returned on Jan. 4, 2007 and slept over once again.

On Jan 5, 2007 at 9 AM I went back for my appointment. First I had to take the oath. Then, I was asked a few questions about my personal life. Next, I was asked these 5 questions: a) What are the colors of the American Flag? (**Red, White, and Blue**) b) What is the most important right granted to a U.S. Citizen? (**The right to vote**) c) What are the tree branches of our government? (**Legislative, Executive, and Judiciary**) d) How many Supreme Court Justices are there? **Nine (9)** e) Who elects the Congress? (**The People**). Then I read a sentence and next, I wrote a different sentence. Then the interviewer said Congratulations, and he informed me that I would be notified of the date and time for the U.S. Citizenship swearing in ceremony.

Mrs. Akilah Rushdan and a friend drove to Pensacola, Florida for the ceremony on February 23, 2007. There were approximately 300 people from around the world there to take their Citizenship vows. It was both a sad and a happy time in my life. It was also a very big and joyous moment in my life.

By Rachida Belaid

*Rachida is married and has lived in the United States seven years. She is a student at the Jackson County Public Library Learning Center in the ESL Program. Ms. Rabel participated in the Student Ambassador Program this year. She is happy with the program. Her mentor is Akilah Rushdan.*

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### **My Struggle with Reading**

At first, I blamed my mother and father for my dyslexia. Dyslexia means a person who struggles with reading. I never understood why I couldn't read. My intelligence fooled everyone, even my parents. My parents sent me to school and my teachers kept passing me.

When I became an adult, I went back to school but I was not serious. I learned that you must be serious if you have a problem with reading. You need to listen and stop fooling yourself! Focus! Keep your mind on what you need to learn and not what other people think.

Looking back I knew I had to change the way I think. I had to focus and now I am learning to read.

By Beulah Bewey

*Beulah is married and has two children. She now gets the pleasure of reading with her eleven year old. She checks her homework and goes to her school. Beulah is a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center. Her teacher is Mary Putnam.*

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### **There's a Lot More Here than Back Home**

One evening, my mind was thinking about how wealthy some countries are compared to others. All the countries in this world are not the same especially in the area of wealth. That is why there are different classifications: developed and underdeveloped countries. My name is Laurent Jean Biguens. I am from Haiti which is one of the underdeveloped countries in this world, unluckily. I am nineteen years old and am a single, peace, loving man. I graduated from high school in my country but I am not very fluent in English. Now, I live with my mother, a sister and a brother. My father is still in Haiti.

I decided to come to United States because I think it is the best country that I can build my dream. Within this short period of my stay, I see a huge difference between Haiti and America. The life of the people in Haiti is very difficult. Their health is a disaster. Most of the hospitals do not have great facilities and services. Many unhealthy people die for lack of medical care. The medicines are very expensive. There is not an organization that can help the citizens of Haiti.

The young Haitians are very smart. The problem is that majority of the high school graduates are unable to get into the universities. While some youths become very intellectual, often times they are not the ones who would occupy the important positions in higher places in Haiti. We do not feel secured in our country. Often times there are no justice because the court favors those who are wealthy despite the crimes they committed. This shuns professionals to be involved.

I feel very fortunate to be in America. This is a fertile soil for me to build my dream. There are several colleges to choose from. Resources for further education are plentiful. Numerous jobs are available. Though I am new here, I do not feel insecure. I learn a lot from attending the English class, such as I need to learn to open my mouth to ask for anything I want to know about. My teacher gives me abundance of information to help me grow out of my 'shell'. She makes me do things the right way and shows me the right way of doing things.

In class, I learn not only academic skills but also life skills and workforce skills. I also learn how important it is to discipline myself in order to achieve my goals in life. She teaches me to always tell the truth, never to cheat or lie, to be open minded, and write out my plan for my future. I value everything that I have learned so far and am determined to go forth. I am ready to challenge anything that comes my way. There are three quotes in my class that I always keep in my mind. The first one is "We are here to go to a higher level." Second, "The sky is the Limit." Third, "Only the strong will survive."

I pledge that I will do my best to endure the hard work I have to go through to achieve my goal. Thereafter, I would like to go back to my country to help my people. My advice to all is nothing is too hard – you never know you can do it until you try. Therefore, stay hopeful, be steadfast, and believe in yourself. It will work if you work it!

By Laurent Jean Biguens

*Mr. Jean Biguens is from Haiti. He has been studying English since October 2007. He would like to go to a college in Texas to major in Engineering. While English is holding him back right now, he is confident that he will succeed in life once he gets over this hurdle.*

### **Sabrina's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

First of all my dream would be, to change a lot of things that is going on in the world. First I would make it where there would be no wars, or fighting against each other. There would be no more drama, a lot more love, and world peace.

When it comes to education I would make it where everybody wants to learn and everybody makes it to college. I would also change that uniform thing that they have going on where the kids have to wear uniforms; I feel like they should be able to wear what they want as long as it is respectful.

As far as the Presidents I would love to see a black President or even a woman President would be even better. Like Martin Luther King said, we all have dreams and one day our dreams will come true.

By Sabrina Bligen

*I am 41 years old. I am a mother of 4 teenagers, 2 boys and 2 girls. I'm from Bradenton, FL. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE III*

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### **What I am Going to Do**

What I am going to do in life is make a difference in mine and my son Joshua's life. I want to get my G.E.D. I feel that if I get my G.E.D., I could change the way I think of myself.

I want to get a good job so I can have the best for my son. I didn't have much in life and I don't want my son to have the life

that I have. I have been in and out of county jail. I have learned that you should set yourself a goal in life.

My goal is to get my diploma, raise my son and give him a life without pain and suffering. When I was in Okaloosa county jail one of the officers had told me that anyone can be a father but it takes a man to be a dad. That is what I want to do in life.

By Jeremy Boles

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### **Yaowalak's Gift to the World**

If I could give a gift to the world, I would give money to the Thai community and a large amount of books, clothes and food. The money would go to the community so they could use it to help people to build a school. I come from a poor country where the children really need a school to have an education. They need lots of books to read and to study.

My country Thailand is looking for people to donate a large amount of books. Why I want to give people clothes is because most people do not have clothes to wear. Especially in the winter time, they need warm clothes. The food is still very important for the people; they need food to survive. This would be my gift to the world.

By Yaowalak Boning

*Yaowalak is a single mother of two children - Billy and Chris. She is an ESOL class student at Okaloosa Walton College. This class is helping her to get a job and to communicate with people. Her teacher's name is Mrs. Adams.*

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**The Right I Value the Most from the U. S.  
Constitution's Bill of Rights**

The U. S. Constitution's Bill of Rights gives United States citizens many rights. The right I value the most from the Bill of Rights is the right to Freedom of Speech. In the United States, people can say what they want. With the Freedom of Press, people can print or broadcast what they want. Freedom of Religion gives people the right to practice any religion they want. These rights and freedoms are guaranteed to all people in the United States.

With the Freedom of Speech, you can peacefully request changes in the government. There are many different ways to make your voice heard. One way to make your voice heard is by sending a letter, giving your views to your local newspaper. Voting is an important way to make your voice heard.

Voting is the most important right of U.S. citizenship. Before you vote, you must register or sign up to vote. Many communities have neighborhood organizations that work to make their area a better place to live. You can talk about the issues with friends and neighbors. If your neighborhood or community works together to get a candidate elected, your vote has more power. You can organize a protest. You can encourage people who share your ideas to vote. Lots of immigrants do not have these freedoms in their native countries.

I value my freedom of speech in the United States.

By Stanford Bowers

*Stanford is a student with the Palm Beach County Library's Adult Literacy Project. He is a member of the Learner Leaders and a member of the Library Literacy Friends, Inc., the board that supports the Adult Literacy program. As one of the Learner Leaders, Stan has been a presenter at the 2005, 2006, and 2007*

*Florida Literacy Conferences. Stan is a dedicated and determined adult learner. His tutor is Carol Weyhe.*

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### **Advocate for Abused Women**

When I look back over my life as a child being abused, I want to help others. As a child I was neglected by family members. Not having a father in the home, I was surrounded by older brothers and one older sister. I was next to the last child that was born. There was never any food in the house. Now I see there are ways I can help others. I'm going to be an advocate for other abused women.

When most people think of abuse, they think of physical abuse. But mental abuse is really much worse. You can heal naturally from the scars of physical abuse, but healing from mental abuse is extremely difficult.

Now I would like to take a little time to talk to you about myself. With the abuse and neglect, I started to abuse drugs looking for a way out, and to try to overcome some of the forms of mental abuse. I was trying to get rid of the rejection, neglect, intimidation, threats, and thoughts of suicide. All of this made me shut down. I got pregnant at the age of 14 years old. Rejected by family members and school mates as a child, I cried a lot. I was withdrawn and as an adult beat up by men. I was always afraid, always looking over my shoulder. It's like I ran all my life from town to town looking for a way out.

I was never stable until I met two people from Jacksonville. I asked them can I move there with them, and they said yes. So I moved here to this city. It seemed like a good idea at the time, but I got into more relationships that were not good. Then I got married, and my husband abused me. I ended up at the Hubbard House for Abused Wives and Children.

We got some help, and I started to see that I didn't have to live like that, I decided to find a better way and to help myself. We, as women, have to educate ourselves. We have to ask for help. There are people out there that are willing to help us, and with God's help, we can have the things we need to help our children and our family.

I thank God for the Women's Center. I've gotten strength from the people here. Thank you, Women's Center of Jacksonville. I am like a bud of a flower. I'm buzzing here. I will be a beautiful flower because you are here.

By Patricia A. Brooks

*Patricia is the mother of four children. She also has three grandchildren. She is recently divorced. She was referred to the Women's Center by her employer. She has been participating in the Women's Center learning program for approximately seven months. Her immediate goal is to get her GED.*

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### **Nidia's Gift to the World**

If I could give a gift to the world, it would be happiness. If the people are happy, they will not have reason to fight each other or to have wars. Happy people are comfortable with the things they have. They will enjoy every moment of their lives. There will not be stress in any place, and the rate of sickness will be reduced. Opportunities to know each other by having parties or get-togethers to have fun will be the common activity.

By Nidia F. Brown

*I am a married woman. My country is Mexico. I am an ESOL student at OWC – Fort Walton Beach. My teacher is Mary Ann*

*Adams. The ESOL class is very helpful to increase my writing and reading skills and my reasoning in English. My goal is to get a GED diploma.*

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### **Stand Up**

Growing up in the seventies was a struggle for some single parents. I never knew how blessed I was with what I had. If I could turn back the hands of time, I would be more considerate and appreciative. I most definitely know that greedy, selfish, and ungrateful wouldn't have been in my vocabulary.

I'm thankful today to have my mom Annie Bryant, for providing the things that I needed. Well, as I've grown older I now know all the things I wanted weren't a must. I realize how difficult it is making ends meet alone. But by the grace of God I can do all the things through He who strengthens me (Philippians 4:13).

My life is a struggle for me right now on this journey without my loving sisters Melanie, Sheryl, Lashawn, Melissa, and my wonderful brother Ricardo. This journey is such a learning experience for me, I have done grown up things out of childish ignorance or juvenile bravado, but now I've begun to mature.

Life is short, and it's up to me to make it sweet. Life is not what you take, but what you leave behind which defines greatness. It doesn't matter how many times I fall down; What matters is how many times I get up! Today I am blessed to say "Stand Up", stand up for something or you'll fall for anything! If It wasn't for the things I've been through, I wouldn't have had the chance to write this to you. Stand up today and always.

Thank you God for allowing me to share my story.

By Sophia Bryan

*I was born in Quincy, FL and raised in Clearwater, FL. I enjoy shopping, doing hair, and traveling. Today I can say I am strong minded woman, believing in myself and achieving what I believe is possible. Teacher: Chaundra Whitehead Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE III.*

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### **Maybe**

When Mrs. Moseley, my teacher, asked the class to submit writings for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Adult Learner Essay Book, I was excited. I couldn't wait to get started, but I had one problem. What would I write?

Maybe an essay on what it is like to be a woman in prison. How at times the loneliness feels it could swallow me whole. I miss my family so badly it's hard to take a breath. I have to wear patience and acceptance like armor. I take these seemingly endless days one at a time.

Maybe I could write about my past. I could tell how drugs took from me everything I cherish like my children, my home, and myself or how I threw away my education and my opportunities and squandered chance after chance until I ended up here.

Or, maybe I could write about my future. I could imagine what it would be like to have my G.E.D. or how one day I will be with my family, and be a strong, recovering woman who has finally made it and will squander no more chances.

So, no matter what I write, it will be honest and come straight from the heart. It will convey my hopes and my gratitude towards those who helped me on my way.

By Sara Buckalew

*I am 41 years old. I hope to earn my GED and further my studies while incarcerated.*

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### **Surviving the Struggle**

Eating disorders are a very real illness. It is known to be one of the worst illnesses from which to recover. I have an eating disorder. I suffer from bulimia-anorexia. I have had this illness for 28 years. At present I am in recovery. It is not easy. Eating disorders are devastating and affect every aspect of one's life.

There are three types of eating disorders.

**Anorexia-nervosa**: Symptoms include fear of gaining weight. Excessive exercise, starvation and mental disturbances of one's body image are experienced.

I became anorexic at age 19. I learned I could control what I did to my own body. I couldn't control other things going on in my life. I was confused and mixed up about what to do with my future. I also met a man that has been part of my life for 27 years, living in an unstable environment.

**Bulimia**: Lack of control of bingeing and purging food. Self induced vomiting or misuse of laxatives. Also includes starving or excessive exercise and body image distortion.

For me, bulimia set in at age 19 also. It was a way of getting relief from stress. It is a vicious cycle. I have been hospitalized, gone thru addiction and eating disorder programs, to no avail. I re-started such behaviors once I was released.

I did learn that childhood traumas, dysfunction in the home, unstable living arrangements, co-dependency on others contributed

to having this illness. The big obstacle was insecurity and feelings of inadequacy made me hang on to the erratic eating, starving behavior.

**Binge Eating:** Episodes of out of control eating. Eating much more rapidly, eating until feeling uncomfortably full. Then feeling disgusted with ones self or very shameful and guilty after over eating. Binge eaters don't have associations of purging food out.

I've had my share of compulsive over eating. The difference is I compensate by purging and starving. My life has spun out of control from these illnesses. Now I have false teeth, osteoporosis, very serious stomach trouble, and also fatigue and weak muscles.

I'm recovering. I take medicine and see my doctors. I see a therapist weekly. I attend support groups, church, bible-study groups. It is all helping me a great deal. It's not easy. I have to pray, have hope and confidence. I also need to be productive and follow frequent small meal plans.

My illness has affected my family with a lot of worrying and concern. It has had negative influence on relationships. I isolated so much thru the years.

My goal is to get healthy and strong. Be positive, secure in my own body, mind and spirit, and not having others worry over me being sick. I will continue to encourage others and pass on the word of God and continue to quote the Serenity Prayer over and over. "God grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change. Courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference."

By Lorendia Burdette

*Lorendia lives with her loving, supportive sister and brother-in-law. She is in the recovery stage from eating disorders, and from*

*the break-up of a 27 year relationship with her first boy friend. She has developed a spiritually close relationship with her Lord and Savior. She now has a secure, productive and structured lifestyle.*

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### **Some Things Hurt Even Though they are Funny**

One day Seabrin, my mom, and I went to Wal-Mart. We bought two new fishing poles. When we arrived at home, we decided to test them out by putting weights on. Well Seabrin's line got hung up in the bush in the front yard. When Seabrin was walking back to me, I said that I was going to try to hit him in the privates. Well, he started running back to me from the left side of my yard and I cast my rod out straight and some how the weight went to the left and hit him in the privates. All of a sudden he hit the ground with a thud. I ran over to him and he told me what happened and I started laughing. After a few minutes he managed to stand up. Hopefully he will be able to have a family.

By Brian J. Callahan

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### **My Life's Treasured Moments**

I was born in Colombia in 1977. I have a wonderful mother, who was both mom and dad to me and my brother and sister. My dad was killed by a guy who tried to steal his car.

My mom worked seven days a week. At times I was sad because she didn't have much time for us. But when she had the time it was valuable.

My name is Paula. I have three children. I had my first child when I was 17. When I learned I was pregnant I felt so sad that I had disappointed my mom. But at the same time, I knew I had a

new life (my baby), and he's a good part of my life. My mom supported me all the way. My boyfriend is part of our life all the time.

When my son was born I felt so happy. When I saw his eyes and his little hands, I said thanks to God for my son's life. He's my older son, Juan David. We lived with my boyfriend in Colombia for 1 ½ years. It was hard leaving my mom and being a wife and mother. But we made it because my mom and family was supportive.

In 1996 we moved to Atlanta. I felt so sad to see my family stay there. But we thought of the better life for my son and us. Atlanta was beautiful. No mountains, like Colombia. In Atlanta the houses were much bigger, and there was no sea.

I was going to see my mother-in-law and my boyfriend. I felt so happy, but sometime sad for leaving my own family. My mother-in-law is like another mother. She's friendly and we make a good relationship. Like mother and daughter.

We started a new life. I had to learn English. I started to go to school and study. I also started to work. I drove a taxi cab for three years. But one day a man tried to attack me. I quit that job. I called mom often because I was lonely. But we are still happy here because it is a better life.

In 1999 we had my daughter, Dayanna. She's intelligent and beautiful. She is doing ballet, art, soccer and Girl Scouts. I feel so proud.

In 2002 we had my youngest son, Kevin. He's 5 years old. He's going to VPK classes. He's very smart, and he likes to go outside. He looks older than he is.

Now my life is most difficult to be a mom, wife and friend to my children. But I try to do my best.

In 2004 we moved to Jacksonville. We like it here for the beach, and it has less traffic and is quieter than Atlanta. I like Jacksonville, and am studying at the Women's Center to get my GED. Life is better and better each day, for myself and my kids, and I still live with my boyfriend for 14 years. He's a good man.

By Paula Cano

*Paula is the mother of three children. She moved from Colombia to Atlanta in 1996. She moved to Jacksonville in February of 2004. She is participating in the adult learning program at the Women's Center to help get her GED, and also to improve her English.*

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### **How I Felt when I First Lost My Daddy**

I was thirteen or fourteen when I first lost my daddy. I thought at least I was going to see him when I was 21. I wonder how we would have been right now. My mama had to raise two kids alone I think it would have been better if my daddy had been there.

When they told me, I had to be the strong one. I miss the days we spent together. I remember we went to this restaurant in South Carolina called 301. At 301, I ate hamburger and fries and a sweet tea. He told me he can't wait to see what it will be like when I have kids. He said he hoped he'd live to see it. I wish my daddy was still alive.

By Lorenzo Campbell

*Lorenzo is a student in the Lively GED program in Tallahassee.*

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## **History about Me**

My name is Maria del Carmen. I was born in Toluca, Mexico on April 27 in 1988, but I grew up in Tenango del Valle. My parents are Isaias Hernandez and Gloria Perez, and I have two siblings Rosa and Adrian. Rosa is 18 years old and Adrian 10 years old. I studied until 9th grade because I got married to my husband Guillermo Lopez on June 1st 2002.

That year, I had my beautiful daughter Brisa Monserrat on December 30, 2002. On May 31, 2003 we baptized her. That year my mother-in law, my sister-in law and my husband arrived here, three months later my husband came back to Mexico with us and on March 17 2004 we decided to come here.

On April 12 2004 we arrived in Apopka FL. Here I learned to drive and decided to learn English. I found a school that gave me an opportunity to study with my daughter. Now we are happy to be here, with my friends who help when we need it.

I am happy to be here, but I miss to my family, the traditions. I remember when all my family used to get together on holidays and eat traditional food, depending on the occasion. We used to talk about each life, when all my cousins, neighbors, siblings and I would go out to the street and play hide and seek, soccer, basketball, baseball etc.

On my grandfather's birthday at 5:00 am we used to get together and sing "Las mananitas" for him, and he would wake up and say "thank you" and every one would go to the dining room and have chocolate with bread or tamales. Then, at 11:00 a.m. my aunts would make the food and when they cooked the chicken they gave us the stew and every one ate lunch there, in my grandpa's home, throughout the day we would adorn the room with balloons and everything.

At 5 or 6 pm we used to go to the dining room and eat the food my aunts cooked, later we sang "Las mananitas" again and ate the cake and jellos and we used to make a toast and celebrate with him the rest of the night. That and others histories I remember with love and I have them in my heart. Well, this is a little part of my life, and I hope you like it.

THANK YOU.

By Maria del Carmen

*Maria started at GROWS in level 1, knowing very little English, and has progressed all the way to level 3, where she loves to write about her beautiful daughter and her handsome husband.*

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### **My Cultural Enlightenment**

As a young boy I was adopted by a couple who were educators. They could not have children so they decided to adopt two boys; my brother and me. We lived in Michigan for a number of years until they got a job teaching in a small foreign school in South Korea.

We moved to a town called Yeosu. It was on the very southern tip of South Korea. It was a small fishing village off the Korean Strait which separates Korea from Japan. It was very exciting for my brother and me because there were lots of new things to explore. Between the ocean beach, which at low tide would go out for miles and the mountains right behind our house, we enjoyed countless hours of exploration.

Our family would go camping in the mountains on the weekends. It opened my world to things I had never seen! Water falls and rock pools were some of my favorites. We would slide down some of the water falls into deep pools of mountain water. On one of our many trips to the mountains my brother and I met a

Buddhist Monk. The meeting enabled us to explore many temples in that area. There were many Buddhist Monasteries in the mountains. They were very old and very beautiful. Some would take hours to hike to, but every one would have a gateway into the temple with huge painted statues carved out of wood. The statues were there to scare off evil spirits from entering the temples.

Japan was only hours by boat. We went there many times. What stands out to me was our trip to Hiroshima. I had been to Pearl Harbor and had seen what happened in World War II, but I have vivid memories of feeling humbled after our trip through the ruins of Hiroshima. The images of children's shadows burnt into a still standing wall will be with me forever.

My travels also included the Great Wall of China, the Imperial Palace and many other attractions. We took the Trans Siberian railroad. It was a seven day train ride from Beijing, China through Mongolia, Siberia and ended in Moscow Russia. What sticks out for me from this trip was that in every country we went through they would lift the train off the tracks with us in it, remove the wheels to fit the new track size. This dated back to war times. They had different sizes of track in every country to prevent movement of troops.

Some of my other travels have taken me to Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Switzerland, Italy, Luxembourg, France, Netherlands, Belgium, England and Scotland.

I spent most of my childhood traveling around this vast world. I have met countless people from all walks of life. I have met people who couldn't even begin to imagine having some of the common luxuries we have in the United States that most of us take for granted! This makes me very grateful for the few things I have in my life that hundreds upon thousands maybe even millions of people will never even get to see in their lives!

My hope one day is to enlighten others to the vastness of our world and what it has to offer each one of us.

By Adam S. Carothers

*Adam recently moved to Florida from Michigan and has the job of his dreams. Adam has decided to come full circle and has enrolled in GED classes at Manatee Community College in Venice, FL. He is really enjoying the mental stimulation. His teacher is Alan Ackerman.*

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### **Autobiography of Wilfredo Castillo**

My name is Wilfredo Castillo. I am from Panama. I decided to come to the United States looking for a better life for myself and a way to assist my family back home. I came in search of a new life. I work in construction. I worked for Progressive Forest Tree Company when I first arrived. It was hard work.

When I arrived in the United States, I noticed so many changes that it overwhelmed me, especially in the cultural aspect. I noticed differences with the clothing, food, the law. Food is very different. I miss my mother's cooking and our traditional dishes. You can find it here at specialty restaurants, but it is very expensive. The daily life is also different. We are more relaxed in Panama and we don't have such a fast pace of life. Here it is go, go, go. I have always worked hard, so that was a plus I brought with me.

The language barrier was another big limitation for me. It is so important to have good communication skills in order to survive here. English is very difficult to learn. I got around by gesturing all the time and by getting over the fear of speaking and making mistakes. I promised myself not to look at Spanish television channels, but to listen to English channels.

I have been in Florida since 2002, but lived in other states: Alabama, Missouri, Georgia, and Pennsylvania. I moved around a lot due to work issues. I like it in Florida. It is one of the fastest growing states in regards to development and there is lots of construction work here. I have adapted well.

I think that overall I have adopted to the American culture well. I have tried very hard to learn English since it has been one of the goals that I set for myself. I heard about the ESOL (English Speakers of Other Languages) Program at Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal (a program sponsored by the Orange County Public Schools and Adult Community Education) and quickly enrolled. I have been an active student for the past two years and I love it. It has been a very good program for me in terms of education and socially. I have no family here in Florida and now I have new friends that have become a family to me. Now I can accomplish work that I couldn't before because of my gained English skills. I have a better income and am more stable economically.

I conclude by saying that this country has many opportunities; however, you have to work hard, be dedicated, have goals, and strive to do your best. We can accomplish anything when we set our minds to it. I want to take this opportunity to thank those who work so hard to make programs like this available to the hispanic community. I am most grateful. To my teachers who have been wonderful, thank you for your dedication and willingness to help us overcome the fear and adaptation of a new place.

By Wilfredo Castillo

*Wilfedo is originally from Panama. He is a single father of a four year old daughter. He has lived in Florida since 2002. He is a construction worker. He attends Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal to learn English. He is an eager learner and strives to do his best at all times. He has excellent math skills and is very expressive. His teacher is Jacqueline Centeno.*

### **Autobiography- Jacqueline Centeno**

Hello everyone, my name is Jacqueline Centeno. I am a teacher, but I am also an ESOL student. I will always be an ESOL student. Even though I have lived in the United States most of my life, I feel that I am constantly learning new things about the language. I am a divorced mother of two children: Yecenia (26) and Fernando Christian (25), and a grandmother to Adonis (2). I have two Masters' Degree and am fully bi-lingual in Spanish and English.

Why do I say that I am an ESOL student? It is quite simple I am always learning something new about the English language. Everyday I learn something new every day: a new word, phrase, or a new strategy on how to teach my ESOL adult students at night. I understand when my students come into my class and they feel fear and absolute desperation at not being able to communicate with others. I was once, a long time ago, an ESOL student myself.

I came to the United States when I was in third grade. I remember arriving in New York and feeling horrified about the huge skyscrapers. I missed my homeland, my friends and the family I left behind. My father came in search of a better life for us. He worked as a teacher and my mother worked in a shoe factory. My siblings and I went to school. There were no ESOL programs back then. I remember sitting in a class full of students who spoke differently than me. I felt lost and had intense sense of fear. I cried for one full month. I got ill in the mornings and was terrified to walk to school. I am thankful now for a hispanic teacher, Ms. Gonzalez, who saw the fear and anguish I felt and proceeded to help me on a daily basis to survive. She took the time to teach me with lots of patience. I remember she made my transition into this country a whole lot easier. I want the same for my students.

I was glad for a supportive family. However, we lived with relatives for about two months until my father got his salary stable and an apartment for all five of us. It was great to share with my cousins, but I always think about how it feels for someone to take everything they have and just come here to no family, no friends, and no support. It takes courage and determination to do what we must do to make better lives for our loved ones. I wish for all my students to have the opportunity to learn and adopt quickly, but this is not so in many cases. The programs are limited and the costs are high. I believe that Orange County Adult Education Program gives adult learners the opportunity to learn and acquire the necessary skills to survive in the United States. It gives them a chance to learn English in a supportive and safe environment. I am so glad I work to help others.

I know, personally, how difficult it is to fit in and how extremely difficult it is to learn a new language, any language. It does take time and determination and setting goals and sticking to them. Sometimes life is hard and times are rough. As an ESOL teacher I try my hardest to make sure that people don't give up, that they start and finish ESOL programs, and to go beyond just our school setting. I make sure they understand that being bi-lingual in today's global economic world is a plus for them. That being bi-lingual is definitely a plus!

By Jacqueline Centeno

*Jacqueline Centeno is a Title III Instructional Coach for the Multilingual Student Education Department and an ESOL Adult Education Program Site Coordinator/Teacher at Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal for the Adult Community Education Program in Orange County Public Schools. She is a mother of two and a graduate of the University of Central Florida and Springfield College in Springfield, Massachusetts. She enjoys teaching English to adult learners and states that she gets the best satisfaction of*

*seeing her students faces when they realized that they know more than what they think!*

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**Polly**

One who persistently finds good in everything.  
The state of being part of.  
Part you, part me, part us, part free.  
You're like a day at the ocean  
When there's a gentle breeze.  
Like a walk in the forest amidst  
The flowers and trees.  
By being part of,  
You're made a whole.  
Conceived of loving creatures  
From our heart and soul.  
It means so much to me  
To let you know I care,  
And if I let you go from me,  
There's a void in the closeness we will share.  
I know one day we'll have to part,  
And in that fleeting moment,  
You'll take with you my heart.  
I realize you're a woman now,  
For I became one too.  
I have no desire to control your life,  
But just to be a part of you.  
Ride free daughter dear,  
Ride upon your steed.  
And if your trail suddenly ends,  
I'll be there to lead.  
Love,  
Mom

By Diane Charles

*Diane is married with two children and one grandchild named Logan. She moved to Lake City in 2007 and became a newlywed in April of 2007. Diane received her GED this past fall and is pursuing a degree in massage therapy.*

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### **The Christmas Visit**

My husband and I moved to Florida at Oct 1st, 2006. In March, 2007 my stepson Michael was visiting us on his spring break. When he returned to California, he invited his friends to visit us during the Christmas holiday. On Dec 16<sup>th</sup>, 2007 early in the morning, they arrived at Jacksonville International Airport. My husband was already waiting for them at the airport exit way.

Crescent Beach is between Saint Augustine and Palm Coast on the A1A Scenic and Historic Coastal Highway. People sometimes drive the car onto the beach, do exercises, fish or play games. That morning my husband wanted to show them the Atlantic Ocean. Afterwards, they drove the van onto the beach. Michael was the driver (this was his first time to drive onto beach). Before he became aware of what was happening, the van sank into the soft sands and became stuck. Fortunately, a park ranger's car came and helped them to pull the van out. When they came home, they were still excited about the incident. My husband knew they were lucky because they had barely escaped the danger.

The next day, Michael and his friends drove all the way from Palm Coast to Key West. They were crazy about water sports. They enjoyed jet skiing and canoeing for two whole days. On their return trip to Orlando, they wanted to visit South Miami Beach but the traffic too heavy. They drove directly to Orlando. My husband and I would joined them to visit the Islands of Adventure water park and Universal Studios. The next morning we met them at Orlando. We went to Marvel Super Hero Island, Toon

Lagoon, Jurassic Park, The Lost Continent, and Seuss landing of the Island of Adventure. Also, they visited Production Central, New York, Hollywood, World Expo, San Francisco/Amity, and Woody Woodpecker's KidZone. We rode several high-speed roller coasters, from the Incredible Hulk, groundbreaking 3-D attractions, and the Amazing Adventures of Spider-Man, to the Shrek 4-D show. Their favorite was the Terminator 2: 3-D.

On the last two days, they visited St. Augustine (the oldest city in the United States) and walked around the old town to see the remnants of the Spanish Empire's effect on this area. They took some pictures of the Henry Flagler's first St. Augustine hotel (Ponce de Leon Hotel), The Lightner Museum and El Castillo de San Marco. Also they came to the Fort Matanzas. The fort was building in 1740-1742 and played a strategic role in warning St. Augustine of potential enemy advancements from the south via the Matanzas River.

Michael and his friends stayed in Florida almost one week. On Christmas Eve, his friends returned one by one to California. On the morning of Dec 24th, he left Florida with his best friend San Ho. Before New Year's Eve, we received an email and some pictures from Mike. He said, "I appreciated Helen to making the food and Dad organizing the schedule. We had a great time in Florida. Thank you very much."

By Chun Ping Chen (Helen)

*My name is Chen, Chun Ping, my friends call me Helen. I have been in America almost three years and in Florida for half that time. Before that, I was in China. Nowadays, I stay home and surf the internet often. I hope to learn sufficient English to get a job.*

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## **Superstition**

Though it seems somewhat superstitious, it is a true story. At the latter part of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, China was under the rule of the corruptive and incapable Ching Empire. During that time, most people were very poor. The youngsters, except those from the royal families, had difficulty going to school. Hence, a lot of people were illiterate. They could earn a living only by using their strength.

In an underprivileged area in South-Eastern China, there lived a poor family of six people: the grandma, the parents, and the three kids. The father was illiterate and worked as a coolie. Having suffered a painful illiterate life, he worked very hard to earn more money in order to let his young sons go to school and get better jobs after their graduations. But among them, only the eldest one had any interest in studying, while the other two were quite the opposite. Therefore, the three grownups, especially the grandma, loved him much more than the other two.

At the age of 13, the eldest child could recite many old Chinese books and write some beautiful essays. The more he improved in his studies, the more the grandma loved him. But, unfortunately, it happened one day that the clever child died from a sudden disease. The whole family was very sad, especially the grandma. She sat beside the dead body crying sorrowfully for a long time. Then, she grasped the child's left hand, slapped him on the forearm, and blamed him: "You are a bad boy! You know I loved you so much. How could you leave me so unsympathetically and ruthlessly?"

During that time, China was a Buddhist country. People believed that human beings, after death, would be reincarnated. It was a superstitious legend that if a dead person were slapped on any part of his body, there would be a nevus shown on the "counterpart" of his body when he was reincarnated. By

“counterpart,” it means: “*right hand vs. left foot*”; or “*left cheek vs. right hip*,” etc.

One night, the grandma dreamt that her grandson approached her, murmuring, “I know you loved me so much. Don’t be sad any more from now on. I will be your grandson again soon.” The next morning when she woke up, she could remember clearly what she had dreamt. She told her family and her relatives about it. But none of them believed it. They thought the dream was merely because she thought of the child so often day and night.

Just a couple months after the grandma’s dream, the mother found herself pregnant. Since her youngest son was already nine years of age at that time, which meant she hadn’t got pregnant for a long time, it made her believe that the pregnancy was the reincarnation of her dead eldest son. Several months later, she gave birth to a son. To everybody’s great surprise, there was clearly a bit nevus on the newly-born baby’s right leg, which was just the “counterpart” of the left forearm slapped by the old lady. Moreover, as the baby was growing up, he was very much like his eldest brother, both externally and internally.

After the baby came into this world, the old lady was no longer sorrowful. She gave all her love to him because she firmly believed that he was the reincarnation of her former eldest grandson. It happened that this little baby was later my father.

By Eugene Chiang

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### **A Fool for Love**

I thought I was in love  
I thought I had someone who loved me and cared about me  
But all this time, I was just a fool in love

This piece of artwork, God's painting of me  
A beautiful black queen, yea that's me.  
I thought to my God I never knew I looked like this  
Taking my looks and shape to my head  
Falling in love with it, yea me falling in love  
Easy with men and women

Or me thinking that they were in love with me  
I was that fool in love  
Just crying and hurting  
In so much pain  
Makes me sit back and think about  
How I am hurting myself with my tears  
Did these people love me for who I was?  
Or just a piece of skin they can come get  
When they were in need of pleasure

Yes that was me, that fool for love  
Family and friends they try to tell me  
I don't need to go through this  
But I did not want to listen  
Because I was in love  
A little whisper in my ear, a kiss, a hug  
Or a blow on the neck, and a small touch had me going crazy  
Yes I'm that fool that's in love

Crying all day long and all night  
Buried myself in my tears  
Until one day an old lady came up to me and said  
"Little child stop sharing those tears  
You don't have to be that fool in love no more  
Just put your faith in God above."

By Chiquita Collier

*Chiquita is a student in Ms. Marlinda Johnson's ABE II class at Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **Ode to my Baby**

Fat and plumpy  
Love of life  
Cheeks the size of oranges  
Eyes bright as the sun  
Legs twisted to the side  
Cute as a button  
Harmony

By Brittany Collier

*Brittany is a mother of a two year old girl. She is attending Lively in Tallahassee to receive her GED. She has a wonderful life and is taking one day at a time.*

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### **The Falling Star**

Every night Ellie would sit in her window and watch the stars before going to bed. She would try to count them all but she knew there were just too many. She named the moon Maleah and the sun Isabella after her friends at school, some of the stars had names. Tonight however Ellie had no idea that this night would be different.

Just as she was closing her window she saw a flash of light come right into her window. She looked down and saw one little star lying on her bedroom floor. He was crying and did not see Ellie. She kneeled down and picked up the little star and wiped away his tears. "What's wrong?" asked Ellie. "I fell out of the sky

and I don't know how to get back" replied the star. "Can you help me?" he asked.

Ellie knew it was bed time and that she would have to help tomorrow. She told the little star that in the morning they would try to get him back home in the sky.

The next morning Ellie woke up, ate her breakfast and got dressed. She told her mommy she was going outside to play. Ellie carried the little star out to her backyard. Ellie told little star that she would bounce him back up into the sky. She jumped higher and higher on her trampoline. Little star was having fun bouncing around with Ellie but it was not bouncing him high enough to go to the sky.

Then Ellie thought she would swing the little star back into the sky. Ellie swung higher and faster than she ever had before. Again the little star had fun swinging with Ellie but it wasn't high enough to get him home. Little star really missed his mommy and daddy and became sad again. "Don't cry little star" said Ellie "I've got another idea to get you home."

I'll get a balloon and you can float back into the sky. Little star liked that idea. Ellie went into the garage and found the box of birthday decorations. She found yellow balloons, pink balloons and red but she liked the blue one the best. Ellie thought it matched the sky. I'll just tie you on the ribbon and then when you think your high enough let go and you'll be back up in the sky with all the other stars. Ellie blew up the balloon tied the ribbon and said good bye to the little star and let go of the balloon. "Thank you" yelled little star.

He floated farther and farther away until she could not see him anymore. Ellie was sad to see the star go but was happy she could help him. That night sitting in her window watching the stars, she

saw a little star shining brighter than all the rest. Ellie knew that the little star made it home and was back with his family.

By Jill Cortez

*This story is dedicated to my little shining star Ellie. Thanks for making me such a better person and this world such a brighter place. Jill had to leave school and work several jobs to pay her bills. Now at the age of 28 she has been laid off from her job and is going back to school and achieving the one thing that still haunts her, not finishing school. She attends class at the job link center and has Ms. Sackey for her teacher. She loves writing and wrote several short stories for her daughter during slow times at her previous job and this was one of them. She is excited about sharing them with others.*

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### **Continue to Learn—My Story**

I was born in Marianna, Florida. I dropped out of school in the eighth grade when I was sixteen years old. I then went to work at a Gladiola farm. I realized I needed more education so I went to Adult Education from six till nine P.M., two nights a week for three years. The teachers at Adult Education really prepared me for the G.E.D. and I passed in the early nineties.

In two thousand I went to work for the University of Florida where I did very well but realized my writing skills were not good. Later I accepted a position at the Department of Transportation. I worked four ten hour days and that left Fridays open for going back to school to improve my writing skills. I called around and found that the Public Library would help me with my writing skills. The teachers have taught me a lot about writing. With hard work and dedication I am beginning to learn how to write, spell and punctuate correctly.

By Eddie Coulliette

*Mr. Coulliette is a recent student at the Jackson County Public Library Learning Center. He has made great progress and plans to continue improving his writing skills.*

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### **I Know I Can do It**

I was going through life pretending to have an education. I was having a hard time keeping a job and I didn't have an education.

I had my first grandson and I wanted to read to him a bedtime story, so I went to the library to ask them to help find someone to help me to read better. I waited till they found me the best teacher that could teach me patience to learn to read properly.

I met Virginia Gildrie and her husband. They were the nicest people I had ever met and they wanted to see me read a book on my own. Even though I went to high school and I did graduate. I did not know how to read. That did not stop me from wanting to learn to read better.

So Virginia introduced me to my tutor Barbara. I come to school to work with Barbara on Monday night and also Wednesday night. We work for about 2 hours each night. She helps me to work on my reading, spelling, sounds and pronouncing my words correctly.

I needed my driver's license to get to school on my own. I studied the questions and answers in my driver's book. I never thought I would get my driver's license but I did. Now I am reading everything when I shop. I turn the box over and read the ingredients for my health because I have to see how much salt is in the food.

I also learned to use the computer. I started at level 1 and now I am on level 3. I also have helped my classmates to use the computer, something that I never thought that I could do.

Even though we are in school to learn we also have fun. Every Christmas we have a big party for the students and teachers and we have so much fun playing Wheel of Fortune. We also have a dinner in May. The students get certificates for every book they complete.

I always wanted to go to Hollywood and be a superstar and wear diamond rings but not as badly as I want to learn to read a whole book on my own. I know if I keep coming to school someday I can do it.

By Sandra Courts

*Sandra Courts is the proud mother of her grown daughter, Hope, and the grandmother of 2 boys ages 9 and 5. She is a student at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg. She has been working on improving her reading and writing skills for the past 4 years. She is also learning to work on the computer.*

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### **Alice's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

My dream and my faith today is to let go, and let God have his way with me. Continue to let him be in total control of my life. Letting go and letting God control my life will give me strength and courage to become the best mother, daughter and grandmother my loved ones deserve as well as becoming a very productive member in today's society.

By Alice Coy

*I'm originally from Chicago, IL. I had a wonderful upbringing until I chose to take life for granted, causing me to be incarcerated numerous times. God spared my life so I can become a very productive member of society. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon ABE IV, Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **Would you Rather Live in the Country or the City**

I would rather live in the Country. When I leave my home early in the morning for my morning walk, I step outside my door and the air is so crisp and fresh it's like right after a good rain storm and everything seems new again.

As I look up to the sky, it is so clear and blue with a few white puffy clouds. The pine trees are so tall and the branches are long with moss hanging off the tips of the branches, you can see the morning dew on the leaves.

There are several dozen birds flying from one tree to the next and so many different colors, red, shining black, blue and yellow. If you listen closely it sounds like they're singing in harmony.

As I walk a little further, I can see a family of deer. The older deer are tan with a white strip going down the middle of their chest and the baby deer is sleeping like a new born baby.

I keep on walking and as I get closer to the stream of water, the rabbits hear my foot steps going through the tall grass and they start running in different ways along the dirt road.

When I get to the stream, I see two small black baby bears playing high up in a pine tree. The branches on the tree were bent so far over, I thought it would break right off, but it didn't. They were playing like two small children on a playground without a

care in the world. The stream is crystal clear. You could see the rocks on the bottom and the fish swimming around.

The Country has so much beauty in it, there's no other place that I would rather live.

By Melody Coyle

*My name is Melody. I have lived in Naples for about 28 years. I've been married for 21 years and have 4 children and 2 grandkids and one on the way. I've been driving a school bus for the past 10 years. I hope by this time next year I will be in college.*

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### **The Web Of Dreams Tangled in Creeds...**

My humanity is of Karma,  
Far in past times....  
As a spider;  
I spun webs created in greatness like rhymes.  
I thirst, in knowledge to conceive my aspirations;  
I am a master artist in my own craft and creations.  
Society will draw a circle to shut me down  
Yet, I evoke mathematics to help me out.  
Perplex as it may seem  
I spin my web of dreams, tangled in creeds.  
Visualizing, what others may seem as a mirage  
I set my plans to action.  
Reminding me of those specter's in ways of misdirection.  
For, my ambition is set clear  
I build a wonder of strength  
That surpasses that of steel.  
Idealizing facts that stretch from forest floor to branch in a  
cycle or wheel  
I do not delude myself in notions of visions  
That will destroy my web in condemnations of provisions.

I use rain drops as reflections; as time flashes by  
I listen carefully to the ticks; I show my best designs  
I embark, on my vision with good views and opinions  
For I strive to construct the best in good deeds.  
Another, spider in the world showing a web of dreams, tangled in  
creeds

By Juan Mystic Cruz-Perez

*My name is Juan Cruz. I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts and moved to Florida to better my life. I was doing so well in life I thought I knew it all but I was lacking one thing. An education so I went to Tampa Workforce and got my GED. Thanks to Lynn my teacher and her assistant their I accomplished my goal. Also the student were my backbone. So this poem is not only for all of them but to those who dare to dream and accomplish the goals they have in life.*

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### **Motivation**

Motivation is what I gained when  
my youth was taken away at a young  
age, and adulthood was forced upon me.  
I felt sad, alone, and scared, but I still  
went forward.

Then there's people I've known my  
whole life; one minute they're there, and  
the next second, they've past on, never  
to be seen again, and you're left behind  
feeling despair, but you still find a way to  
move on.

Motivation is what I had after all the  
tragic events I endured through life, but

*Opening a New World*

I'm still moving on to become a better individual.

Once I moved forward I found a way to move on, and wanted to be a better individual; I realized that was motivation, and motivation is me.

By Tashasia Davis

*Teacher: Ms. Letitia Lowe Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE III.*

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**If Only...**

Ever imagine winning the lottery? Sound exciting? What would you do? Wait till you hear what I will buy with my earnings. First a house, then I would purchase a red 2008 Dodge Charger, and last, go on a New York shopping spree.

The first thing I would purchase with my earnings is a house, a tall Victorian Ballroom Masquerade Penthouse. The house would include a pool and an inside basketball court. I would decorate the master bedroom with sixteenth century African relics.

The second thing I would purchase with my earnings is a car, a red 2008 Dodge Charger. I would fully customize it with twenty eight inch rims and fifteen inch headrest monitors. To complete my customization, I would have my signature airbrushed on both front doors.

The third thing I would purchase is a New York shopping spree. First stop, The Christian Audigier boutique. I love his designer T-shirts! Then, I'm off to find some exclusive shoes rarely seen. Last, I'll visit the Ed Hardy boutique to pick up a

couple of his flamboyant designer hats. I promise you...New York would never be the same!

Ever find yourself daydreaming about winning the lottery? Sound exciting? Well, if I won, I would buy a huge Victorian style house, a 2008 Red Dodge Charger, and go on an exclusive New York shopping spree.

By Joshua Daniels

*Josh is a student in the MTEC Adult Education Program located at Gulf High in New Port Richey, Florida. He is a songwriter and currently has his music published to his personal website at [myspace.com/youngciti](http://myspace.com/youngciti). He feels his background in writing music is helping him to become a more proficient writer. Josh feels his teachers, Ms. Carson and Ms. Teeple have inspired his desire to become more successful!*

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### **A Story about my Life**

My name is Berlynn Ukachi Davis, and this is my story. I was born on November 3, 1982, on St. Croix, the U.S. Virgin Islands. I was a very beautiful baby and a very bright child too. I am a Christian. I love worshipping the Lord everyday. I grew up in church. I am also very shy and very quiet. I love to read, sing, dance, play Christian music, go to the movies, go bowling and picking up shells on the beach.

I have been wearing glasses since I was 5. When I was in first grade, I had to sit in the front seat, so that I could see the board. I graduated from Sandalwood High School on May 31, 2001. I got a special diploma, because I have a mental disability. I have trouble concentrating. It takes me a long time to do some things.

I want to go to college someday to study massage therapy. The reason why I want to study massage therapy is to help people who are having pain. After I graduate from college, I want to get married, and have some children of my own. I want to have 3 children. I am 25 years old, and still living at home with my parents and my grandmother. I don't have a boyfriend to go out with me. I am not dating yet. I am still waiting for Mr. Right. The Lord will bless me with the right one when the time comes.

I moved to America in 1992. I have two brothers and two sisters. I love my family very much. I love to travel and eat out with my family a lot. I am working at Wendy's. I have been working there for almost 3 years. I am enjoying my new life. I am a very nice person, and I like myself. I still miss my childhood and my teenage years, but it is time for me to give that all up and move on to adulthood. It is time for some new changes. I have to get used to these new changes as well.

I thank God everyday that he is with me, and for his blessings on me and my family. I will always do what's right and stay focused on reading God's word. I want to reach out to a lot of people who need the Lord. My story will show a lot of people how God has touched my life. I want the Lord to change the world around. I will follow my own dreams and remember all the good times. I pray that God will help me grow spiritually. I need him more than ever. He is my only hope.

By Berlynn U. Davis

*Berlynn U. Davis is an ABE student at Learn to Read in Jacksonville. She attends a grammar class twice a week and meets with an individual tutor once a week. She is also active in her church.*

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### **Tamika's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

That one day you will not hear of child abuse, child abductions and killings, and that children will not be judged by what their parents have done but by what kind of person that they become. That there will be more places that are safe for kids to hang out, play sports, learn and get tutoring. One day when you don't have to worry if sending your child to school is a good idea anymore.

One day I hope that there will be help for kids who get in trouble the first time around. That there is counseling and help before they lock them up to find out what makes them do what they have done, to see if it's just a cry out for help.

By Tamika Davis

*I'm a 29 year old single mother of one from Tampa, FL. Teacher:  
Ms. Judy Drymon ABE IV, Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **To my Papa**

Papa, you were always there for me.  
You got up at 4:00 a.m. every morning  
to feed the farm animals.  
When you got done, you would  
walk out to the newspaper box to get your paper.  
While I would get ready for school, you would  
sit at the picnic table outside and read your newspaper.  
When I got sick, you would take care of me.

You were like a mom and dad to me all in one person.  
You were amazing.  
You always loved to have fun and tell jokes.  
You always had coffee going.

I would put on your socks for you  
since you could not bend over.

You were always a morning person.  
You were always in a hurry,  
never wanting to be late.  
When you passed, my life stood still.  
I was lost without you.

By Jessica Davison

*Jessica lived in Panama City all her life, but recently moved to Tallahassee and attends the GED class there. She has a little brother Brandon and an older sister Christen. She lives in Tallahassee with her boyfriend.*

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### **Mary's Gift to the World**

My gift to the world would be a monetary gift to the poor, humble people in Africa. Most people in this part of the world walk miles and miles to get a drop of water. To make life easier for them, I would like to make a monetary gift to install a manual water pump. The water is a precious commodity in this part of the world because of the very dry and hot climate conditions and droughts. If there is a manual water pump in the village, they could utilize their valuable time in a more productive way rather than walking miles to carry water on their heads.

By Mary DeCroos

*Mary is an ESOL student at Okaloosa Walton College in Ft. Walton Beach. Her teacher is Mary Ann Adams.*

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## **Life Long Learning**

I am Theresa Dendy and I have had the opportunity to become a Literacy Ambassador for the Calhoun County Public Library in northwest Florida. I first became involved with Literacy at the Library when I enrolled as an adult learner to improve my spelling.

When I was a child I lived in a Catholic Children's Home for homeless children after my mother became ill. I learned to sew a dress at the Home. It was there that I learned to do very good housekeeping. I learned to set the table properly. My sister and I had to set up the dining room. I was just 10 or eleven years old then. (Later my dear children said I was ridiculous because I wouldn't let them touch the walls with their hands after I had cleaned them.)

I cleaned for doctors and lawyers. And I worked as a housekeeper 15 ½ years in a hospital in Baltimore, Maryland. I received awards there because I was so good and thorough in my cleaning.

When my children were young, I became interested in becoming a teacher's aid because I was very involved with their education. I would sit in on their classes so that I could help them with their learning. I was really disappointed that I could not be a teacher's aid because I had difficulty learning to spell, so I became a housekeeper. I was a very good housekeeper.

Now I am improving my spelling skills through studying at the Family/Adult Learning Center of the Calhoun County Public Library. I have had some really good teachers: Lavaine Williams, Joyce Peacock and Helen Gavin. I have received praises because of my improvement in reading long paragraphs at Kingdom Hall so I know I am progressing. I have learned to use a computer and type my answers in TutorSystems, which is a computer program that teaches me reading and spelling and grammar skills.

I just wish I could have learned all of this years ago. I plan to continue to get help with my spelling so that I can be a better teacher in teaching people about the Bible.

By Theresa Dendy

*Ms. Dendy is an energetic senior citizen who undoubtedly will never stop learning.*

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### **African Animals**

Joe Green loves animals and he loves taking their pictures. He had an idea of sharing his photographs.

He thought the best place to photograph animals was Africa. Joe knew an African Chief, Jimba, of the Aruba Tribe. He met Jimba in New York at college. Joe contacted his friend about his idea. Jimba invited Joe to stay at his village. He offered to take him to a popular water hole where all the animals come to drink.

When Joe arrived at the Kenya airport, Jimba was happily waiting. At the village, Jimba introduced Joe to his people and explained why he was visiting. Jimba explained to Joe his tribe's cultures.

The next morning they drove four miles to the water hole before the animals arrived. They hid behind bushes to take pictures. After waiting about an hour, suddenly a pride of Lions arrived. After they drank, the adult lions went to a nearby tree to rest. Joe photographed the lion cubs as they played – slapping, jumping on, biting and chasing one another.

Joe reloaded his camera and waited for a long time before a herd of impalas, zebras, elephants, and gazelles came. Joe took

more pictures. Soon the herd finished drinking and left. Joe and Jimba waited about thirty minutes and suddenly a herd of gemsboks came. Joe had never seen these animals and he got a kick out of watching. He thought they were beautiful. Joe stopped photographing them and watched them until they left. Joe and Jimba waited for other animals. Suddenly, baboons, chimpanzees, and spider monkeys appeared. Joe photographed them grooming their young. After the apes left, a rare white rhinoceros came. Joe took many pictures of this magnificent, marvelous animal. He put his camera down and observed the rhino enjoying himself cooling off. Joe hated to see the rhino leave because he liked him. After all the animals left, Joe and Jimba drove back to Jimba's village.

After arriving, they ate and talked about the wonderful day. Joe told Jimba sadly that he must leave tomorrow. He promised Jimba he would keep in touch. Jimba hated to see Joe leave because they had become very fond of each other.

Joe and Jimba arose early and drove to the airport. After confirming his ticket, Joe said goodbye and thanked Jimba for a wonderful time.

Joe arrived at Kennedy Airport about 7 p.m. Later, he made animated slides of his photographs, which he blew up to appear lifelike. Since the children in the hospitals could not visit the Zoo, Joe had permission to show his slides. The public relations children worker, Mary Smith, greeted Joe. She and her aides gathered the children from seven to thirteen years-old in a large auditorium. Also, some doctors, nurses, social workers, and administrators came to Joe's presentation. As he began his presentation, he explained each animal and their behavior at the water hole. The animals in the slide looked like they were actually moving, which amazed everyone. The show lasted two hours. When the presentation ended, everyone applauded. Joe visited many hospitals showing his animal slides and made everyone

happy. Joe gave credit to Jimba, a good friend for life, for taking him to the water hole.

By Jeff Deutch

*Jeff is a student with Florida Community College at Jacksonville's Learning for Living Program. The class is held at the Mental Health Resource Center, Inc. in Jacksonville, Florida. Jeff enjoys writing short fictional stories, such as romance, horror, etc. His instructor's name is Margart Mathis.*

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### **From Darkness to Light**

I lived on the streets for almost one year. I learned about the dark side of life, but I believe that only through the darkness can one see the light.

When I was eighteen my mother kicked me out of my home after an argument and a fight with my brother. I nearly killed him. Mom told me to leave, and I looked at her with sad eyes. I knew that even if I convinced her to let me stay, my heart had filled too much with the darkness, so I left. I traveled to Marble Falls, Texas where I lived for a few months. I then hitchhiked to Austin, Texas. This is where my life changed and I really grew up.

On the streets I had two choices: grow up or be destroyed. I survived the horrors of the streets. I watched my friends die, some in my own arms. I have saved lives and I have destroyed them.

One day I met a woman. We were together for five months, and I cared about her very much. We were walking to a soup kitchen and we were attacked by a group of men who were also homeless. One of them threw a brick at her and I jumped in the way to protect her. This brick shattered as it hit my eye. Time slowed dramatically as everyone stared in amazement at what I had

done. They were not expecting this sacrifice and it opened their eyes to the light.

My girlfriend dragged me inside the soup kitchen. As my face poured blood, I caught a glimpse of the trail that I had left behind me. She prayed for me as I sat leaning against the wall with my hand covering my eye. I told her not to cry for me because I protected her knowing fully well the consequences, and I wouldn't take it back for the world.

The ambulance came to pick me up, and on the way to the hospital I died and saw God. He asked me, "Why have you come here? It is not yet your time, Guardian." I asked him, "Why did you call me Guardian?" He replied, "You sacrificed your life to save another."

Three weeks later my girlfriend left me. Even if I had known then what I know now, I still would have saved her. If someone has wronged you it does not give you the right to stand back and do nothing. You should still protect them; you should still protect life.

By David Duffy

*David Duffy is a Computer Systems Technology student at Washington-Holmes Technical Center in Chipley, Florida. He earned his GED diploma in December 2007 after attending the Adult Ed program at the center. David is twenty-two years of age, married, and has a fourteen month old daughter.*

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### **Untitled**

I wished away the rain again, and the bottom fell out and the walls caved in. Falling harder everyday, not knowing who I am or what has made me this way. Angry and lost, confused and enraged, any

other emotion I'm void of these days. I keep screaming but no sound comes out. I keep running but I just seem to fall back. I've taken into me this lost cause that I am, the air that I breathe is poisoned I fear. I'm nothing but fury it is rage that I've embraced. I hold onto it dearly, it's all that warms me these days. I've lost all sense of myself to this craziness that consumes me, an empty shell of the person I used to be, you can ask all who knew me. Dreams have turned to nightmares, love has turned to hate, the warmth of the sun is gone, even food has no taste, a broken down inmate is all that's left these days.

By Lauren Fernandez

*Teacher: Mrs. Patsy Moseley, ABE IV Program: Gadsden Correctional Facility ABE.*

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### **My First Chicken Pot Pie**

I want to share with you an interesting story that happened to me with a group of co-workers. I am a social worker who is working with Visually Impaired People (VIP). One of the principal responsibilities in my work is to provide support through group sessions to people who are legally blind and are coping with different stages of grievance/bereavement. They are also learning how change through new positive experiences can be possible.

I came three years ago from a Hispanic country and as a person from a different culture, many experiences could be considered new for me. This one was funny but interesting as well. I have never eaten Chicken Pot Pie... After a work conference I was with some of my co-workers on our way home and we stopped in a new restaurant. Since I have come to the USA, I can identify many different experiences as my first one. This time was not an exception; we were talking about what we would order to eat. My co-workers were talking about the "famous" Chicken Pot Pie and

how delicious it was. At that moment, I didn't have an idea how the taste would be and I decided to order one.

Usually, when I am dealing with a new experience I have a bunch of questions that come to my mind; moreover I ask myself if I am making the right decision. I learned to trust my decision and if I don't obtain my desired results there is always a new plan that I can figure out. But, I know something for a fact: if I don't try something I will never be able to know how it tastes.

Also, I have learned that life is like that, it will place you in different types of new experiences. I enjoy taking risks and seeing what will happen next. I have learned when I am dealing with a new situation, asking questions can help me to have a clearer idea about the decision to make and being around positive people as well. I have also learned that all different stages of vision loss are very unique, as are any other first experiences in life.

Even though trying a new plate of food is a completely different experience from learning to deal with a loss. I have had the opportunity to identify some similarities in the process. Being around VIP participants teaches me how my client's life can be productive and positive through proper information applying to new experiences. This is what I share in my group session with my clients.

Mostly, I am trying to ensure all VIP participants can be aware in every new situation "If you don't let yourself receive the opportunity to be in a training center you will not be able to experience the difference that having services available can make. You will also be losing a delicious taste of empowerment and the possibility of keeping your independency in a safe manner."

By Marielys Figueroa

*Marielys is from Puerto Rico. She has been in the United States for three years: two in New York where she took English classes, and then she moved to Florida for our wonderful climate as it resembles her home. She is employed as a social worker for Fort Myer's Visually Impaired People program. Marielys is studying for the TOEFL exam this spring. Her goal is to score a 600 or better. After passing this exam, she hopes to enroll in Florida Gulf Coast University, where she plans to center her studies in Gerontology. Her tutor is Amy Hollman.*

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### **My Personal Hero**

There are many types of heroes in life that people admire most, whether they are firefighters, police officers, medical people, military people, friends or family. The person that I admire most is someone that has been able to go through daily trials and who has made the best of every situation and does things to the best of their ability, and that person is my brother, Michael.

Michael was born legally blind and developed many medical problems as he grew into a young man. Michael has done a lot of things in his life that truly have amazed me. He works very hard at whatever he does. He is so much fun to be with and I enjoy doing things with him like walking, playing basketball, playing with my dog and his Seeing Eye dog.

Mike was given a Seeing Eye dog to help him get around places. He had to receive training on how to work with the right dog. The dog is now seven years old and is a very good worker for him. I love his dog for that reason. Mike went to college and earned his masters degree.

He now teaches at Brown Elementary School and works with handicapped children and those with special needs. My brother is also bilingual and helps to teach and tutor children who need

English as a second language. Mike's dog goes with him to school. His class loves that. Mike has a young boy in his class that has visual problems as well as medical problems. The child's mother has thanked Mike and has told him that she is inspired as she hears Mike's story and hears how he has excelled in school and many other things, such as creating games and programs to help his class to improve and learn new skills.

In conclusion, I hope that other people can see Mike as a hero, and if not as a hero, I would like them to know that he is a good man that does so much to help others in need, either in school, teaching Spanish and English, or just being someone that others can look up to. I am happy to say that my hero is my brother Michael. I can only hope that others see him the way I do. He is truly a blessing!

By Nina Fox

*Nina is 23 year old GED Student, who has suffered health issues of her own. When Nina was 21, she underwent brain surgery to remove a cyst, which was making her very ill. Nina has continued to work hard in the GED program, in order to realize her dream.*

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### **Runaway Gypsy Girl**

I was seventeen years old when I ran away. It was very hard for me, but I couldn't live the gypsy life. I wanted to learn how to read and have a normal life. I didn't like living the gypsy ways. I had to leave my family and did not see them for 25 years.

I tried so hard to fit in with American people. I had to learn to trust. I met some nice people who helped me get a new start. I met my first husband. I was married for thirty-one years. We had three sons. It was not a good marriage, so we divorced.

I decided then to go to school and learn how to read. After three years, I graduated from the Hillsborough Literacy Council's Laubach program. I'm still learning more. It is hard for me because I am dyslexic. I have a very good tutor.

I remarried in January 2006 and now I'm very happy with my life. As a gypsy, I told fortunes for a living. Now, I'm a caregiver for the elderly. It's an honest living and I feel good about myself.

By Victoria Gabriello

*Vicki has been a student of the Hillsborough Literacy Council for over three years. As a graduate of the Laubach program, she has moved on to working with Voyager and Challenger programs to further her knowledge. She is a dedicated student and loves to use her new reading and writing skills.*

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### **Spending a Day with my Mother**

If I could spend one day with someone, it would be my sweet Mother. Oh, how I miss her. She is gone now. But if she was still alive, we would spend time doing the ordinary things we used to do together, like sitting around the house and just talking about life. Spending time with my mother would bring me so much joy and laughter. I can just imagine how happy she would be seeing her grandchildren all grown up. I would love to see the look on her face when she met her great grandchildren for the first time.

I am not sure how I would fit everything into one day, but I would certainly try. I would love to spend time with her shopping and going to church. We always enjoyed getting all dressed up in our fancy hats and dresses. Mother loved praising the Lord. I can still hear her sweet voice singing, "Just a Closer Walk with Thee". Thinking back on these moments makes me feel like shouting!

On this one day we have together, we could talk about the cold winter days we spent sitting in front of the fireplace talking and making quilts. She taught me everything I know today about quilting and cooking. You see, while we were busy quilting, we also talked about the menu for our next meal. My mother cooked some of the best soul food I have ever tasted: collard greens, mustard greens, pig feet, chitlins, peach cobbler, sweet potato pie, macaroni and cheese. I can taste every bite.

When my mother was around, there was no end to the day because she always found something for us to do together. Every chance I got, I would tell her how much I thanked God for blessing me with such a good, loving, and kindhearted mother.

In conclusion, if I was blessed to spend just one day with my mother, I would ask her if there was anything I could do for her and I would make sure it got done! Then it would be my turn to tell her how much I loved her and still love her. These are some of the things I would say: "Mother, you always told us to treat others the way we want to be treated. These words have always stayed with me and I have passed them onto my children and their children. You always told us that we have to show respect in order to get respect. This is the best advice anyone can receive. I wish you could stay longer, so I can tell you about all the progress I have made in my life. I want you to know how happy I am. Mother, at this time, I am at peace with my life. Please, hurry back."

By Annie M. Garrett

*Annie Garrett is sixty-four years young. She is the proud mother of three children and five grandchildren. Though she graduated from a segregated high school in St. Petersburg in the 1950s, she never really felt she received an adequate education. She is currently attending an adult education class at Lealman Elementary to increase her knowledge and literacy levels. Her teacher is Anne Morgan.*

**Please Dad**

As soft winds sweep away the days  
I look back on life through a haze  
Remember playgrounds, park and friends  
The laughter in a game of catch  
Still memory ever attach  
To innocent in youthful eyes  
Catching the ball to dad's surprise

I recall my first bike, first wreck  
Who picked me up, said "What the heck?"  
Convinced me to give one more try  
While knees skinned, I forgot to cry  
Just the joy knowing he was there  
Making him proud my only care  
There was nothing I couldn't do  
My heart held fast that to be true

Though teenage years were kind of rough  
I sure wasn't too big on tough  
You taught me to defend what's right  
And never back down from a fight  
So I learned the hard way to stand  
Still with each hump, I found your hand  
Drawing from you an inner strength  
And stubborn pride of equal length

But there the line of fate was drawn  
As though I blinked and you were gone  
I found myself facing the sun  
Not man, not boy, a fatherless one  
Eyes blinded by a void inside  
I could not believe that you had died

Alas finding it to be true  
I could do nothing without you

Please Dad, today, just hear my call  
I'm sorry I dropped the ball  
My life is wrecked, my knees are skinned  
My emotions undisciplined  
I can't get up although I try  
Please don't get upset if I cry  
Though I can't fight what I can't see  
Please Dad; say you're still proud of me

By Susan Brown Gee

*Susan is a student in Ms. MarLinda Johnson's ABE II class at  
Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **Mom**

Missing you is the hardest pain I've ever had to go through...  
Days turn into nights...  
Minutes turn into hours.  
There are so many things I wanted to say before my life turned out  
this way.  
In my heart I searched for words to let you know how much I care.

Mom, I cared for the times you fanned me with paper because we  
had no air.  
I even cared when you didn't think I cared.  
I hurt everyday for the pain I put you through.  
God blessed me with tools.  
I was so caught up in my own moments, I never knew...  
Mom, God gave me...  
Eyes to see you  
Arms to hold you

And my heart to love you  
Two feet to stand beside you.

You're very special to me for all that you do.  
I couldn't ask for a better Mom.  
That's why I have you.

I love you Mom

By Shannon Geiger

*Shannon is a student in Ms. MarLinda Johnson's ABE II class at  
Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **Fight for Your Freedom**

My name is Wista.

I was 25 years old when I came to America. I'm a human trafficking victim. My life was so terrible with the person who brought me here, I was like a slave; they didn't give me food or clothes. I worked without pay until I found the program Coalition Human Trafficking. They helped me out of that situation.

I couldn't hear English, neither speak it. Now I am doing well. I'm earning my high school diploma at Golden Gate Learning Center and after I get it I will enroll in college to study Criminology. Anything is possible when you decide to raise your life. You find difficulties but don't give up, the victory will be yours.

When I came to America I didn't know how to drive. Now I'm driving, I have a car, I've got a job. When I'm behind the wheel I feel my freedom.

By Wista Georges

*My name is Wista Georges. I live in Naples and I am single with no children. I want to spend my life helping people and studying. I am 28 years old.*

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### **A Mystery in the Making**

It was a cold and rainy night in London. The air was thick with fog. You knew that something was going to happen. All of the sudden, a figure came partially out of the shadow. What was this figure up to?

Molly was looking out her window across from the park and saw the figure lurking in the shadow. She called her neighbor, Georgetta, and then the police to come and investigate. The crime scene unit arrived and took pictures of the wet shoe prints on the ground. Investigators asked Molly, "What was the man wearing? How tall was he?" Georgetta, the neighbor who also had seen the figure and Molly were too scared to remember. The police said, "If you remember anything, call immediately!" Molly and Georgetta went back inside the house to get themselves together.

Just then, Miss Volpe, the building superintendent, knocked on the door and asked why the police were at her home. Molly said, "It was a figure in the fog and with all that is going on, I was scared, Miss Volpe." Molly said, "Did you see the person?" "No," said Miss Volpe as she grabbed a cupcake from a plate that Molly had on her table "I was just wondering." Georgetta said, "If you know anything, tell us!" Georgetta broke out in a cold sweat. Her hands were shaking.

Suddenly, there was a strange noise by the window like someone was calling to the three woman. They looked at each other. "What should we do?" asked Molly. "I think we should call the police," said Georgetta. Just then, there was a man's voice

calling to the women. "Come help me, let me in." the man said. Molly was scared to do that. "I will go to the window," said Miss Volpe.

She was startled to see a man bleeding. It was then that they recognized who it was. The man turned out to be Harry Jeffers, a neighbor, who had been injured at work. "I left early because I hurt myself. I ran when I saw the police" said Harry "An accident occurred at work and my co-workers blamed me. I thought that the police were after me!"

Georgetta called for an ambulance. When the men came, Mr. Jeffers told them he had been injured at work and was feeling weak.

Molly, Georgetta and Miss Volpe looked at each other. What had happened at Mr. Jeffer's work? How had he been injured? Another mystery? Another puzzle to solve? Ah, but for another day!

By Thomas C. Glenn, JR.

*Thomas is a student with the Flagler County schools.*

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### **I'm Just Ready**

It has been one year and several months since I have been in the Leon County Public Library Literacy Program. That's when I said it, "I can not read or write or spell." I finally admitted it to myself and the world. I'm in a place in my life that I'm ready for doors to be open and for good things to happen in my life like picking up a book and reading it front to back without missing a word, being back in school and seeing myself hold my LPN license in my hand; also being the Sunday morning bible school teacher before church

on Sundays. I'm just ready. I'm just ready to be on a different level.

By Anonymous

*I love the help that Miss Libby and Lori are giving me. It really works! Libby Penrod and her adult student are very committed to their tutoring sessions. They have been working diligently together since September 2005. I'm Just Ready was written by the student and is her personal expression of how important lifelong learning is in helping a person to reach their goals.*

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### **Heart and Mind**

Listening and hearing are two different things,  
People say listen to what your heart is saying.  
Hearing what your mind says can play tricks on you.  
Your mind is the worst part; it can be.  
The heart wants the best for you and tells you the truth.  
Lies, lies, lies is all your mind receives.  
If your heart receives one lie,  
It can be broken badly.  
Keep your heart filled with the truth.  
Love is something your mind believes in, but your heart grows in.  
But one final question remains.  
Can the heart and mind become one?

By: Joe Goodale

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### **A Golf Course Foreman**

My name is Sam Gordillo. I have a wife named Maria, a son named Sami Jr., and two stepsons, Johnny and Felipe. I came from

Mexico in 1984 to Chicago. I worked as a dishwasher because I did not speak English. I started working on golf courses in 1987.

I started working at Pelican Sound in 2003. My superintendent Tim took a job here. I had worked for him for four years before coming to Pelican Sound. My cousin got me the interview with Tim. I have been able to advance with my job at Pelican Sound. I am happy now to be a foreman.

The club pays me to make the course look great. I want to make the members happy. I like to hear them say how happy they are with our work.

I check after everyone has done their work. I pick up any twigs and paper and whatever is left behind. The assistant tells us what we need to do. We usually don't double mow the greens, but for a championship, it is different.

Two weeks before the tournament, we clean the beds, then we put fresh pine straw down. One week before, we mow the fairways twice. On Wednesday before the tournament, we mow the greens in a double direction, 2 to 8 and 10 to 4. On Thursday, we mow in a double direction again, and use a roller to make the greens smooth. On Friday, we double cut again and paint the cups. Saturday, we again double cut the greens. There is a lot of work preparing for a golf championship.

By Sam Gordillo

*Sam is in his fourth year of our annual sixteen week tutoring program. He is a beginning reader and writer who would like to one day earn his GED. He and his tutor, Judi Samson, enjoy talking about their families and working together to improve Sam's skills. Sam very much appreciates Judi's time and hard work.*

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### **Learning in Old Age is Hard**

Learning in old age is hard. My name is Gatwech Guandong. I am from Sudan. I have two brothers and two sisters. I didn't have my education because of war. When I was young, I just helped my parents at home and didn't go to school. I came to America on June 21, 1995. I am married and have six children. Learning in old age is so hard because you have to take care of the family.

You have responsibilities to feed the family and also you have responsibilities for the place they live. There are all kinds of responsibilities you have to take care of. You have to work a full time job or more. Working a full time job or more, you do not have enough time to study, so that's why it's very hard for the old learner. Nothing is easy to get.

Education is the key for everything in this world today. Without education you cannot get a good job. People respect educated people. When you're not educated, you will see so much disrespect wherever you go.

Although learning in old age is hard, I am getting a better education to help myself and my family's future.

By Gatwech Guandong

*Gatwech Guandong is an ABE student at Learn to Read in Jacksonville. He attends grammar class twice a week and meets with his individual tutor once a week. Gatwech is the 2007 recipient of the Flight For Freedom Award. In his spare time, he likes to walk.*

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## **The Positive Impacts of Prison**

My name is Kimberly Hall. Before I came to prison, I saw things differently. I was an alcoholic and I just lost my son to my mom. Because I was never home, I could not provide a stable home for him. I was busy chasing my dreams of being a writer, so I traveled from one place to another hoping that, this state or that state would give me my “Big Break”, but it never happened.

I got to prison and realized that I had issues that I had to work on while I was sober. I used to self medicate with alcohol; Long Island Ice Tea was my thing. I really wanted to sleep my time away, but my counselor at the time said, that I was too bright to let myself go to waste. She got me into every program there was from Anger Management to Art Therapy.

That was where I realized that I had a lot of unclosed issues, and I start things and never finish them. I finally realized that is the reason why I never finished my book, play, or the magazine that I’ve been working on. Prison gave me a big break and my first short story was published by the Florida Literacy Coalition in Orlando. They also made me a known published author. I was thrilled, to me that’s a foot in the door, like a resume. If I were out there in the real world it would have cost me money to publish my short story, but in prison it did not cost me a thing, and I have a chance to do it again.

Thanks Florida Literacy Coalition for opening this wonderful door for me. If not for prison, I would not have had the chance to clear my head. Now I realize what I want out of life. I also learned how to be patient and take life one day at a time.

By Kimberly Hall

*I was born in New Haven, CT. I was raised in Nigeria, West Africa. I have one child, named Kosy Hall. He loves science.*

*Special thanks to my mother Gloria F. Hall for inspiring me to write.*

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### **Tina's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

My dream for a better place would be to stop the war so our country could not suffer with high gas prices and inflation so high. I would make peace so everyone is happy. The elderly wouldn't have to suffer with trying to find health insurance and all the people going without because of the economy. I just would like to see peace, no war, jobs and our economy in better shape. That would be my dream, "Happiness".

By Tina Harris

*Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon ABE IV, Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **The Environment I Grew Up In**

The environment that I grew up in was very open to learning. It challenged each one of us to be the best we could be. In the environment that I lived in, the challenge was to compete and to be able to accept losing if you lost. For losing is a part of learning for you to be able to win.

I learned these lessons through chess and in various jobs, education and in life. One of my grandfather's best sayings and one which I live by is this: "It's not where you start from but where you wind up."

As I grew older, the lessons that were taught from my environment to me were hard and life-lasting. It taught me to be

open to learning and hard nosed when it comes to work and being on time.

It has kept me positive in all business and personal matters. When I see other people mentally down and not attempting to try, I try to pass along many of the life lessons I've learned to them.

In conclusion, your environment is where the vast majority of learning takes place. It shouldn't control or stop you from learning or accomplishing what you want to become.

By Sylvester Henderson

*Sylvester Henderson is married with two kids. He is a barber and a plumber and an injured worker with a closed head injury.*

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### **My Adventures in English**

My name is Gonzalo Hernandez. I was born in the southern part of Mexico. I'm the youngest of two brothers and one sister. I used to help my father to work in the field sowing corn or taking care of cows. I attended school only twelve years. I couldn't go on because the situation down there is not easy. You have to work so hard to hardly get some pesos; that's why I decided to leave my family behind and go to another state where I stayed for three and a half years until I got my visa to the U.S.A. where I've been for over three and a half years.

When I first came to this country in June 2004, it was so hard for me to get used to the idea that I was in a different country with different manners, different people but above all this different language. I couldn't understand English as I do now. The first thing I did was to go to the library of Mount Dora and ask for information about English classes and after a few days they put me to study with a very nice lady. Her name is Katherine Kaminski. I

studied with her for about four months. I started working in a citrus company and this place was interesting because I learned all the processes in making orange juice.

In the month of June 2006, I started taking classes with Mr. George Cook. It's been almost two years and I realize that I've learned a lot with him. He is very patient. He dedicates time teaching. He agrees that it is important to make yourself understood in a foreign language. It is great to know that there are people able, ready and willing to share their knowledge and their time with us trying to make the difference, giving more than 100%. It is also great to know that many libraries open the doors to people like us. I like very much Miss Erika and Miss Rosa who are in charge of teachers. They give programs and parties that do not cost anything.

I'm not making a lot of money, but the bit I get I'm saving so if I can't go to the school here there is always a second chance I would like to do it in Mexico where I can study from a Spanish or English teacher. First I need to learn everything I can of this language: the grammar, pronunciation, verbs, expressions and a lot of slang so they will know that I learned it here.

I'm far from home with nothing familiar around me but I have to continue on this journey until I reach my goals. Sometime I wish I could go back but I came to this country with the yearning of learning this language and I won't give up I'll take advantage of everything I can to make my dream come true.

By Gonzalo Hernandez

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## **Change**

I am sitting here thinking about time ahead while lying alone in my bed. Every time I think about your loving face I think “Damn why did I have to catch a case?” I’m glad I’m getting this out of the way, because one day soon I’ll see a brighter day. One thing for certain, this prison time has taught me a lesson. God works in mysterious ways. For me, it probably was a blessing.

When I get home, you’re going to see a change in me because I know better and am a wiser lady. We have so many things to look after, more than a few, my life is about to change for the better. I’ll just spread my wings and fly like a bird’s feather. One day at a time is all it will take. I put my trust in God because he is not fake.

There are a couple of things in life I want to do. There’s too many to name, but one of them is being with you because being with you will make my life complete. All the bad things that happened and things we went through, I just put it on a computer disk and press delete. Change is something I need in my life... all the pain and heartache of the past has been cutting through me like a knife. I guess I have to leave the past in the past and find something good that will truly last.

That day will be the day that the Lord has made. One thing for sure my trust in Him will never fade. I mean all these words from the bottom of my heart. Will you be there to help me make a fresh start?

### **CHANGE IS GOOD**

By Linda Hernandez

*Linda is a student in the ABE II program at Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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## **Getting My GED**

I have decided to come back to school because I felt like I missed out on a lot by not graduating. I could not get any of the jobs that I wanted and the ones I did get, did not pay very well. They only have to pay minimum wage if you do not have a high school diploma or a GED. Not very many people will even hire you if you don't have an education.

I decided to get my GED with the even start program because I am pregnant and I don't want my child to think that he does not have to get an education because I don't have one. It will be easier for him to get a job and be able to do what he wants to do and just have better opportunities. He will be able to go to college or get a trade degree without going through all the trouble of having to pay to get his GED because where I am from they charge you two hundred and fifty dollars just to take a GED test and its hard to come up with two hundred and fifty dollars if you don't have a job. I am glad to be getting my GED. I think it will make me feel good about myself to know that I have accomplished something by getting my GED. I feel better about myself just going to the GED classes because I know that's half of the battle right there. I am glad that I got to have this opportunity to get into the even start program where they help me by paying for my GED and get me in to neat programs.

I feel like I should at least have my GED before I have my son. I think it's just more responsible. Now that I am getting my GED I will probably be able to get a job with good benefits that pay well and are something that I want to do. Something that's not like Subway or something like that. I hope that I can get my GED and start at some kind of trade school so that I can have a career, not just a job and I can be a good example for my son. I think that kids turn in to more responsible adults when their parents are more responsible by having more successful jobs.

To me getting my GED means that I am growing up. Like growing more into adulthood because I have figured out that I can't just sit at home and watch TV or hang out with my friends. I have to make my life better and I think that I am doing that by getting my GED. I think that not graduating was the worst decision I have ever made in my life. That is something that I should have never done because I am still paying for it two years later and I will have to think about that for the rest of my life. I think that by me getting my GED, my life and the life of my child will be so much better than if I was to stay a dropout with no job or education.

By Carrie Hobbs

*Carrie is currently pregnant with her first child. She adds a lot to our program. She is very helpful in the classroom. Carrie is very artistic, and is interested in attending school for this hobby.*

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### **A Short Story of Brazil**

My homework was to write sentences with words I learned last week, but I decided to write a small history of my country, Brazil using these words, which I bolded.

A long time ago, we did not have any government in some towns; the power lay in the hands of a few rich families. They made their own laws. Those laws were more **harsh** and severe than the government laws of today. In fact, their laws gave the ruling class the Right for Capital punishment, which means, they killed a lot of the poor population.

The poor people **despaired** because they were considered **outlaws** if they did not follow these established rules. Actually, they did not do anything wrong according to the laws of the land. They were killed **although** they were innocent.

The poor people were confused, but felt they needed to do something. This **reign** could not continue in the hands of the ruling class and make the rest of the population feel like **yellowbellies**. They could not **fool** the people any longer.

The poor people decided to change this situation step by step. They organized Unions, to establish power as a group which eventually changed the system.

By Carmen Isensee

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### **Nothing is Impossible**

There is a girl who couldn't do anything. Not only could she understand well but also she couldn't talk read, write, or walk. She was very dependant in her early childhood. Would you like to know who she is? She is my lovely, precious daughter. Miraculously, now she can do many things. So, I believe in this world nothing is impossible. If we have deep faith to focus our mind, the impossible becomes possible.

Farhan was born in Bangladesh ten years ago. She is my first baby. My husband and I were so happy and we thanked God for her arrival. She was premature, weighed 4 pounds and 2 ounces, and had many problems. She was kept in the incubator for seven days. Also she needed photo-therapy and because she had jaundice. In all, she stayed in the hospital for fourteen days. Day by day as she grew up, we sensed something different in her compared to a normal child. We became worried. In my country, we do not have the latest medical care though it is affordable. So, we did not bother to seek help there. Our expectation is very high for our daughter; therefore, we searched for treatment elsewhere, such as India and Singapore. To our disappointment, we did not see great changes.

One day to our surprise we received a Diverse Visa from the U.S. Embassy. Without hesitation, we grabbed this great opportunity, packed our suit cases, jumped into the airplane and flew to America for her sake. Here, she went through many tests just to discover that she needed more treatment and special care that no other countries could provide. Presently, Farhan has two wheelchairs, a manual and an electric one, too. She can walk using a walker.

At the age of six, we enrolled her in an elementary school. For one solid year she was not able to learn and write. But now, she can write quite well, make sentences, and even short paragraphs. Farhan can also type. Something different about her is that she has wild imaginations and a higher level communication skill. She possesses a charming personality: quiet, polite and very sharing. She loves reading, swimming, and watching T.V. Her reading skill is high and that is her gift.

Farhan wants to be a teacher in the future. She would like to help people, especially those who are old, weak, and poor. She says “I will do something for them!” My dream is that Farhan would be highly educated, very helpful, have a wonderful behavior, and an excellent server to everyone. In return I hope they would love her, too. I wish that she will have an exceptional fine life partner who would love her, understand her, and produce a very nice family together. To me, she is the most marvelous girl that I have ever seen.

Meanwhile, my husband and I are very pleased and thankful for the services and facilities that we receive for our daughter. Though my husband had a very well paid job, as well as we have a bigger house, great family back home, we have to sacrifice for the life of our darling daughter without any regrets.

By Sharmin Jahan

*Ms. Sharmin is from Bangladesh. She feels that she needs to be well grounded in English Language before pursuing her master's degree. She is very pleased to have received the opportunity to come to America. Her goal is to help children with disabilities in the future.*

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### **The Whistle of the Contact**

Only the song of the sertnista, a professional specializing in contacting Indians, interrupted the silence of the jungle. The sertanista's name was Sydney Possuelo. It started to become dusk a little after 5 P.M. on a rainy afternoon in February. He interrupted his own song because Sydney heard a whistle.

Besides this kind of whistle, the sertanista and his workers could see smoky shapes, though the mist, human eyes. Yes, there were people in the jungle on the other side of the stream. They appeared before us looking timid, scared and naked.

In front of us were the last survivors of a nation. After centuries of escapes, persecutions, confrontations, there where 13 men, women and children left. They were the Arara nation, the people who lived in the heart of the Brazilian Amazon.

Emotions? How can I explain the feelings that invaded me? On the opposite side of the narrow stream, two civilizations meet. On one side, a powerful, dominant people, who had conquered metal and sent its people to explore deep into space, the other side, people, their only technology is polishing rocks.

The chief took the first steps. In the 200 meters that separated us, he crossed geologic eras between the Stone Age and supersonic society. After the greetings, made by gestures then, the test. They wanted to know if we were human beings, because even with the

same facial characteristics, we had a body covered with clothes. And, we spoke an incomprehensible language. They started to touch us. We wore t-shirt, jeans and tennis shoes. The only difference was our hair and the color of our skins. To be certain who was who, the woman groped us and pulled at our t-shirts. They wanted to know what the differences were between me and the men. I took the chief's wife to my camp. There, far from the masculine eyes, I took off my t-shirt and she could see me. She opened my mouth, looked at my teeth and at my finger nails. I felt like an extra-terrestrial. When she finished examining me, she gave a sigh of relief. Yes, I was a human being. We walked back to the group.

The next day we left the jungle and we took the road to the city of Altamira. When we arrived, it was still light. Three Indians came with us. In the city, when the chief of the Arara people left the Jeep, a large group of people watched him with wide eyes. When he walked toward the people, they were scared and retreated. Without missing the rhythm of his steps, Toti, the chief, walked directly to another man, extended his hands and asked: "Prem pri'á?" (Who are you?). No one answered. Then, the chief said in his language: "I'm a human being". Without understanding anything, the people surround the human being and everyone hugged one another.

At the end of the street, the colossal Xingu River rolls on, indifferent to the human feelings.

By: Luzia Jakomeit

*Luzia is from Brazil. She has worked as a journalist for more than 30 years with a Brazilian newspaper writing political, war related, and human interest stories. She has lived and traveled extensively throughout the world and is currently living in Florida. She is attending an ESOL class at Mid Florida Tech where she wants to further her knowledge in English to expand her journalist skills.*

### **My Mother's Bookshelf**

I have a shelf that used to be my mother's before she passed away back in 1993. This shelf is special to me because she had lots of things on it that I and the other children had given to her.

Over the years, my brothers, sisters and her grandchildren have gone places and brought her souvenirs and little gifts from places they have visited. We would bring her what-nots, pictures and things she would like.

Mother would dust the items off from time to time to keep it looking nice. She often looked them over and touched them carefully as she enjoyed the memories. Sometimes she would just stop and stare at the items on the shelf.

Now the shelf sits in my house. I stop and stare at the special knick-knacks at times. I love the shelf because it was my mother's. My mother had it first and now it is so special to me.

By Rita Jarvis

*Rita Jarvis is a student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. She enjoys reading and going for walks. She plans to go on to college after getting her GED, but does not yet know what she would like to study.*

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### **Looking for Happiness**

I am the type of person who has always been thinking about happiness. Everything that I have done in my life has been an attempt to find it.

As a child, I spent the years doing things that would make my parents proud of me; later, as a youth, I did things which made me feel better as a person. I eventually graduated with a teaching degree, and a few years later I received a second degree in law—both were not enough, however. Once I believed that everything I had accomplished was a worthless effort: as I tried to please my parents, they were never satisfied with my achievements.

I married in my early years just because I thought it could be the way to be happy. I was in love and filled with dreams of the new life which I was just beginning to live. However, I was wrong. Since my way of searching for happiness was mistaken, I never felt as miserable as this time in my life. My wrong headedness, in part, led to my eventual divorce from that life, from those innocent dreams.

I thought that my life was truly spoiled; however, I was wrong. Many years have passed since then, and my life has changed year by year, but I have largely lived as I have wished.

After marrying again, I left my country, family, job, and friends in search of conjugal happiness on other shores. I became a wife and the mother of two wonderful, affectionate children while continuing my search for happiness in America. I felt satisfied with the life I had chosen. I was in love (and still, in fact, am). I simply have never felt as loved as I am now. Despite everything seeming ideal however, I missed much about my former life.

So, where was happiness? How could I find it? Of course, I needed to start looking within myself to understand what I needed to feel happy. Soon I understood that happiness is a state of mind; I needed to be pleased with myself rather than with somebody living with me or somebody being proud of me for all I have done in my life. Without a doubt, I do not have to find happiness. After I discover who I am now, what I want, and what kind of person I

want to be; then I have to do anything that can bring me the most meaning and contentment to my life.

Certainly, happiness is commonly thought of as having love, recognition, money power, or fame but these things do not actually make a person feel happy. Believing so is a lie. I have learned that happiness is inside of me, and whatever happens I need to have the courage to tackle things that worry me as best I can, while remaining positive and cultivating an inner sense of well being.

By Ana Jasso

*Ana is currently finishing her English language studies at Brewster Technical Center in Tampa, FL in order to work in the legal profession.*

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### **My Feelings about Life**

The theme of “life” is so vast that we could write endlessly about it. I believe that life is a miracle in all its expressions. It’s the greatest gift humanity has ever received.

I love nature intensely. I feel full of life when the morning sun rises and spills its rays over the earth like a mantle of light and color that makes everything come alive! I cherish not only human life, but everything about our environment such as the rivers, flowers and the seas, whose depths hold wondrous creatures and plants. The trees and plants with their blooms and fruits bring me joy. All of these things are a wonderful gift to our senses.

Each day when I wake up and take a look around, I feel I am fortunate to be alive. I feel happy when I can walk and smell the perfume of the flowers and hear the songs of the birds. But the thing that is most precious to me is the fact that I was able to be a

mother four times. I love watching my family grow and being a part of them.

I love and feel each minute of my life. I thank God for all of the wonderful years of my life.

By Margarita De Jesus

*Margarita De Jesus is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. She also volunteers there and was a member of the organization's cookbook committee. Her tutor is Peter Anderson.*

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### **Poem**

When a sorrow is very profound, anguishes you  
and you believe that the enchantment of the life is lost  
don't torment yourself searching for a solution  
for your problems too soon.

Since the sun is born every day for all  
and we have always found a light of hope, trust in it.

And keep in mind that still in the deepest ashes,  
there is one spark of heat  
that can heal the cold and sadness in the corner  
of your heartache.

By Olga Lucia Jimenez R.

*Olga is married to a poet and is a mother of two children. She has only recently moved to an intermediate English class at Grows. She hopes to become a dentist.*

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## **Coming to America**

I remember clearly as if it were yesterday, my desire to come to the United States. The intent look on my face was indelible. Years later, I surprised my mother and told her about my secret dream coming true. I was going to live in the United States. I recalled the day I stepped foot on Miami soil, no family, and no friends with only pure determination.

I met a woman who claimed to know my mother. I stayed with her and her family. Since she was in the shipping business, I worked for her for free from eight in the morning until bedtime everyday for four months. While she had two men doing the same job from eight to four for two hundred dollars weekly. Not a day goes by; I don't remember that slavery time. My belief, my pride and my determination kept me from going back home. Until I decided not to do the same thing for a friend and I was kicked out that evening.

A few months later, I meet my husband than I realized that *Patience is a very important factor in everyone's life*. He swept me off my feet and I fell in love. Our lives had some ups and downs but compared to my first experience, I am grateful. Many years later, the grace of God rewarded me with six beautiful angels to nurture. Since I love kids so much, it was my new world. Having my children was one of the many blessings in my life. There are no words that can explain my joy and my happiness.

Until one day, something entered my world that would devour my soul. They took my children away from me because I went to the store without them. My world was crushed. I had become exhausted. As I know that: *There is no mountain too high nor too big to conquer, and God never gives you more than you can handle*. I kept my faith in Him and with my husband's consistency, after four days, the court found no proof for their allegation of abuse or neglect to stand.

I got my kids back with more sorrow and relief than ever for the ones that I love dearly. God gave me my wonderful world back again. You never know what you have until you lose it. I already knew what I had and I would continue to cherish it even more with my husband by my side. My family has endured and will continue to endure many obstacles that come our way. I have always appreciated the good things that come my way and I know now from years of experience that my family is my world.

Well, beside my misfortune, I do not regret having to fight for my children back one bit because only God can predict the future. I cannot. The growth as a person and the things learned from life experience make all of us who we are today.

By Anonymous

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### **Cocaine**

Cocaine is a very powerful enemy. When it gets a hold of you it never wants to let go. I have seen it destroy many of my loved ones and close friends. It will tear apart families in a very short time. It is very addictive and does not care who it hurts.

Cocaine will make you lie to everyone around you. It will make you steal, rob and cheat people that care about you, and also people you do not even know. Drugs like cocaine will make you do things that you would never do before them. It will make you go places, and do things with people under ordinary circumstances you would not have even known. Sex for drugs and money. When you are high or feel the need to get high you don't care who you hurt, anyone who gets in your way.

Cocaine will make you so ashamed that you lie about its very existence. It will make you not want to even look in the mirror,

because you don't like the person looking back at you. Cocaine will make you feel like you are a disgrace to the whole world. It knows no boundaries. The consequence for just one try can be death, jail, divorce, the loss of children, and family or maybe just addiction. But really which one is worse?

By Debra Kelley

*I was born and raised in Gainesville, FL. The mother of three children. I have 4 grandchildren and expecting the fifth soon. This essay is my living proof that the worst can happen to the best of us, but we can overcome anything if we really try. Dedicated to my loving family.*

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### **Debbie's Dream**

To make the world a better place

I would love to have been an inventor, to help invent cures for the people in the world. Things like kidney failure and heart disease especially because I lost my sister at a young age from kidney failure and a heart attack. She was a wonderful woman who lived a short life. I wish I could have done something to have helped to invent a better cure then maybe a new and different cure could have made her better to where she would still be alive today.

By Debbie Kent

*I'm a mother of 3 beautiful daughters and 9 grandchildren.  
Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE  
III.*

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### **What Even Start Means to Me**

An opportunity to excel and be free...

To finally get rid of the burdens haunting me.

The pros are plenty and the cons are none, please

allow me to explain where I am coming from.

I've literally been in a financial coma, but Even Start is

helping me get my diploma.

For now I am not so great in math, but with Miss Mary's help,

World you'll be aghast!

Today I'm practicing my writing skills as my emotions for Even

Start begin to spill. For I do not want to miss a day,

Being here makes me gay!

"Alexander the Greatest" is in daycare, while Even Start

Picks up the fare! It's a comfort to know my child is okay,

While I am mentored towards going my way.

Before I can break these chains, Ms. Wanda says I have much to gain.

She explains there will be hills and shoals, that I must learn

To set my goals.

I'm coming now to a conclusion, before you get a tiresome

illusion. Even Start's opportunities are rearing me into a productive career with our society.

By Lori Fulton Lacina

*Lori is a one of a kind individual that has put loved ones before herself all of her adult life. She decided it's about time her talents should be an asset to all the readers out there. Luckily, she stumbled across the Even Start Program in the Lakewood community of Pinellas county. Her tutors are Mary Flynn and Wanda Trojnar.*

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## **A Rough and Ready Start**

My life hasn't turned out quite the way I wanted it to be. My Mom once told me that the roads you pick in life will follow you forever. I was young and didn't pay any attention to what she said. I thought I had it all figured out, but now I realize I was wrong. I ended up quitting school in 9<sup>th</sup> grade and having children much too young.

I was eighteen when I quit my education altogether. My life was nowhere and I went nowhere. I lost everything and I ended up on drugs. Some years later, I woke up. When I saw that I couldn't even get a good job because of my lack of education, I put my mind to it. I now have more determination, and even if it takes me a few tries, I am not giving up.

Getting my GED is my first goal in a long time and I am going to accomplish it if it takes the rest of my life. There is always hope. After I earn my diploma, I would like to go to college to become a social worker, so I can help my fellow addicts who are still out there. I would love to help people find their way back. I can tell them, the road is hard and there is nothing easy about it, but when you find people who really care and want to make a difference you realize it can happen for you. You just have to take it one step at a time.

By Teri Landon

*Teri Landon is a student in the Even Start Family Literacy Program in St. Petersburg, Florida. She has struggled with addiction for many years, but now she is on the road to recovery. She has two children James, age nineteen, and Cody, age 10. Her teacher is Anne Morgan.*

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## **My New Life**

On April 30, 1975, the Republic of South Vietnam fell to the Communist north. That day marked the end of the Vietnam War and began a tragic life for a million Vietnamese families like mine.

My husband was an officer in the South Vietnam army. He was imprisoned in a re-education camp set up by the new Communist government. Because my husband had fought for the South, my family suffered discrimination. In order to support my family, I worked very hard.

In 1977, I received a letter and my husband's death certificate. I learned that when all else is lost, I still have hope. In 1993, I got permission to come to the U.S. I had no reason to stay in Vietnam. My mother worried about the many struggles that awaited me in the U.S., because I didn't have any relatives or friends in the U.S. But, I believed in myself. I thought I'd be able to build a new life in the U.S. I began to study English when I came to Rochester, Minnesota.

Fourteen years have passed. Now my oldest son is the owner of a barber shop in Houston. My youngest son works as a chef in the Kaler Hotel in Rochester. I have a secure job at Florida Hospital. My family is not as successful as many Vietnamese families, but I'm happy. We have freedom and a better life. Thank you America.

By Tuyet Le

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## **Living in a Dream Country**

It has been three months and a week since I left my country, Vietnam, to unite with my grandparents and family in the United States. My family waited about ten years to have permission to immigrate to the United States. It was a very long time; thus

sometimes we thought there was no chance for us to live in this country. My parents were working hard to set up a business in Vietnam. The business was doing well. Then we received the invitation for an interview. It wasn't very hard for us to pass the interview. After that, we decided to sell our business.

My parents were very ambivalent, but they thought this was a chance for us and our descendants to have a good life. They kept some property in Vietnam in case things didn't go well in the United States. We didn't decide to come to the U.S, to enjoy modern life, but to work and study hard for a bright future. When we arrived, we didn't understand very much English, so we didn't understand everything people said. We enrolled in Winter Park Tech to learn English.

In the United States, English is basic for life. Outside of class, we practice English by reading newspapers, watching TV, and listening to the radio to improve our skills.

Although my parents had mixed feelings about leaving our country, they try hard not to think about our previous life. Our family is trying to adapt to American life and to realize our dreams.

By Quang Le

*Quang Le is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech. His teachers are Glenda Worley and Linda White. He hopes one day to be a pharmacist or a businessman or both.*

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### **Lonya's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

I have a dream that one day felons are not judged by their past convictions but by the skills that we withhold. I have a dream that

one day innocent people are not convicted of someone else's crime. I have a dream that one day prisoners are not sentenced to so much time. I have a dream that one day criminals will finally see what their doing wrong and stop. I have a dream that one day everyone will love one another like Christ loved the Church.

By Tonya Leonard

*I am a mother of 2 from Miramar, FL. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon  
Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE II.*

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### **Redefining the Dream**

Some years ago, as an English major in Chinese-speaking Taiwan, I made a heart-felt wish that someday I would speak like an English native and study in the United States. Most of my buddies were content with working toward excellent grammar. Or they were satisfied with themselves to excel in reading and writing. Those are admirable goals, and worthy of TOEFL, but they are common to us Asian students. I wanted to master English pronunciation and sound masterful to a native audience. The challenge was severe because most of my English teachers were native Mandarin speakers, and my friends agreed that pronunciation was not as important to succeed in scholastics.

I told my friends that I'd rather keep silent than enunciate Chinese. I had the belief that this is the best manner to gain true English speech rapidly. I avoided Chinese conversation as much as I could in our English program at school. I needed to immerse.

Many acquaintances regarded me either as fanatic or arrogant. "He is not a native of America. So why does he need to use English all the time? Does he really think himself a speaker of English?" But I was simply uncommunicative because I did not want to converse in the default language.

Then, like a dream, I arrived in Tallahassee for more English training. Within days, the imaginative and attractive dream faded. I was tutored by an expert in phonological preparation and met the most difficult challenges of learning English. In this intensive training, almost every vowel and consonant I pronounced was scrutinized and regulated. I thought I was confident of my English pronunciation in Taiwan. But native pronunciation? I was far from it! I never realized how difficult this could be. Surrounded by real sounds from real English speakers seemed impossible to master in my brain. I even thought about quitting and settling into the acceptable mediocrity of Asian pronunciation. Maybe my friends were right after all. When you run into the fine-tuned mechanisms of reality, you realize how vulnerable your ambition can be.

My tutor is dedicated to my goal. He believes in me and insists that, as I learn to manage my phonological system, I can change my articulation. We have worked many hard hours for many weeks over many months. We record every session so I can go back to earlier lessons and hear the changes occurring in my mouth. The proof is in the pudding. So, I'm still going at it. If I quit now, I would be very regretful and ashamed.

The most precious goal is the one you think impossible at first, but then conquer tough tests to realize it. That is the real reality. I still cannot pronounce some nasals and bilabial blends like an American because our sound systems still clash; but that doesn't weaken my resolve. Now I understand it, not as a mimic, but as a manager. The linguistic knowledge and power I get from of each articulation challenge continue to cultivate fresh life and refined meaning to my dream. Someday I will sound masterful to a native audience.

By Francis Lin

*A native of Taipei, Taiwan, Francis Lin Guan-Shi began his formal English studies at age 23. He is currently being tutored by Leon County Literacy Volunteer and Assistant Professor, Michael Pierce, ESOL Program Specialist of Flagler College-Tallahassee. Lin's goal is continuing his education through graduate studies. His dream is becoming a citizen of the United States.*

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### **Moving for the Best**

It's funny how fast time goes by. I look at myself now and I think about how much things have changed for me. Two years ago I can remember being in Colorado Springs, where even the climate is extremely different and my situation was also different.

I was with my kids' father of four in a not very happy relationship. There were a lot of difficulties: I dropped out of school to be a mother, my kids' father and I started fighting a lot, and I was just so stressed out.

It's now two years later and I can finally say that I am stress free. I have now relocated to Lake City, Fl. I am enrolled again in a great program called Even Start and I have met a new love of my life.

So far so good, it's all been well. I have a new baby on the way which makes my hands full even more. But I am making more progress than I was back in Colorado Springs, not only in my home but also in my school. I didn't do it only for myself but also for my children that I love so much. Now I can say that I am happy, thanks to God.

By Quartreass Loggins

*Quatreass Loggins (as we would call her Punkin) is a single mom of three boys and one girl and pregnant with her fifth child. Her*

*children's names are Quantavis, Shaki, Shatavia, and Bling. Punkin is a wonderful woman and strives to be the best mom she can. When she has the chance to make a difference in her children's lives she puts forth 100%. She believes that her children's education and her own are the most important things in life. She believes that with her being in school her children's education is easier.*

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### **Little Dreams**

When I was a little girl, I used to play like a child, but now I watch my grandchildren play. I enjoy watching them play hide-and-seek, tag, and jump rope. These are the same games I used to play. If only I could have the same energy as I did back then! I would happily join my grandkids in play if I didn't have to worry about my back or getting hurt. These are worries you don't have as a child.

I also remember my dreams. I used to dream about being rich, but now I have accepted that God has a reason for everything. God provides all my needs for me on a daily basis and that's all I need to be happy.

I may not be rich money-wise, but I am rich spiritually and that's all the riches I need. I thank God everyday for all his blessings.

By Abigail Loredo

*Abigail Loredo is studying at the Clewiston adult school for her GED. She has two daughters and one son. She also has three grandchildren who she would like to play with all the time.*

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### **My Lifetime Goal and How I Plan to get There**

Moving to a new country was exciting; it was a dream. A day or two after I had been on U.S. ground, reality hit. It was at that moment I knew things needed to be changed in my life for the better. I come from a country where 95 percent of the population lives in poverty. We don't have much opportunity to advance ourselves or even make our country a better place to live. It has been a life long dream and goal for me to become an Amnesty International Ambassador of Conscience.

Imagine being from a country where the Haitian language is practically everywhere. Now imagine trying to learn in an American school, using a foreign language and being expected to move into the mainstream with others. It's difficult, but I have managed to do okay for myself in this situation. To fulfill my goal, I must continue educating myself even if it means starting from the beginning. I currently attend an adult education class, where I can pursue a high school diploma/G.E.D. My education is an investment that pays itself, giving me the opportunity to open doors that would otherwise remain closed. With the completion of the program, I will be eligible to attend any college of my choosing. The need for a college education has become increasingly valuable to me despite the high cost of tuition and loans. A college education will determine my future income potential, and it is the only way to climb up the socio-economic ladder to become an International Ambassador of Conscience.

While attending college, I plan to become a Student Ambassador for young people. As a Student Ambassador, I would be working with the young people to help them raise their aspirations, giving them the knowledge they need to make informed choices about life. Starting as a Student Ambassador, I feel the opportunity would be very rewarding. Not only would it develop my communication and teamwork skills, it would also increase my employability and give me the opportunity to work in

a variety of settings. Like my hero Nelson Mandela, I hope to be a vital force in a fight for human rights and racial equality in my home country, Haiti.

By Jean Winston Louis

*I attend Golden Gate Adult Learning Center - GED classes- I am presently employed as an executive chef.*

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### **An Unforgettable Date**

Sometimes, there is a date in your life that you will never forget. I remember my appointment, December 3, 2007, at the United States Embassy in Port-au-Prince, Haiti. This interview is the final process for all immigrants before entering the U.S.A.

That was not only a stressful moment, but an especially exciting one. It was stressful because I had to answer a lot of questions from a consulate officer. The slightest error could result in a possible delay in the process. It was like taking an exam. Exciting though, because I saw a long-awaited dream about to become true. It was similar to a successful score on a difficult exam.

Nevertheless, I realized, I was stupid because the impression that I had about the United States was deeply different from the one I have had since I arrived on December 20, 2007.

I am confident, however, that the economic situation of this country will improve before long.

By Yves Jean Louis

*Yves Jean Louis is from Jacmel, a very nice and quiet place in southeast Haiti. Jacmel is called "the Mardi Gras City". Special thanks to my teacher, Glenda Worley, for her support.*

### **My Sister In-Law**

My sister-in-law was very happy when she came to America to visit my friend and I. It was her first time and she was here for a week. My family went to pick her up in Miami and drove her down to Key West. That was a long way for her but she was very excited. Nerly and I took her with us on a trip to Naples. We had a great time on the beach, sight seeing, and we ate at a fine restaurants. Well, time goes fast when we all are having fun. Soon enough it was time for her to go back to Haiti. The day that she had to go back to Haiti, we got lost several times on the highway and this caused her to miss her flight. For this reason, she was put on stand by. Thank goodness the next day she was able to go on board and flew home.

A week after her departure, I received a letter from her and this was what she said. She expected the people in America to be very generous but all of them are not so. For instance, when we were at a church service, she noticed that many people were not charitable. However, it is a big deal for them to go to the bars and spend their money on drinks. Another observation she made was their clothes. Some Americans do not show respect in the way they dress when they go to church. They are very casual at church and elsewhere.

Academically, she was surprised to learn that only 70 percent out of the total enrollment graduated high school. How could this be? Education is free for the kindergarteners until high school. What happened to the other 30 percent? She argued that surely there are a lot of help available to assist those children. Unfortunately, some gave up for certain reasons that we all should be concerned about.

With regard to etiquette, she noticed that some youths were very rude and disrespectful. Some are very distant and quiet. She

thought that the children here have too much freedom to do anything they want. Perhaps they come from a single parent family, lack of parent control, or possibly the parents are working too much and spending less or no time at all with their children.

Though it was a short trip, she had a quick preview of life in America. Therefore, I would not take her opinion seriously. What I would like to say is that it is a privilege to be able to come to another country to explore and observe the culture, the education, and the behavior of the people. This exposure could widen your horizon to be open-minded.

If you have a chance to travel to another country, you should. It is a great opportunity you don't want to miss. I am thankful that my sister-in-law was brave to come and visit me and Nerly. I bet she has enriched her knowledge and her mind. Now, she has something to share with others when someone talks about America, getting lost on the highway, and flying in the airplane. Some people did not have a chance to do any of these, but she did, and I did. We feel grateful.

By Marie-Flaure Louis-Henry

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### **What I like about Adult Ed**

First of all, what I like about Adult Ed is that all the teachers are very helpful and great. They do their best to help you with whatever you need. They prepare you for the GED. They do this by either having you work out of books or on a computer to build your skills.

The second thing I like about Adult Ed. is knowing that I am going to get my GED. I have been in Adult Ed for almost 3 years. Each time I have taken the TABE test or the GED, I have done

better. I have come too far to quit now. Plus I have a lot of people who care about me, and keep telling me that I can do it.

My third best thing about Adult Ed. is knowing that I can encourage others to get their GED. This is what I am doing right now. You are never too old or young to get your education. If it's something you want to do, then you can do it. Don't ever say I can't or quit after the first try. It is something you have to stay with and believe me you will get better. I know I have done a lot better. When I first started here I didn't do all that great but I just kept coming and doing my work, I have gotten a lot better.

By Stephanie Love

*Stephanie Love is a student with Even Start of Columbia County.*

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### **Evie's Valentine's Surprise**

One sunny afternoon Evie was just about to go outside to read one of her favorite books when a phone rang. So Evie went to get the phone. It was her mother just calling to say "Hi". Evie was happy that her mom called. Evie hadn't talked to her mom in 2 months. Evie's day couldn't get any better, so she got her book and went outside to read. Evie heard the car pull up, and it was her roommates coming home from work.

Evie went to greet her friends and started to make dinner. Since the next day was Valentine's Day, Evie's roommates got a surprise gift for Evie. So the roommates cleaned up the kitchen after dinner while Evie went to the store to get food for the Valentine's party Evie was throwing for all of her friends. "Happy Valentine's Day to you, Evie", the roommates replied. "Happy Valentine's Day to you, too", said Evie. The girls were getting ready for the Valentine's party Evie planned for all of their friends, but to no

one's surprise Evie's mom would be coming soon. "Knock, knock, knock" went the door, and everyone looked at Evie.

Evie was shocked that someone was at the door so Evie went to the door to see who was there. As the door opened, everyone yelled out "Surprise!" because it was Evie's mother coming to visit her on a very special day of the year, Valentine's Day. She was so surprised that she started to cry. Evie gave hugs to her roommates for bringing her mom down for Valentine's Day, and to show that she appreciated them, not just as roommates, but as wonderful friends. Evie gave both of her roommates charm bracelets. As the party started to end for the day, Evie's mom had to go home. Evie was so happy that her mom came to visit her that she promised her mother that she would call her twice a week to say "Hello" and "I love you".

By Roselyn Lugo

*Roselyn Lugo is 24 years old and lives with her family in Sarasota, FL. She attends GED classes at Manatee Community College in Bradenton, FL. Roselyn aspires to get her diploma and become a speech and physical therapist, as well as, a youth pastor for her church. Her teacher is Jill Scott.*

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### **Difficult - but Right Choice**

I was born in Guatemala. After getting my assistant-nurse diploma, I was supposed to go for an internship program in the hospital. At that time, I started thinking about leaving my country and moving to the U.S. in search for more opportunities. I faced a lot of difficulties in the process of accomplishing my desire.

First of all, my parents were opposed very much to the idea of me, a young woman, leaving Guatemala, and they really insisted I had to absolutely stay in my own country. It is always hard when

we don't succeed to agree and accept our parents' opinion. Among my friends, some had advised me that earning money was easy in Guatemala, and that I had just to find a well-paid and "easy" job. I moved to a larger city, following my girlfriend's advice: She told me I could work as a cook at the college cafeteria! Never before had I aspired to become a cook, but I was young and not afraid. I was thinking -OK...let me give it a try. Anyway, at that time, I didn't want to make my parents unhappy by leaving for the US, as my brother had left already.

I moved to a larger city and started this "well paid and easy" cook job. I rented an apartment, but whenever possible, I continued dreaming of leaving one day for the US. So, finally, seven years ago I came to the US, spent some time in California and then moved to Florida five years ago. The first couple of years were tough. At the beginning I wasn't attending any English classes. I felt kind of isolated because I was able to communicate well only with people who spoke Spanish to me.

My life started changing and moving in a positive direction, once I began attending English classes at the Adult Literacy League. I am grateful to Rocarda Contreras, Literacy Assistant at ALL, for good advice she has given me about the programs. I have been attending English classes for two years now. My teachers, Nancy, Biljana and Vince, as well as all staff members at ALL have encouraged me very, very much and I am thankful to every one of them. The fact that I have come in touch with so many other students from many different countries around the world means a lot to me. We often exchange experiences and discuss all kinds of life happenings. Now I am aware that, when it is about difficulties, I am not the only one... I am just one of many others who experience similar challenges due to the fact that English is not their mother tongue language.

I would like to continue my education and make it possible to experience my dream come true. I intend to work hard and try to

eventually get my license to become an assistant nurse in the US. I am taking a computer class right now and I am continuing to attend my English classes. However even if I don't get to become an assistant nurse in the U.S. at least presently I am not stressed anymore. There are so many other opportunities for me and I can see that I haven't made a mistake by coming to the US. I am able to work and live a normal life.

Now I am comfortable whenever I have to see my doctor, talk to the employees in the supermarket or at the bank. I am able to read books and magazines written in English. Above all, I feel happy and not ashamed when I am curious and have to ask questions and get answers from people who speak only English. Maybe it doesn't sound like a big deal, but believe me, to me IT IS!

By: Alejandrina Macario

*Alejandrina Macario is from Guatemala. Seven years ago she moved to the US. Alejandrina feels that, in America, there are more opportunities to succeed in life than elsewhere. She lives in Orlando and attends regularly English classes and various programs offered by ALL. Presently, her teacher is Biljana Scepanovic.*

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### **Marketta's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

In my dream to make the world a better place is I would want no murders and no diseases on this earth. I say this because a lot of people in this world die because of disease or they get killed. My opinion and experience from death due to disease and murders were very dramatic in my life. I went in a state of shock losing my family members. I had grown to have a cold heart against some people due to my hurts about my family's and friend's death. I

thank God for delivering me from that past. It took me almost eleven years to forgive people for what I thought they did. This is my dream is to make the world a better place.

By Marketta Maloy

*I'm 24 years old. I was born in Miami, FL. My culture is Dominican/Haitian. My role model is my grandmother. My goal is to help people who lost their parents at an early age. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon ABE IV, Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **To My Lovely Father**

Dear Father,

I am writing this letter because even though you have been gone for many years I still feel that you are close to me. I want to say in this letter some of the things that I did not say to you when I was younger.

You were always a good father figure for me. I remember the happiness we shared when I was growing up and nearing the time for me to be on my own. I remember exactly the day when you took my mother, my brothers and me to see snow for the first time.

It was spectacular and exciting for us and we traveled for almost four hours. There were nine of us and I remember we were singing in the car the whole time. Whenever you saw a police car you told us to duck down because there were too many of us in the car and you didn't want to get a ticket from the police. We almost always fell asleep on the way home. We were cuddled together like baby birds in the nest.

If you were here now I could tell you about my family, my new country and how I have spent my life since we were together. I

want you to know that the lessons you taught me have helped me to live my life. I have taught my sons the same principles and beliefs that you taught me and they are both happy and successful young men.

I write these words to give you thanks and to tell you that I love you. Time and distance make no difference because in my heart we will always be together.

By Magdalena Major

*My name is Magdalena Major and I am from Seville, Spain. I came to the U. S. 10 years ago and have lived in Florida for seven years. After improving my English I decided to change my degree from Spain to the U. S. I am in my third semester at Hodges University. I wrote this essay for my English composition class. It was to be about someone you love. I have received much help from my tutor, Margaret, and thanks to her, I can now participate in a program like this.*

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### **Love at First Sight**

Do you believe in love at first sight? Well I do. On Mother's Day, May 14, 1989, I left my mom and went to the beach with a friend. We went to a store to buy stuff to take to the beach. After shopping, I left the store. Outside my eyes met the eyes of a man I had never seen before. My heart started beating fast and my stomach had butterflies. I felt that he felt the same. We both went separate ways.

My friend and I went on the beach. Two hours passed. From far away, I again saw the man who had before captured my heart. The incredible thing is that he came close to where I was. I thought he wouldn't recognize me because I was too young and thin. He looked older than I. He looked very athletic. My heart started

beating much faster than before because he was getting close to me. He came up to me and said, "Hello, my name is Milton." I said, "My name is Nilsa." He asked if I could hold his football while he ran on the beach. When he returned, he gave me his phone number because he wanted to know me better. I had to make a tough decision. I did not know him. He was twenty years old, and I was only sixteen. My parents did not approve of my dating him, but I couldn't think. It was love at first sight.

Nineteen years have passed and that "Love at First Sight" has become my best friend, my husband and the father of my two beautiful, extraordinary sons, Milton and Diego. Our love is like the ocean that will always exist.

By Nilsa Marcano

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### **Life Changes After Learning to Read**

When I was a little girl, living in Morocco, I always wanted to learn how to read. I used to copy words but I didn't know what they meant. In spite of my desire, I didn't have the opportunity to go to school. Fortunately, the people I worked for made it possible for me to come to the United States.

After I came here, I went to school to learn English. I remember that first day, after class, my friend gave me a piece of paper with instructions on how to catch the bus. I was so afraid because I couldn't speak enough English to ask for help. Three buses later, I finally made it home.

I did manage to learn the language quickly but it was a struggle with reading, writing and spelling. Thankfully, I learned about the literacy program and it has changed my life forever. I'll always be grateful to my tutor, Pat, who has become a good friend and to this wonderful organization that has helped so many people.

By Hyna Marino

*Hyna is from Morocco and has been very eager to learn. She attends class with her tutor Pat, every week at Dixie Hollins Adult School in St. Petersburg. They sit in on the GED classes in preparation for Hyna getting her GED.*

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### **The Hardest Parts about Being a Parent**

The hardest parts about being a parent are trying not to make mistakes, being a role model, thinking about the future and conducting myself in a positive manner.

One of the most difficult parts about being a parent is trying not to make mistakes. I'm trying my best not to make mistakes because I don't want my son to resent me for something I did wrong or didn't do.

Another challenge about being a parent is trying to be a role model. I didn't have a lot of role models growing up so I want my son to look up to me and respect what I say or do.

Thinking about the future and hoping that everything I say will play a big part in his life can be another hard part of parenting. I hope he grows up to be a good man.

Finally, I have to put my son before me. Any decisions I make have to work around him. He comes before me and always will. Sometimes things I want to do as an adult are limited.

I think these are the hardest parts about being a parent and I don't think it gets easier. It gets harder from here on out. But, that's what being a parent is all about, "No one said it was going to be easy".

By Oline Marius

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### **Respect**

“The glory of young men is their strength; gray hair is the splendor of the old.” Proverbs 20:29

The other day I was driving to my English class, in front of me an old woman was driving very slow, many other motorists were becoming impatient. This made me think it is important for everyone to treat the elderly with respect, admiration and love. We need to wake up and realize that the elderly need our patience and understanding. Young people should understand that they too will someday be old; it's part of the circle of life.

By Maria Matos

*Maria Matos, originally from Costa Rica, is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. She attends ESOL classes there and her teacher is Vince Scalise.*

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### **Honoring Our Soldiers**

Our country has always been an intervening country. We're always helping others in all parts of the world.

The Vietnam War took place in the 60's. We sent thousands upon thousands of our soldiers over there to fight the North Vietnamese. Many people say that war should never have happened. Thousands and thousands of our soldiers lost their lives.

Some loved ones have lost husbands, children lost their fathers, and mothers lost their sons, and sisters lost a loving brother; I could go on and on.

I'm pretty sure none of us could walk a mile in these soldiers' shoes... watching their buddy get killed in front of their eyes, not knowing if it will be them next. We need to support our soldiers, who are fighting for our country, and our veterans, who made our country what it is today, the land of the free and the brave. We can get the message across about honoring our soldiers by putting stickers on our cars with the emblems saying "support our troops" and our veterans.

It's nice to know that we have our American soldiers in all branches of the service fighting in Iraq right now, protecting our country and protecting the good people in Iraq.

When we see a soldier in the Marines or Army or whatever branch on leave from Iraq walking through the mall or eating dinner with a friend, make sure you stop and shake his or her hand and say "GOD BLESS YOU" and "THANK YOU" for everything that you continue to do for us and our country. "I'm really proud of you." They deserve that respect and let's not forget our veterans who fought in the wars including Iraq and lost their legs and other limbs. We can help these soldiers by sending money to build craft kits to help them pass the time.

They've done so much for us, now it's time for us to do something for them. Not too long ago, we took our friend's daughter, who was on leave from basic training and graduated with honors, to dinner wearing her uniform. We were so proud of her. Tears welled up in our eyes another soldier being trained to fight for our country. While at dinner, many people honored her shook her hand saying we're proud of you. Two Marine veterans talked to their new comrade and said "Hang in there, you'll do it."

This is what I'm talking about. We need to show our love and respect. We should never forget our soldiers over there in Iraq as well as our veterans from other wars.

By Rosemarie Maxwell

*Rosemarie is a wife and mother she is also a student and a tutor. She has come a long way with her studies and will go all the way. Her math skills are improving and she will soon have her GED. She is tutored by Monica Baxley.*

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### **Meeting My Father**

If I could pick someone to spend the day with, I would have to pick my real father. The main reason I would pick my dad is because I never got to meet him. The only memories I have of my father come from three pictures that I have of him. If I could just spend some time with him, he would no longer be a stranger to me. Not only could he answer the many questions I have about his life, but he would also get to meet his grandchildren and I would be able to share my life with him.

My father's name was Raymond Russo and he was born in 1932. Over the years, I have learned a few things about him, but only by word of mouth from other people. In the pictures, he appears to be a handsome, Italian looking guy. He passed away when I was only six years old.

If I could spend the day with him, not only would it be a dream come true, I would have dozens of questions to ask him. I have always been curious about my other brothers and sisters and his side of my family history. I have also always wanted to know why he allowed my mother to keep him from me.

I firmly believe that he would have had questions for me, also. If he were here, my dad could see how much I've grown up on my own, how smart and pretty I grew up to be and after meeting his grandchildren, what a good mother I became.

So in summary, and if I had the magic to be able to see anyone in the world, it would be you, Dad, the real father I never got to meet.

By Jessica McKellar

*Jessica has tried several times to earn her high school diploma- this time she is convinced it will stick. She is the mother to Jason, age eleven, and Alyssia, age six. Jason and Alyssia are expecting a baby brother or sister on 8/08/08. Jessica is a student at the Lealman Adult Program in St. Petersburg. Her teacher is Anne Morgan. She has never met her father.*

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### **To All God's Children**

**L**ove must be showered carefully with our  
**E**motions, letting that process define our everyday  
**A**ctions in order to create the beautiful garden of  
**F**lowers that we call "Life".

So, is it possible to safely "**LEAF**" through life?  
"I think so," but all must remember "the world is the soil in which  
the seed of love is planted.

"Us" defines all, "U" can't do it alone!

By Jedadiah McGlocking

*Jedadiah is a 30 year old single father of a 2 year old daughter. He is an aspiring poet/lyricist from St. Augustine, FL. He is presently incarcerated in Monticello, Fl where he serves at ITA (Inmate Tutor Assistant) in the Education Department.*

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**Addicted To**

Guns, Knives, Shanks, Blades  
Pipes, Whistles, Bongs, Lighters  
Weed, Coke, Crack, and Pills  
Suffering, Dying, Overdose, Thrills  
I ask myself some days why,  
Why is it that people do the things that they do?  
I ask myself why is that people get hooked on drugs?  
Why is it that they spend all their money  
to get that ten minute high?  
And you want to know my conclusion is?  
It's that people don't really have anyone that they can look up to  
It's that people are so stressed that no one will talk  
to them about the problems that they have.  
Or the problems that re going on in their life.  
Its that people get so hooked and don't know what to do  
And they know that the drugs are the only ones  
that will be there for them  
That the drugs will help out with the problems you have.  
That they will always make you feel like you are somebody  
I ask myself again why, and then I think... why,  
Why does that sound so much like me?  
I tried to change it. It won't work.  
The people that I thought were there weren't.  
I don't know what to do, I try so hard to change.  
Everything I try to do just goes down the drain,  
I found out I'm hooked,  
Hooked on what I can't change. I do it, I just want more,  
Hooked on what I can't change. I do it I just want more,  
I run, I just come back, I'm broke, I steal, I'm hooked,  
Hooked on what I can't feel. The drug, crack cocaine  
I ask myself for the last time why, why crack cocaine?  
Is it that it feels so right or is it that it just won't go away?  
I found out the true reasons of what I thought was the beginning  
But was really the end, Overdose.

A drug that helped many a drug that kills all,  
Crack cocaine a drug that will never go away...

By Zachery McMillen

*As an 18 year old, Zach has learned some tough life lessons. While the poem describes an almost "love-hate" relationship with drugs, he is clear about the harsh and life-threatening impact drugs have on our lives. Zach enjoys football and basketball and plans to be in the Marine Reserves in the not-to-distant future.*

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### **Dreaming**

Thoughts in your mind  
That are so luminous  
It makes the sun look murky.

That one thought of freedom.  
Something that no one owns.  
There is no name, there is no number,  
It belongs to no one.

Something that catches you when you are not aware.  
I hope this pure feeling,  
This one freedom, will never fade.

By Josh Meagher

*Josh is a 16 year old student in the Adult and Community Education's GED class at Lively in Tallahassee.*

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## **Learning English in America**

I remember when I came to America. When people talked to me, I did not understand what they said to me. One day I got a dictionary and started to look up some words. After that day, English started to be easier for me than before. My teacher now asks me a lot of questions. One day she asked me a question and I put my hand up and answered the question. From that day, my English was better and I read a lot.

By Micael Mesidor

*Micael is a student in the Lively GED program of Adult and Community Education in Tallahassee.*

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## **Nick's Story**

I graduated from high school and I couldn't read that well and couldn't write or spell at all. I wanted to learn to read to go back to school and to feel better about myself. I also wanted to read football books, and car engine books, and to be able to read Engine Builders Handbook and Engine Blueprinting, so I could build my own high performance engine for my own car. I went to the local library and got a reading tutor. We worked together for two years, usually once a week.

I went to heavy equipment operator's school and I was able to read the tests and textbooks by myself. I passed my final heavy equipment exam with a 96. After I passed my final exam, I started to read more books and to write and to go on with my education. I look up words I don't know in the dictionary.

I'm learning more new words all the time. I would like to go to college, so I'm going on with my tutor until I can do that. And so I

do hope this will encourage you to go to the local library and start to read a book.

By Nick Miller

*Nick lives in Live Oak, FL his tutor is Alix Neel.*

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### **An Opinion I Used to Have But now I've Changed**

An opinion I used to have is that it was okay to treat people wrong, but now my opinion has changed. One reason I changed my opinion is that I didn't want to end up in jail. Another reason why I stopped treating people wrong is because I would not want people to do me wrong. I also gave up fighting others. The reason why is because I realized I could hurt that person.

One reason I stopped treating people wrong is that I realized fighting can put you in jail. I heard jail is a bad place to be. By being in jail you can't accomplish your goals. After being in jail, it is hard to get back on your feet.

Another reason I stopped treating people wrong is that it can hurt their feelings. It can also cause them to think bad about themselves. I don't want them to do me wrong. That's why it is important to treat others as you want to be treated.

I also gave up fighting others because you can really hurt someone when you didn't mean to do it. You also can kill that person by accident and you won't have a chance to apologize to them. That is the reason I gave up fighting.

I used to get in lots of trouble in school, so that made me think about the consequences and how I can improve myself not to get in trouble. Today I try to respect others and hope they respect me back.

By Elbonie Moore

*Elbonie Moore is a GED student in the Adult and Community Education at Lively in Tallahassee. She loves working with kids and hopes to own her own day care one day.*

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### **Changes in my Life**

My life has changed a lot since my marriage ended. I worked hard to make a better life for my son and me. We have been getting along really great with each other and working things out.

We've been going places like to Key West and Colorado and camping. We went to Busch Gardens a lot. My son and I got to fly in an airplane which we never did and it was fun.

I just got the Wii for my son and we have been playing Wii Sports ever since we got it. It's been fun doing things with my son I never did. Now we're doing things and I like my life now and I love my son. I want to see him grow up and live a good life. I love him.

By Juan (Angel) Morgado

*Angel is recently divorced and has custody of his son who is 12 years old. He is a diligent student and has shown great improvement in the short time we have worked together.*

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### **What a Life Change!**

Today, I do not know what turns me on and what expression I have to borrow to explain my enthusiasm. I am anxious to find a computer to try to tell you briefly about my life. I also know of

some people who are in the same boat like me who are excited to talk about themselves. They think it is always good to talk about the best moments or positive sides of their lives. Personally, I do not want to talk about a story like that. I want to talk about my life before the miracles and the greatness of God. This is because I realize how much I have changed. Sometimes, I ask myself, “Is there a destiny for everyone?”

I am Jean Normil Morin. I am twenty one years old. I am from Haiti. I was born in a family of ‘little luck’. My father, Nicholas, was unemployed because he was a sick man but he had many girl friends. Maybe that might be the reason why he did not get married. I am the last of the children. My father died when he was fifty years old; At that time I was fifteen. My other brothers did not quite like me. They did not love our mother on the account of my father’s misconduct. For this reason, we are not one happy family. There is discontent among us.

Everyday and every time when I think about my father, I recall an author who used to say “It is easier for me to teach twenty people some thing good to do than to be one of the twenty people to follow my advice.”

My father was a good father to all of us. He always gave me some good advice. He instructed me to attend church, to try to do my best to learn well, and to study my lessons so that I could become a good citizen of tomorrow. He also spoke to me about girls. He said that the girls are the beauty of nature. We need to respect them. In reality, when I think about my father, I do not exactly follow his advice.

Life is a notion of experience and that is pretty clear to me. According to a scientific viewpoint, life is defined by its operations, organizations, the nutrition, reproductions, conservations, and finally an evolution. Everybody who is alive

realizes that they all have dreams. However, many do not know that they need to be wise to make their dreams come true.

I am very aware of the difference between knowledge and wisdom. Knowledge is full of facts. Wisdom is to apply those facts in our everyday life. I learn about wisdom through personal experience and other people's experience. The best way to learn about certain ones is by reading books about them because obviously we do not have all the time and chance in the world to experience them first hand.

The application of wisdom can help us reach our destiny. Our destiny has been predetermined. We must take the right approach toward it. When one is at peace with oneself and the environment, one should be able to focus on the path to one's destiny. Being in America, I learned about having personal space. I used to not even think about how important it is to have a personal space, but now I do. My life has changed tremendously because I am able to think clearer, better, and smarter. When I am cool, calm, and collected, I am ready make my decisions to pursue my actions to reach out for my destiny.

By Jean Normil Morin

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### **A Place in my Mother's Heart**

I can hear a sweet melody playing in the back of my head, as if I heard it play a thousand times before.

I Love You Son

That's the Melody!!

And my mind begins to wander, wander to a place where those sweet melodies first grasp my attention.

A place where no kid wants to leave or be apart from under any circumstances.

A place like home, but feels like heaven....

By: James E. Moring

*On February the 14th of 2006, my mother passed away. When I was a kid and even up until I was grown, my mother would always tell me that she loved me. When she was alive those words sounded like whispers, but now that she's gone, they play like sweet melodies...*

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### **My Autobiography**

My name is Rosa Elena. I am married to Roman Muñoz. We have nine years together here in the United States. We were born in Mexico. When we arrived in the United States, it was very difficult because we didn't know anybody, we didn't have work, and we didn't have a car.

My cousin got work for my husband and his wife got work for me. My husband worked in construction and I became a farm worker. We felt very sick and we almost fainted. After we knew more people, we got other work in a factory. In the factory, we didn't have so much sun, but the supervisor gave us the machines very quickly and he wanted us to work very fast. I couldn't work anymore because I was pregnant with my first daughter and she almost wasn't born because when I was two months pregnant, my supervisor wanted me to work very fast (I worked two machines). My husband helped me sometimes, when he could.

Now, we have 3 daughters: Maria (8 years) is very intelligent and very serious, Neishla (5 years) is very intelligent and very

social, and the mischievous Lupita (2 years) is very, very mischievous and very social. Our three daughters are beautiful.

My husband now works very hard because we are five people at home and I don't work because I need to take care of my three daughters. It is still difficult because there are other problems because we are immigrants, but we are very happy with our three daughters.

By Rosa Elena Muñoz

*Rosa Elena lives in Orlando with her husband and 3 beautiful daughters. She is in the Level 3 ESL class.*

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### **Dreams**

One more time,  
I am here.  
Alone, just with the sea.  
One more time  
I am here,  
Looking for your paths on the sand.

Far away, there are birds,  
Playing with the sun.

One more time,  
I miss you.  
I miss your soft skin  
and your hair, black and rebel.

The sea is warm,  
Like were your eyes.  
I would like to see you one more time.  
I do not remember when I lost you,

Centuries ago,  
Perhaps.

One more time,  
I am here,  
And there are not rainbows in our house.  
The roses of the garden  
Are dead,  
And my soul, too.

I am here,  
Looking for your arms.

I am here,  
Looking for a little star.

Tomorrow,  
I will come back,  
Maybe I can find you.  
Maybe not.

There are some birds,  
Playing with the sun....

By Efrain Murillo

*I came from Colombia three years ago with my wife and kids. To learn a language is hard, but funny. My teacher has helped me a lot. She is a great person.*

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### **The Baseball Fan**

It was mid-summer, the year 1957, when a young boy's mother asked her son if he would like to attend a professional baseball game in New York. He said yes and was very excited about the prospect of going to the big game in the big city.

When Saturday morning arrived, the young boy, his father, and mother awoke early in order to get ready to take the train from New Brontin, Connecticut to New York, New York. The train ride in itself was a new adventure and yet the young boy could hardly wait to arrive at the game.

Now, this particular game was special, as it was between the famous New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox. Although it took only a few short hours to get to the ball park, it seemed like eternity to the young boy.

When the boy arrived at Yankee Stadium with his parents, he was in awe of the activity that surrounded him. Once seated the young boy asked his father about a baseball player that displayed the number 7 on his jersey. This father told him that he was the one and only Mickey Mantle.

The game was exciting and one that the young boy would never forget. It was that day, at that moment, that the boy knew that he wanted to be a Yankee fan, and 52 years later, he still is. That young boy was me.

By Chet Murzyn

*Mr. Murzyn is 60 years old and is a successful business man, who enrolled in our GED program one year ago. Although, Chet is very intelligent and highly motivated, because of a learning disability, he was unable to finish his high school education. It is his life long*

*dream to complete his education, something he would be most proud of.*

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### **Kim's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

My dream would be to be a productive member of society, clean and sober. To be content with my family and to leave here and be with them. To have my three daughters in my life not just of one of them. I think the world would be a better place if everybody would just respect each other for who they are and where they are at. We don't necessarily have to like them just respect them.

By Kim Nelson

*I am 47 years old and was born in New York State. I have three daughters. I have been struggling with drug addiction since my early twenties. I hope and pray that when I leave prison I will go on to achieve my dreams. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon ABE IV, Gadsden Correctional Facility.*

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### **No Thanks!**

Hello! I'm Duyen. I came here one and a half years ago. I had learned some English in Vietnam, but when I got here, I couldn't say or understand everything. I could just say "hello" and "thank you" because I was so nervous. When I went to the mall, a worker there asked, "How are you doing?" I said, "No thanks." I thought he said, "Can I help you?" He stopped smiling, and my face got red. I said, "Sorry." I was so ashamed of myself. Now I laugh when I think about that. It was funny.

By Duyen Nguyen

*Duyen is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech. Her teacher is Glenda Worley.*

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### **My American Dream**

In April 1975, communists took over South Vietnam. My family and about one million other South Vietnamese left the country. My family and my brother's family and sixty-seven others left Saigon about 2 A.M. on a flat boat. My wife was seven months pregnant. We had bad luck. A thunderstorm caused big waves and our engine fell into the ocean. We made a sail out of a blanket. After eleven days, we saw a Thai boat. It did not stop to help us. A few days later, another Thai boat helped our boat get to land.

We stayed on the beach for three days. The government gave the order to take our boat back into the ocean and shoot us. We were very lucky. The sergeant who was supposed to kill us told us to lie down in the boat. He told his marines not to shoot us but to fire their guns into the air. The government thought we had been killed.

After about 48 days at sea, a Malaysian navy ship helped us to shore. Our family stayed there in a refugee camp for three and a half months, then we got a sponsor with a heart of gold. We moved to Portland, Oregon.

We went to Oregon not speaking English and not understanding the culture. We went to school to learn English. We worked very hard. I love my wife very much. She always took good care of our children. My son and daughter studied hard and got university degrees. One is now a pharmaceutical representative in Washington, DC and the other is a lawyer in New York. I am very proud of them.

I want to thank America for giving us the opportunity to have the life we have here. Even if you are poor here, if you work hard and your children study hard, your family can have a good life and your children can get a good education. This is what we call “The American Dream.”

By Hien Nguyen

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### **My Long Journey**

As a young girl I grew up in a changing land, full of pain and sorrow, but dreamed of a better life filled with peace and love. When I was six years old my country was at war with the United States and my future looked nothing like my dreams. After the war, my country was changed forever. The Communist Party in Vietnam controlled the educational system, the newspapers, hospitals, and really every aspect of our lives. Entire families lost their jobs and people were starving. We had no real homes, lacked clean drinking water and food, and our money was almost worthless.

Vietnamese people who worked with or knew Americans during the war were sent to jail or to re-education camps. The young and able bodied were forced to work on farms or to flee into the jungle. This work provided barely enough food and money to survive. These were the hardest days of my life. As my parents struggled to provide for nine children, a world of peace and love seemed far away.

One of my memories is the sight of my baby brother crying each time my mother left our town to make money for our family. She walked for miles to sell chips, cookies and fruit from a tray. She sold these goods at train stations, street corners, and in the markets. When my mother was away from our home, she lived

wherever she could, making space for herself with pieces of cardboard and sleeping on the ground.

At age ten I begged my mother to let me go with her. I wanted to be there to help her when she got sick and to be close to her. This meant a lot to her, but I soon got sick and had to return home.

Eventually I joined my father in the fields. Mosquitoes in the fields were thick and carried disease. I became very sick and I had a high fever for many days and nights. There were no vaccinations, no pesticides, and some who were even sicker than me still had to work.

At age twenty, I made a decision that changed me forever. I pleaded with my parents to let me leave home to search for a better life. They allowed me to leave with my two year old baby brother. Even with the risk of death in our escape, taking this chance was better than staying. I made a promise that if we survived, my brother would have opportunities for a better life.

Eighteen years later, I'm in America writing my story. My life has taught me that our journeys are like vacations, some bad and some good. Each has a starting point and an end and we should make the best of every day and remember to have faith, hope and love in our hearts. All of the people in my life have helped to heal my heart and mind, and my life is a wonderful journey.

By Tuyet Nguyen

*Tuyet came to the United States from Vietnam in 1990. She is an ESOL student at Okaloosa Walton College, and her teachers are Brian and Melody Jones. She wants to thank Father Benonis and Father Dan, her first sponsor in America for giving her a warm home for her and her brother. She'd also like to thank the Walsh and Hassel families for helping her learn English and providing her with her first job in America. She writes this story in memory*

*of Emily, Alan, Elizabeth, Jean, Peggy, and Sister Paul for helping to lift her spirits both mentally and physically when she first immigrated to America. Most importantly, Tuyet credits her loving parents for their strong belief in her ability to make a better life for her family and people around her.*

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### **A Sweet Smile**

A smile came over her face  
Suddenly her face became illuminated  
Similar to a decorative picture  
Her spiritual face lightened  
And made bright her gold eyes  
Transforming her figure  
In a well drawn sculpture

Why reserve the smile  
For a special event  
A smile is love  
Smile with your lips  
Smile with your eyes  
Smile every day

A sweet smile  
Such a flowery garden  
A pleasant smile  
It is not missed  
Always remembered

All of us will be winners  
With an agreeable smile  
That touches our soul  
And our hearts.

I love nature

And everything that our Lord  
Gives us every day.

By Nieves T. Nouel

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### **Paint Brush**

Here is my paint brush, I take it with me where ever I may go.  
Just in case I need it so the real me doesn't show.

I keep my paint brush in my pocket and use it when I need it;  
cause when you're not looking there's layers of paint beneath it.

I walk around putting on a coat at a time until I'm all covered  
up so you can't see.

I need you to see the real true me, but I'm not sure you will like  
what you see. But I want you to see so I can be free.

Peeling it off a layer at a time and now you see. Wanting to  
throw my paint brush away but I can't so I put it back in my pocket  
where you can't see.

I'll use it again so they can't see me.

By Amy Peachy

*I am from Lake County, FL. I started writing poems about a year ago, and I am inspired to keep writing for my three children and my family. My teacher is Chaundra Whitehead Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE III*

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### **Struggles to Earn my GED**

I began studying to get my GED upon arriving at the county jail. I had come to realize my life was going nowhere. I wanted desperately to change the way I was living. Receiving an education seemed like the best place to start. So I worked hard and studied every chance that I got and through hard work and effort I was

rewarded with my diploma. Here are some of the ways I plan to use this to my advantage and become successful:

I will start by continuing my schooling, I would like to study drafting and design. I already have eight years experience in carpentry. With my previous experience leading into the classes that are required, it shouldn't take me very long, if I stay focused and work hard to achieve my goals.

By achieving my goals and becoming successful I hope to be a great role model for my son. I plan to tell him of my struggles in life and hope he will take me seriously when I do so. I was very hard headed and did not listen to my mother when she attempted to show me right from wrong. The best that I can hope for is to break the cycle. Having my GED diploma raised my spirit and let me know that anything is possible.

By Barry Peppers

*Barry is a father of a 4 year old son. He enjoys helping others in the class. In his free time he enjoys playing volleyball and hanging out at the beach.*

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### **My Childhood Dream**

My childhood dream has yet to be fulfilled. It is a dream only so many others can wish upon. My dream is filled with passion and excitement. What is my dream, you ask? It is the dream of an open-wheel race car driver. It is a sport that I love and watch all the time. This sport requires your full attention. It doesn't matter if you are racing or in the pits.

It all began with my father. He was into virtually every sport. He introduced me to collecting die cast cars and racing. "Speed" should be my middle name because I love it. He is not as big a fan

of open-wheel racing as I am. I have a deep love for the sport, and to be a part of it would bring a feeling of accomplishment. As a birthday gift to me, he recorded various sports on a cassette, including an Indy Car race. I watched it countless times, rewinding and fast forwarding, until the tape was no longer good.

The first step is to begin as an amateur racer and work my way through the ranks to the top of the racing world. It is a big sacrifice as you are giving up your normal life to have the chance to be watched all over the world. With determination and family support, I shall get there. Once I am there, I can begin to expand my horizons.

Next, I intend to create a family from my team and the people around me. A racing family is just like your real family. They are supportive, they teach different techniques, and they celebrate with you. With Indy Car Racing, chemistry is important. Teams need to be able to co-exist to win. Racing is more intricate than some people know. Most say that it's just a bunch of cars going in a circle. That is why I love it.

The final step is to benefit from the experience and wealth of racing. With the money I get from racing, I can help my parents financially and be a part of many charities. My mother has struggled in the past with money, and to help her with that would make me happy. She has taught me well and deserves to be helped in every way possible.

With a career in racing, I can create a well-known name for myself and have fans cheer me on. When I am older and hopefully have a son, I can bring him into the world of motor sports, then I can watch him race and listen to his fans cheer him on as he becomes a household name in Indy Car Racing.

Indy Car Racing is my passion and a sport I live for. There is no other sport like it in this world. The only closest sport is

NASCAR. I loved the sport when I was a kid, and I still love it to this day. I live for the speed and sounds of the racing atmosphere. To be a part of open-wheel racing and the history would mean a lot.

By Edward Peraza

*Eddie is a GED student at Indian River Community College in the Adult Education Department. He is 20 years old and looking forward to getting his GED. Eddie plans to continue his education in the Automotive Service Technology program. He enjoys writing essays.*

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### **Joyce's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

My dream is to be legal for the rest of my days, to never have to look over my shoulder, to stay strong in the Lord, and spend all the rest of my days with the ones I love: my husband, children, and family and never have to lose my freedom again.

By Joyce Permer

*I'm 48 years old. I have 3 kids and am ready to live a better life. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE III.*

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### **A Mother's Love**

A Mother's love begins when she gives birth or adopts a child.  
A Mother's love creates a special bond between her and her child.  
A Mother's love is when she takes care of her child when she is  
sick or has  
a problem she can't solve.

*Opening a New World*

A Mother's love is when she comes to see her child in the hospital.

A Mother's love is when she sends her child off to school for the  
very first time

and then picks her up from school.

A Mother's love is when she knows her child is getting sick or has  
a bad dream.

A Mother's love is when she tells stories to her child at bedtime.

A Mother's love is when her child has emotional problems  
and she doesn't know what to do or say but tries very hard to  
figure it out.

A Mother's love is very special.

A Mother is lucky to have a child who calls to say hello; to ask  
how she is doing.

A Mother should be recognized not just on Mother's Day, but  
everyday.

She needs to be told what a good job she is doing in raising her  
children.

A Mother's love is very special.

By Wendy Pfeiffer

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**Finding a Blessing**

Finding a blessing....  
How do you find a blessing?  
When the sun refuses to shine, and  
the wind won't blow, and  
the flowers lose their blooms, and  
the birds stop singing, and  
the trees don't dance, and  
every day seems cloudy, and  
there's no rainbow after the rain, and  
the simple things in life that used to be so  
clear seem so distant, and you can't help but to  
wonder if there is a blessing under all this mess.

but for a moment it is quiet and there's nobody  
but you, and you hear a clam, soothing voice  
saying, Look.. look at the simple blessings that  
you didn't see before.  
you will miss them if they're ever taken away.  
sometimes we have to go through  
to get out of the mess we've gotten ourselves in.  
we don't see how blessed we are  
until we lose something or someone we hold dear.  
so always find the blessings in little  
things that don't seem like much,  
because blessings sometimes come in small  
packages, and grow to become something big  
and special.so hold the small blessings closer...  
a blessing is like a flower,  
it won't grow unless you water it and give it sunlight.

By Georgette Philpot

*Georgette finds being a mom of a 6 year old little boy as one of the biggest blessing there is. She enjoys spending time with him and her extended family. She has a love for words and genuinely appreciates learning.*

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### **If I Told You I Loved You...**

If I told you I loved you, would you believe me?  
I mean truly believe me?  
Not my words, but my feelings, too?

If I held your hand with the sincerity of my heart,  
Would you hold my hand the same way?

Have you caught me staring at you?  
And if you did, would you turn and look away?

Or stare back with that same amazement that I show you so clearly?

Would you say my name with your last breath as you fall asleep?  
As I do yours, for the thought of you eases my mind into slumber!  
Would you lose sleep thinking of me at night?  
As at the same time I am thinking of you.

Would you come to me with any problem you have,  
Trusting that I'll have the answer?  
And if I don't have the answer,  
Let me give you comfort?

And would you love me with all your emotion, forever?

You know, the same way that I LOVE YOU!!!!!!

By Makaylee Pierce

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### **Tammi's Dream**

To make the world a better place...  
To be a mom again and to start a Program called "MAC"  
Mother's Against Crack.

By Tammi Pinder

*I'm 32 years old. I'm a single mother of a 7 year old daughter,  
Harli Jordon. I was sentenced to 4 years. This time in my sobriety,  
I'm going to work harder. I'm going to make it. Teacher: Ms. Judy  
Drymon Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE III.*

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**Just Fish**

We are all just fish in the pond,  
Forced to swim in schools. Forced to be fools.  
Forced to be pawns used as political tools.  
Life is cruel, with watered down food,  
watered down knowledge, and watered religion.  
Check out the mess in which we are swimming.  
We are all drowning and we don't even know it.

By Timothy Pitt

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**Leroy's Mother**

My story begins in Fort Meyers, Florida in 1975. My mother lived in one of my apartments next to me for 5 years. We were very close. We laughed and cooked together sometimes and we drove to Church together. I loved my mother dearly and I know she loved me too. Days went by and my mother moved in with my brother, Jerome. She loved my brother, but she was not very happy living there. He is not a woman and I guess she missed being around my girlfriend. They laughed and laughed and had good times.

My mother was doing very good and my friend and I started going fishing. I have two boats. I like boats. Sometimes I take my friend, a woman, fishing. We go at 5 a.m. and have a good time. We talk and laugh and go home with lots of fish. My mother would come into the kitchen to see the fish.

I knew my mother missed her mother. She would talk so much about her and the old days. She felt good when she talked about it. But my mother got sick. I didn't know what to do. Her chances were not good. I prayed to God to help her and me, but she got sicker and sicker. I had to move her to a health center. When she

talked to me she said, "They tell me I am dying." I told her to just shut her eyes and pray you will be ok. God loves you and He will be with you to the end.

Months go by and the Lord calls my mother home. I felt like a part of me went with her. I didn't know what to do. I got very sick and had a heart attack because I was so sad. I left Fort Meyers and moved to St. Petersburg with a friend. I was not very happy living with my friend so I started looking for a place of my own. I found my own place and moved in January, 2008. I started school in November, 2007. I am working for my GED. Now I feel happy and like going to school. I have made new friends. I have joined a church and made more friends.

I have made some mistakes in my life, but I know in my heart I have been redeemed. I cried out to the Lord and the Lord heard my cry and blessed me. I put my trust in the Lord and am thankful I had such a wonderful mother.

My story has not ended yet. I am happy to know my tutor and to learn new things and meet new people. I am very happy.

By Leroy Pompia

*Leroy has a tremendous sense of humor and enjoys coming to school. He is attending reading class and working with a tutor at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg Florida. He is improving his skills to pass the GED test.*

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### **Awareness**

Thunder of a rose petal falling to the ground.  
Causing tremors to echo through habitats below.  
Blades of grass cracking under foot.  
Like a giant redwood struck by lightning.

Fence like net keeping it's catch secure.  
With biting teeth gleaming around it's edge.  
Daring one to dream of freedom.

In a kennel each dog has a run.  
But men are stacked together one-by-one.

By David Pogue

*David is a 52 year old who has struggled to overcome the hindrance of depression to stay involved in the educational process on a daily basis.*

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### **Remodeling**

For twenty years now I have lived in my home. My husband and I raised three girls in this house. The house is in a nice area located five miles from a supermarket, schools, hospital and my work. There are many memories in this house.

After twenty years of living in this house with small remodeling in between, my husband and I decided to do a series of remodeling on the house. Our two older daughters moved out; our youngest daughter is moving in a few months.

It is time to remodel. We need to update. I started to collect good ideas from magazines and television shows. The next step, we looked to hire a good contractor and began to tear down the house. I was so excited in the beginning.

Now the house is a big mess! There is stuff everywhere! My bedroom furniture is in the family and Florida rooms. There is dust and sand all over the floor. I like to keep a clean and organized house, so it is driving me crazy. My husband and I have been

fighting about the house and different ideas. When I get home from work, I sometimes get disappointed because the house is not the way I wanted. Because both of us work we cannot guide the job. The details of the way the house is being built is sometimes different.

It has been three months now since we started, and now the house is 80% done. We just have the Master bedroom and bathroom to finish. Soon my house will get back to normal, and we can enjoy it.

By Yen Polek

*I come from Taiwan, Taipei. I have lived in the United States for 29 years. I have a happy life here. I will continue to go to school to learn English. My goal in ESOL is to be able to write in English.*

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### **I Was Thinking...**

When I was eight years old I lived in Mexico City. I went to school and I was in the third grade. I remember both of my parents working very hard. Sometimes I questioned where my parents' money went. They worked so hard but we didn't seem to have a lot of things. When I asked my parents where the money went, they got mad. They explained that life is hard and they pay for books and clothes and food and shoes for my brothers and my sister and for me.

My parents told me that I have to work for the things I want. They said if I want a radio for my room, I need to work for the money to pay for it. I would have to help my father make the money for the things I wanted. He is a carpenter and builds things like tables and desks and chairs and cabinets and he paid me for sanding, cleaning the tools and keeping them in order and

sometimes sweeping the shavings off the floor. I remember that I did what my parents told me to do. I got my radio because I worked for it. Both of my parents always told me I should not spend my money right away.

They said I should save my money so that I would have extra money when I went on excursions like the three day trip to watch the monarch butterflies moving to Canada. I remember buying Simpson stickers and they said, "Why do you spend your money like that? Keep it for something important." They never yelled. They just talked.

I worked for my father for about three months and later I worked with my older brother. I started working in restaurants as a bus boy when I was in grade school. The first restaurant I worked in with my brother was a Chinese restaurant. I now work in two restaurants and my long term goal is to own my own restaurant.

When I was growing up, my parents always told me to save my money. They said, "Material things are not everything." Now that I am older, I understand the value of money and what my parents told me.

By Oswaldo Perez Ramirez

*Oswaldo is single, 23 years old and came to Florida when he was 19. He is a high school graduate, studied in a Culinary School in Mexico for 2 1/2 years. He says that wherever he goes now he feels much better about speaking English, much better than he did 2 years ago. It has helped him apply for better jobs in the restaurant business. His goal is to open his own restaurant business in Mexico, in a resort area where he will need a good command of English.*

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**Poem**

Born from sin into sin  
That's how my life begin  
As a child I was really a teen  
When I became a teen I can't seem,  
to remember the in between.  
Even though it seemed I had all I need.  
But truly I really wasn't freed.  
I knew of God but I didn't know him,  
Over the years I know I showed him.  
My love, my compassion, my comfort  
So much heartfelt for his children of his guiding light.  
I feel as though his light shined so bright and in spite of all I did,  
He loved me, held me, protected, comforted me.  
Opened his eyes and then I was in his sight.  
He opened his heart shared his love also showed his love for me,  
saying if only she could see.  
Held me in his righteous hand with his arms wrapped  
around me so tight.  
He healed me; saying only if she could feel me. I'm the one who  
can truly fill her; I'm the one that will provide the next meal for  
her.  
But in spite of that I will always love her. I'm her father to be and  
one day she'll be right beside me.

By Delynda Ray

*I'm 24 years old. I have twin daughters. I love writing poems,  
bowling, and listening to the radio. I hope to gain my GED  
throughout the year.*

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### **Sofia's Gift to the World**

If I can give to the world a gift, I would ask to give Love and Peace. We can imagine how the world would be. Everyone would help each other. There would be no fighting, no killing, and no stealing. The rich person would help a poor one. No one would look out just for himself. The world would be changed, and love would be most important. We would be living in Heaven!

By Sofia Razek

*I am from Egypt. I have lived in the United States since 1971. I lived in New Jersey working as a massage therapist. I am married and have one child, who is a doctor. I enjoy taking care of my three granddaughters.*

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### **How My Life Has Changed**

It was about ten years ago that I decided to leave my country Iran, with my children. I am a member of the Bahai faith. My family and other Bahias were treated unjustly by the government and other countrymen because of our religion. We left Iran because of the growing fear of more persecution.

At first, we moved to Turkey to wait for permission to go to the United States as refugees. After being accepted, we came to the United States. My children started school and I found a full-time and a part-time job to take care of my family. At first it was difficult because I didn't know English well.

Now my children are grown and married. They have happy lives. I'm happy for them.

By Venous Razzaghi

*Venous is a student at Winter Park Tech*

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### **Lola's Life**

I was born on January 5, 1958, in Jacksonville, Florida. I am the oldest out of seven kids. I had to take care of my brothers and sisters when my mother worked. I missed a lot of days out of school to take care of my baby brothers. My teacher would let my baby brother come to school with me some days. I stood out so much.

I got behind in school work, so I did not want to go to school. I had my first kid at the age of 15. I stopped going to school to care for her. I got my GED in 1995 at home.

I'm going to Learn to Read so I can learn to read better. I would like to teach someone to read. I'm working at Shands Hospital in housekeeping now. Someday I want to work with Hospice. I also want to go to college someday.

By Lola Reed

*Lola Reed is an ABE student at Learn to Read in Jacksonville. She attends grammar class twice a week. In her spare time, she likes bowling, going to amusement parks and helping others.*

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### **Why am I Getting My GED?**

The hardest thing that I have done was try to get back in school. It's very easy to stop going, but so difficult to start back. There are numerous reasons why one should get a GED or a high school diploma. My 3 main reasons would be not to stay a statistic, strive to get a higher education, and to become successful in a career.

There are so many stereotypes about minorities, young mothers, and high school dropouts. Every time someone drops out or doesn't complete the GED, the numbers ring up. Statistically speaking we become numbers and percentages. I am a minority a young mom and a drop out already, so I have to strive a little bit harder for success. I have to prove to myself and "statistic keepers" that one can still succeed even with setbacks.

After receiving a GED or a high school education the ball doesn't stop rolling. Instead of getting "job training", one could get a higher education at a college and take up something that they enjoy. College fulfills the need for education and fun because you're taking up a subject you enjoy. College is the key to success. Who wants to be stuck at a job they don't enjoy when you can find a career you love? A career is more than a job, it is a life; loving what you do for a living. Finding success in a career guarantees success in life.

In conclusion to my 3 points, getting an education sets you right for life. A GED shows how strong you are because even though you dropped out and have gone through a lot, you were still able to receive what you needed to go on. Without an education you basically will have no life.

By Shayquan Reese

*Shay is very dedicated to her studies. It is her goal to make a life for her son, Zion. She enjoys writing. Her ultimate goal is to be a part of Oprah's Book Club.*

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## **My Significant Event**

“God grant me the serenity, to except the things I cannot change, courage to change the things that I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” I hear, pray and live my life one day at a time. How do you think it would feel if drugs and alcohol ruled your life? Me being only seventeen years of age, know the exact feeling. Addiction and alcoholism are the deadliest diseases in the world, you are powerless over the substances. The outcome of my disease saved my life and is the most significant event that has yet to occur in my life.

August 20, 2007 7:27 AM, my mother Laura walked into my room to check on me, two hours after coming home from Naples Community Hospital getting my stomach pumped. To find me unconscious and foaming from the mouth... she panics. The ambulance arrived applying breathing tubes, heart monitors, and IV's. They bring me to Physicians Regional Hospital where my mother is asked to identify the body of her baby girl. My face is disgustingly unnoticeable. She is in denial that it is me lying on the stretcher until she is shown my tattoos and piercings they have yet to remove. She is disgruntled and fragile. She waits.

August 23, 2007, I lay motionless in a coma for the third day and I had a stroke. My mother is told “It is going to get bad, Mrs. Rilea.” She doesn't understand why they won't give her information. She watched helplessly as I slowly slipped away. The doctors tell her I will not make it through the night. She insisted they keep me on life support for she will not give up on her only daughter. She asked her best friend Esther to pray with her over my body. After half an hour, she tells my mother “she will wake up in the morning.” The doctors kick Esther out of the hospital knowing she is giving my mother false hopes. I woke up choking on breathing tubes, I was knocked back out. The second time I woke up, I ask her whispering, “Where am I and why am I here?” She began to weep and replied, “You overdosed, baby, you don't

remember anything?" I didn't believe her until I saw the toxicology reports. The neurologist walked in and can't believe his eyes and says "There is no medical explanation for why you're alive Carla, you're a miracle, but you will never walk again." I don't understand and cry frantically.

It has been six months since I made the mistake of using drugs or drinking and I'm walking... almost perfect now. If not for my overdose I would still be using drugs probably living on the streets, throwing my life away. Today, I have never been so happy in my life. Never once did I think there was happiness and fun in sobriety. I love life, myself and my mother... she is my everything, my best friend. I have put her through too much mental and physical stress. She deserves to sit back and relax.

### LIVE AND LET LIVE

By Carla Rilea

*My name is Carla I'm 17 years old, and I attend GGALC in Naples, my teacher is Polly Spring. With my diploma, I plan to become a chef as a side job while I'm in college to become an Anesthesiology nurse.*

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### **My Life**

Many times, people feel embarrassed about their past because they had bad experiences or they are not proud of who they are or where they are from. They forget their roots, their customs, and even their language. However, each person is his own past. Our backgrounds can be tools to help us confront problems in work, relationships, illnesses, or just to help other people. In my case, I'm very proud of my family, my history, my friends, and my country. I think that a person is rich when they have a lot of experiences in life. That's the way life is!

By Sheila Rincon

*Sheila Rincon is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech. Her teacher is Glenda Worley.*

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### **Ode to My Life**

I love waking up, going to school  
To get an education, being wise  
Not being a fool  
By breaking the laws  
And not abiding by the rules

I love to go home and sleep  
I always rap at my friend's house  
When he comes up with hot beats  
I'd rather be me  
Than to be on the streets  
Trying to sell drugs  
To put shoes on my feet

I love the smell of fried chicken  
When it hits my nose  
I just sit and wait awhile  
Till it's ready, then I smile  
Mmmm, tastes so good  
I call it "Chicken in da hood"  
But what about the canned goods?  
Baked beans, mac-n-cheese and French fries  
On da side  
Good meals like that have me tried  
Now that's the ode to my life

By Jermane Rittman

*Jermane grew up in Quincy, Florida, with his aunt, his mom and his first cousin, living in Shiloh, a place people never hear about. He is attending Lively in Tallahassee to get his GED. He plans to go to college to better his education for the people in his city.*

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### **Where There is a Will There is a Way**

The person I am going to tell about, who is so dear to my heart, was born in a poor family. It was the end of the 19th Century. His country was at war. His father died at this war. So, his grandfather, the father of his mother, had to support the family. He went to school and was a very good student. When he was fourteen years old, his grandfather died. He had to drop out of school to go to work to support his mother and himself.

He was very worried about his knowledge, so he decided to study privately instead of going to school. Years later his mother got married again, and she gave birth to four children, one boy and three girls. Since the stepfather was an irresponsible man, he took care of his mother, his brother and sisters. He was a hard worker, and when he was about thirty years old, he started his own business. His efforts paid off soon because he was honest, responsible and just. Little by little he amassed a fortune.

Shortly he established seven offices in his country and one office in New York. Growing olives in the South of his country, he became the first exporter, sending olives to The United States of America and making olive oil. He also started farming grapevine to produce liquor and wine. He opened a leather factory for making the latest designed shoes and using machinery imported from Italy. Beside this, on the outskirts of the capital city Lima, he developed urbanization for industrial and dwelling purposes that created a lot of jobs.

Always interested in the development of his country and helping the mainstream population, he was elected a member of the Board of Directors of the City Hall of the capital city of his country twice. The first time it took place in 1919 for the period between 1920 and 1923. In 1921 he had the opportunity to meet a lot of important people from foreign countries, celebrating the First Century of the Independence of Peru. The second time it was between 1941 and 1943 when he succeeded in solving problems of food supply for poor people. He was also a member of several non-profit charity institutions.

Afterwards, he married and had five sons and five daughters, giving all of them the best life and a very good education. His refined spirit and sensibility did not let him live without music, he especially liked to listen to classical music. Usually he enjoyed himself being fascinated by the famous Italian opera singer Enrico Caruso. At seventy years old, this prominent and wealthy man, who emerged from poverty being loved and respected by everybody, died leaving an indelible memory in the hearts of many people. This man, to whom I owe everything, was my beloved father.

By Alberto E. Rivera

*My name is Alberto E. Rivera, I was born in Lima, Peru (South-America) on January 8, 1923, I am a Civil Engineer, retired. I got married on November 30, 1950 in Lima, Peru and I have two sons. I am studying English as a Second Language at Flagler Palm Coast High School, advanced level with Mister Eugene Zaitseff.*

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### **My Country - Colombia**

Colombia is a beautiful country located in South America and has a population of 45 million people. They are great people, happy, smart, and hardworking.

Colombia is bordered by five different countries: Brazil, Peru, Ecuador, Panama and Venezuela; as well as both the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. Colombia is a country of many natural resources. We have many different climates, which give us a variety of fruits, exotic forest fauna, and precious stones like emeralds and sapphires. It is the world's greatest exporter of coffee and flowers.

A recent study showed that Colombians are some of the happiest people in the world and treat their families like a treasure. There is some trouble in my country now but I hope things will get better. I am very happy to be in this wonderful country where I am learning English. I have my family and here I can have a better life. I love meeting people from different countries and learning about their cultures. God Bless America!

By Edna Roa

*Edna Roa is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. She attends ESOL classes there and her teacher is Vince Scalise.*

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### **Autobiography of Liliana Roa**

My name is Liliana Roa. I am from Armenia, Colombia. I studied in my country and got a degree in Business Administration and Tourism. I came to this country with my children, Manuel and Juliana, because of social and political problems occurring in my country at this time. It has been very difficult for my children and I to adapt to a new way of life in this country. The culture, environment, and pace of life is very different here than in my homeland.

One of the biggest obstacles for us was the language – English. It is hard for my children, although they spend the majority of their time in school, due to age. Because of the fast pace of life here, we

find it difficult for quality time and have economic issues. Even though I am a professional in my country, here I have to work in jobs that don't require too much English skills in order to survive. I will need to learn English quickly in order to help myself find a job that relates to my qualifications as a professional. It is very difficult to find work if you don't know the language. I believe that all the people that come from other countries in search of a better way of life here, don't realize how hard it will be to make a new life until they arrive here. It is not easy to survive in a new country even though you have all the possibilities to study. It takes dedication, patience, support, and the willingness not to give up.

Thanks to the ESOL Program (Orange County Public Schools – Adult Education Program) at Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal, I am able to study and practice my English in a friendly environment and better my quality of life. As we learn English it allows us to open more doors of opportunity to improve and adapt to the United States culture easier. Today, although I have been here for a short time, I feel very happy, because every day I overcome obstacles as best as I can.

I can help my daughter with her school work and I practice with her all the time. Now when she speaks to me in English I can understand most of the things she is saying to me. That has made us bond more and I can have a conversation with her teacher. I still have my accent, but I am no longer afraid.

I like the ESOL class. It is a friendly non-threatening environment where I learn a lot and the teacher, Ms. Jackie, helps us to learn quickly and teaches us about the American culture and its adaptation process, along with learning about other cultures because we are from a diverse group of Hispanic nations.

Now my goal is to learn the English language well and to strive to better my life and have the opportunity for improving my working conditions. I will also have the advantage of being able to

speaking and help my children with their English skills and education thereby helping them to have a better future here in the United States. It is hard work, but I am glad for programs that help us meet our goals and make accommodations for adult learners and time schedules.

Thank you,

By Liliana Roa

*Liliana is from Colombia, South America, and has two children. She is a student at Iglesia de Dios Pentecostal an Adult Community Education Program sponsored by Orange County Public Schools. She has a degree in Business Administration and Tourism and puts all her efforts into learning English in order to better her way of life here in the United States. Her teacher is Jacqueline Centeno.*

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### **Vocation**

When I started taking English classes, my skills were just basic elementary English and I could understand much less than I understand now. Since I got involved in the ESOL program, I managed to go for several job interviews and answer and ask questions related to the position. Also, I succeeded in getting a temporary job outside of my occupation. This was a brand new experience for me, because in my country Puerto Rico, I used to work as a travel agent for twenty years.

Obviously, travel agents need to speak a lot with the customers, work high-speed on the computer and communicate well over the phone. This is the kind of work that I would like to continue doing.

The ESOL classes are very important for my future in America. It helps me to speak and listen better; for example: at my doctor's office, while shopping, or taking care of formalities in any

government agency. If I have a question I am not afraid to ask anymore. There is no need to get upset. Our vocabulary can grow every day more and more. Now, when I listen to the radio or watch TV, I really pay attention and I try to learn all the time, not only in class.

When I have an interview for a job I am able now to express my thoughts and ideas much better, people don't have trouble understanding me. It is a joy when I can help my son with his homework. I feel good about myself because I am learning English and then, hopefully soon, I might apply for a bilingual position in some Travel Agency! That way I won't feel I have lost something I always loved doing. I will be able to keep the same vocation, stay in the same field and maybe even become more successful than I used to be in my country. This is not just a dream. The positive happenings are always within our reach. It is good to follow our desires. We need to be happy about our choices.

By Lillian Rodriguez

*Lillian Rodriguez came from Puerto Rico in August 2007. She lives in Orlando with her 5 year old son and her aunt. She expects to reunite with her husband, who remained in Puerto Rico. Lillian used to work as a travel agent in her country for 20 years. She intends to look for a job in the same field and pursue a successful career. She attends ESOL classes at Lancaster Elementary School. Her teacher is Biljana Scepanovic.*

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### **Thank You**

Hello, I am Leticia and I want speak about somebody special in my life. They always cared for me all the time: in my first steps, when I started to speak my first words, and when I started school, they always told me, "You have made great progress in your studies". Step by step, little by little, I made a place for myself.

When I reached adolescence they were both there with me. When I continued to study and work they always forgave my mistakes. They always advised me with love. My parents gave me principle morals such as dignity, respect, love, and loyalty

By Leticia Rojas

*Leticia is a wonderful student who has been with GROWS for just one and a half months. She is in Level 3 English.*

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### **Becoming a Better Person by Learning English**

My name is Ana Roman. I was born in Colombia and lived there for 32 years of my life. I moved to Orlando, Florida in 2004. The United States has been my home since then. That means that my native language is Spanish and my second language is English.

In Colombia, I had everything that anybody could desire: a good job, the best friends, money and the most wonderful family, but something was missing in my life, someone with whom I could share it.

When visiting my sister Diana Lineburgh in Orlando, I found my “*half orange*”, as we say in Spanish when you finally find your true love. I had no second thoughts about leaving my job as a Judge, my financial independence, my friends and my family behind. I met and married Jesus Roman and we had a baby boy, Sebastian Roman. Now, I have my own family, a reason to live, a reason to be a better person.

I started to learn English as my second language. At the beginning I went to a private school, Orlando Language School, for a couple of months. I took ESOL (English for Speakers with Other Languages) classes in Seminole Community College. Now, I

am improving my English at the Adult Literacy League with a tutor.

I began in the Adult Literacy League because my sister advised me to do it. Having an infant son at home, I required a place to learn the language that adjusted to my needs: nearness to my house, flexible hours and a personal teacher. A teacher that would correct my errors and, at the same time, help me develop what I already know about the English language and introduce new concepts.

This is how I met my tutor, Mable Wilder. She is the best thing that could have happened to me. She teaches me pronunciation, vocabulary, the differences between related words and she makes me put my thoughts on a piece of blank paper, something that I have not done for a long time.

I do not know if I really speak English or pronounce it as I should, but I can hear Mable telling me right now: “Oh Ana, do not be so hard on yourself, you speak English very well, at least do not say it during an interview.”

More than a tutor, Mable has become my friend and like other friends, we talk a lot about everything: family, food, religion, exercises, what we want in the near future, and in general our day to day lives. Writing this essay, I realize that this is her way of encouraging me to have confidence in speaking English with others and to make me feel that now I have the same opportunities as other people that were born here, to finally get what I want and studying to have a career and getting a good job in order to help my husband with the finances.

By Ana Roman

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## **The Blue Man**

When I was a boy, my parents had a farm. Every day, once the school hours were over, I ran to the farm. I took an old bus that squeaked with each pothole on the way. The farm was near, but the road was very bad. The farmhouse was as white as a dove, had a straw roof and red doors which contrasted with the whiteness of the walls. Bougainvilleas that surrounded the house showed their beautiful colors.

Not too far away there was a rainforest with very big trees. I liked to walk through a path that joined the house with the rainforest. It wound over and over again, similar to a snake. I wanted to feel the humid leaves under my feet and to smell the herbs. I always had a book with me and loved to read under the tree's shadow. I enjoyed my time reading and dreaming. A stream ran through the forest and its sound lulled me.

One day I was sleeping while I was reading a book. I felt that somebody was looking at me. I woke up and I saw a strange creature. He was tender, short, young, blue, thin, and delicate. He had blue eyes without eyelashes. His voice was like music, but I could understand everything. He told me about a far away world where the trees had different colors that looked like a pallet of an artist and the flowers smelled of special perfumes that nobody might imagine. The water was transparent and one could touch the fishes with their hands. The air was pure and clean.

The most important characteristic of that place was that people lived in peace and helped each other. The food was healthy and no diseases hurt the population. Old age came slowly and the old people had a special relation with the young people. The grandfathers shared their time with their grandsons. They taught them respect and love for others. The color of the skin or eyes did not matter in this world. They were no religions; they were spiritual people.

While the blue man was talking to me, I was thinking, “I like that world” and I said to him, “I would like to go with you”. “It is ok, but hurry; my time is finished.” he said. So, I stood up and suddenly woke up. Had all of this been a dream? However, I could smell in the air the blue man’s perfume, and the sound of silence was invading my senses.

In different times of my life I felt the blue man extended his hand to me saying: “Come with me.” I still dream of that kind of world because that is the world I want to live in.

By: Raul Romero

*Raul Romero was born in Colombia. He is 60 years old. He had to leave his native country because of the violence there. He arrived to the United States without any knowledge of English language. He is very grateful to Adult Literacy League for the help provided in improving his English skills.*

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### **The Election**

Voting in November is interesting because there’s a woman, a black man, and an old man. There are two democrats and one republican in the lead. Their names are John McCain, Hillary Clinton and Barak Obama.

McCain is a senator from Arizona. John McCain is Republican. The Governor of Florida is campaigning for him. McCain is the oldest candidate. He says taxes will go down if he is elected.

Clinton’s husband was President. He and his daughter are helping his wife’s campaign. Hillary Clinton is a senator from New York. Bill Clinton had an affair with another woman. Hillary was strong about it. Hillary Clinton says everyone will have medical care if she is elected.

Barak Obama is a Senator from Illinois. His father is from Kenya. He has a wife and two kids. He says he's going to lower taxes and help everyone get medical care. He is going to stop the war in Iraq.

Many stars were listening to the candidates, and they have helped campaign. Sylvester Stallone supports John McCain. America Ferrara from "Ugly Betty" and Cher support Hillary Clinton. Oprah Winfrey supports Barak Obama.

I hope everyone votes on November 4.

By Kelly Ropel

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### **The Beliefs and Thoughts of My Ancestors**

The place where I grew up was a beautiful and peaceful community where you could see the mountains and hear the lovely whistle of all kind of birds. Each day began when the dawn came up with the last squeak of the rooster. There were no appliances and only a few people had a radio or clock. Since watches and clocks were not common, people used different ideas to figure out the time.

My family used a beautiful animal called the rooster as a morning clock. At 12 o'clock, the rooster crowed once. We called this "el canto del gallo de media noche," the song of the rooster of midnight. After this, it crowed every hour until six o'clock. My mother and father said that not all roosters were a good alarm cock, since most crow first at 3 o'clock. To select a good rooster alarm clock, we followed the beliefs and thoughts of our ancestors. First, they said it was important to have a rooster who woke up early, exercised, and kept himself in a good, healthy way. They also said it must be handsome. I am not sure how these factors let you know

that the rooster will crow at 12 o'clock and then crow again every hour until 6 o'clock, but this is what they said.

In this lovely town, activities used to start early. The women woke up at four o'clock and began to prepare the firewood for cooking, make coffee, and grind corn for tortillas. Tortillas were one of the most important foods in this wonderful place called Puerto de Xilocoatitla, Municipio de Tlahuiltepa, in Hidalgo, Mexico.

The men also woke up early. They helped carry firewood and water, and began to prepare the equipment needed for work in the field. By six o'clock, the men left the house to work. After that, no one worried about the time because around eight o'clock, the teacher of the town would turn on his radio. At 8:15, he rang a bell and kept ringing it every fifteen minutes until 8:45. Then people knew it was time to send their children to school. After the children went to school, the women prepared food for their husbands. At noon, they took the food to the men in the field. To figure out what time it was, they watched the shadow of the sun on their body. When their shadow was on one side of them, they knew it was ten o'clock. If the shadow was behind them, it was eleven o'clock, and if they stepped on their shadow, it was noon. This is how, in this quiet and peaceful place, people figured out what time it was without watches or clocks.

Just like other places, the town changed and the people now have watches, radios, and even televisions. The people can still hear the rooster crowing and see their shadow, but now, when they wonder what time it is, they just look down at their watch.

By Fernando Salvador

*Fernando is a student in the ESOL program at Literacy Volunteers of Leon County. He has been a student in the program since 2006 and enjoys working with his tutor, Emily.*

### **Why I am Studying English**

I am attending class at Okaloosa Walton College to study English. Since I am from Colombia, I need to practice English. If I improve my conversation, then I will have confidence speaking English. Learning to speak English better will help my job. When I improve my English, I will be able to write and communicate better.

My conversation skills need to improve. I need to try to speak clearly because sometimes I need to call the appointment center, and they do not understand anything I say. When I try to explain, it is a problem for me. Another reason is my son. When he is at school, and I need to speak with his teacher, sometimes she does not understand me.

I want to find a job, so I need to speak English better. I need to change my routine days and try to get a job. A job is important because you have your own money. With a job it is possible to have more opportunities to grow in life.

When my English is stronger, I will be able to write so I can be understood. It is important for me to try to write better so I can express everything. It is important because I can help my son with his homework, and I can plan my project in the future of trying to take other levels of education.

Studying English at OWC will improve my life. It is a great opportunity to have new experiences with my partners in the class. An opportunity to realize my dreams: to write, read and speak clearly without being afraid. It is important to me to try to help my son in different situations because that is better for me.

By Adriana Sanfeliz

*My name is Adriana Sanfeliz, I am married, and I have a 24 year old daughter and a six year old son. I am from Colombia. I take an ESOL class at OWC in Ft. Walton Beach. My teacher is Mary Ann Adams. My goal in the future is to try to find a job and to change the level of my English.*

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### **Me and My Family**

The person I am now is not the person who I was two years ago. Two years ago I was pregnant with my fourth child; I was not in school trying to get my education. I was living with my boyfriend's family. Now I am not pregnant, I am in school and I am living in my own apartment.

Two years ago there were a lot of things that were wrong and right with my life. One reason is that I got pregnant with my fourth child. No, I was not too happy, but I got over it and moved on and now I am not pregnant.

The second thing is that I was not in school trying to get my education. I was just doing nothing with myself. Now I am in school and I have taken the GED test and passed 3 parts, which I am very proud of.

The third thing is, my two children and I were living with my boyfriend's family which I didn't like very much. Now things have changed for the better for me and my family. I have my own apartment where we live in peace and we are enjoying our new home.

Some people seem to stay in the past, but I try not to. All these things; being pregnant, living with others, and not going to school has very much opened my eyes to reality. I am going to keep taking the GED until I pass all the subjects to earn my High School

Diploma. I look forward to what the future holds for me and my children.

By Klaihai Simmons

*Klaihai is a mother of three girls: Kadeyshia, Kenyonna, Shaniya. She is a student here in Columbia county Adult Education. As a mom going back to school, she has realized how important it is to get her education. Her children in school are watching her do the best she can, so in turn they are doing the best they can. Klaihai says that her children have a positive role model through her and that her children enjoy getting up and going to school. Her oldest daughter is an honor roll student, she is very proud of that.*

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### **My Life and Goals**

My name is Antonio D. Simpkins, and this is my story. I was born at Bay Front Hospital on April 14, 1987, so my sign of the zodiac is Aries. When I was first born I didn't know anyone at the time but my mother and then my dad. They did not stay together, so I had to get to know my dad later in life.

My life is totally different from when I was a baby wearing my favorite color which is blue. I had a seizure so the doctors had to run tests on me. I was about three months, old with tubes in me. My mother was worried sick about her first born baby boy. I don't think they ever figured out why I had a seizure, but I have never had one again. The doctors did find a tumor on the back of my head. They told my mother it is not cancerous or contagious. It is just troublesome.

When I turned five years old, I started kindergarten. It was 1993, and I was so very happy about going to school. For a couple of years I didn't want to go to school at all, because I was not with my mom. I would cry, until I found some little friends at Azalea

Elementary, then I started to have fun. I learned that friends can make a difference in life.

Middle school was different. It was so hard for me. My grades went down. I was really struggling. My work kept getting even harder. Then I met a girl named Monica. She became the best part of middle school. We dated for about three months, but her family moved away. I was very sad about losing my first love. My life went down even more because kids started to pick on me about the bump on my head. I felt very self-conscious, so I began to wear a do-rag because of it. I have been wearing this “hat” ever since.

I am in an adult school now, and I really love it. I finally believe I can reach my goals. I would like to continue my writing. I have one full notebook of poems. If I don't become a professional writer, I can be a free lance writer. Other goals I might consider are designing clothing, or having my own corporation as a massage therapist. I'm a very good listener, so maybe I could be a counselor. I had a rocky beginning, but now I'm moving forward and using my talents. My mother and dad are very proud of the man I am becoming. I'm not really bragging, but I am very proud of myself too.

These are the words I live by, “Do not ever give up on what you want to achieve in life no matter what anyone thinks about it. Most importantly love yourself.”

By Antonio Simpkins

*Antonio is an older brother of six children with three half siblings, two fathers and a mother. His goals in life are to be successful with his goals and complete them. His family and friends believe that he can achieve and he thinks so to. People might try to say bad things about him but he doesn't let it keep him down at all. He is 20 years of age and not giving up yet, and you know why, that is because he*

*believes in everything he does. "God does too." Antonio is a student at Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg.*

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### **Untitled**

Is it the fortune of fame that makes us unable to tame?  
We struggle to survive, then it becomes a habit, which becomes  
our high.

Only to say "This is never enough", then we wonder why we  
always had it rough.

I'm only playing the hand that was dealt...growing up no one  
seemed to care how I felt.

Waiting to shine, learning to grind. Now I'm stuck doing time.

Contemplating a better way, for God plans our everyday.

I won't complain things always change, by the grace of God is  
always good, things without him are never understood.

I strive for what the day brings, I keep my peace and hold my  
feelings least to being that beast.

He sits high and looks low. He knows what's best for show.

We look at what's in vision but never the unseen. It's great to stay  
focused and keep on our mind the positive things.

By Monic Simmons

*I love writing poetry because it gives me a way to express myself.  
KL I love my best friend, my mom, my aunt and Jesus. I love and  
respect myself and my dignity. MS Teacher: Chaundra Whitehead  
Gadsden Correctional Facility ABE II*

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### **Tracey's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

I have a dream that one day I may not be judged by my past  
offenses and indiscretions. I will be judged by what I am doing

today, like getting an education, becoming a productive member of society by giving back, being able to help those who are less inclined to help themselves; the elderly, our children, being part of the solution instead of continuing to be apart of the problem. This is my dream.

By Tracy Simmons

*I am from Pensacola, FL. I have always wanted to be a motivational speaker, writer, and counselor. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE II.*

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### **From Rags to Richness**

I was born in Jefferson, South Carolina on May 29, 1942, in the family of Lansy and Gertrude Smith. I was one of 11 boys and 7 girls. I grew up on a sharecropping farm picking cotton and working with tobacco. Most of my time as a young child was spent working in the field; therefore, I was unable to go to school on a regular basis.

In the year of 1958 at the age of 16, I left South Carolina to relocate to Oswego, New York, where I worked on a lettuce farm for about three months. Then I caught a bus to New York City where I lived with my sister until I got my first job. I was working as a porter in a bakery and restaurant until 1961. I got another job working as a baker's helper until 1964. Then I got my first baking job. Then in 1966 I got married to Estella and we had two children Kian and Kendall Smith. In 1998 I opened my own bakery shop Le Cake, Inc. with a partner until I sold the business in 2001.

Then in 2005 I moved to Jacksonville, Florida to be close to my daughter. Then in 2006 I enrolled in the school of Learn to Read where I am now a student. I go to class and have an individual tutor. I am on the Board of Directors. I attend committee

meetings, student orientations and fundraiser events. I became a student ambassador so that I could speak to students to encourage them. I am rich in wisdom, knowledge, and understanding.

By Douglas Smith

*Douglas Smith is an ABE student at Learn to Read in Jacksonville. He attends grammar class twice a week, meets with his individual tutor Mary Thompson once a week and is involved in awareness of adult literacy in Jacksonville. He is a student ambassador and serves on the Learn to Read's Board of Directors.*

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### **Thoughts of a Displaced Parrot**

Here she comes, the woman who ruined my life. I recall the first time I saw her. There I was content in my cage located in the corner of The Exotic Pet Shop. I was so engrossed pecking away at a seed biscuit, while keeping a eye on those foolish ferrets nearby, I almost didn't hear that woman sneak up on me. With an awful yowl she shrieked, "Oh my, an African Gray Parrot, how sweet!" I thought sister, there's nothing sweet about me. Move along now. I tried to ignore her as she continued to make a fuss. Then she comes up with a hand full of sunflower seeds to entice me. Always a sucker for a good seed, I gladly complied.

Mistake! I'm now sitting in a swanky designer cage smack dab in the center of the woman's den. But, don't worry I have plans to get even with her for disrupting my life style. I'm going to make it my business to scare the daylights out of that woman. For instance, yesterday I gave her a good scare when she came to my cage with a fancy new bird toy. She hung the toy cautiously as she cooed and chattered at me in her patronizing voice. "Here Alley, look what mama got for you." I thought, Alley my tail-feathers, and sister you ain't my mama. I sure wish she'd quit calling me Alley. OOP! I'm a parrot not cave man for tree's sake. Ha! Just

as she was removing her hand, I flung myself at her and let out an ear-piercing squawk. Lost a feather or two doing that but I'll be all right, scared her good though.

Oh, here comes the human man. Well at least I can tolerate him. Maybe because I sense he's not intimidated by my shenanigans. Besides, he brings me out the cage and sets me on a perch where I can explore and look around. Here I sit looking around. I don't see exotic cats like at the pet shop, so I suppose I'm safe. I'll just sit here, act like I'm bored. Here comes that woman approaching. What's that in her hand? A rye cracker? Only my favorite, but I'll act nonchalant. Well, maybe I'll wait till later to get even. I want her to realize who is really in charge around here and that the bird is the word.

Wow! I'm really tired. That was great getting out of the cage for awhile. Can you believe that here she is again? What's with her anyway? Covering my cage with a huge towel she whispers, "Goodnight Alley OOP." Not wanting her encouragement I make a few grunting noises. Well, maybe I'll get even tomorrow. Hmmm, wonder if that woman has anymore of those rye crackers. Squawk!

By Lynn Smith

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### **A Thug's Life**

If we die today we'll never see tomorrow and if tomorrow was today would we be remembered? For how we lived yesterday will be forever cherished in a special way. Will people remember us for what we did or forever hate us for what we did? Oh God, a thug what we scream out; living the street life never thinking about God until we see the jail house, hoping and praying that he help bail us out, 'cause we are in hell now, never thinking about what we did bad or asking forgiveness. The devil got our soul like a bad

sickness and we blame God for the world being so cold hearted and vicious when it's our fault for making it all wicked.

Making money in a good, way loving the life of a dope, boy, but they are killing our people, the overdose off of coke. Most of us grow up without a father or a mother so we're teaching this so called thug life to our little brother instead of sending him to school so he can learn something better. And when our people are dead and gone, we ask God "Why?", when we know the answer to the question is that's just the way of life.

We go to church and were reading out of the bible but there's no one in the world living by the bible. That's why we all feel pain and struggle for survival. We go through trials and tribulations spoken of in Revelations. The Holy Bible is the world's best education, but we all fail the test at making this a better nation. Dear God, take me away from the sick where people die and bullets fly. I'm tired of living a thug life. I hope I can make change, but most of my people tell me the world would stay the same. That's why I'm trying to make change happen.

I maintain and I pray for tomorrow before today so that tomorrow is a better day and hopefully the world would turn in a better way. I pray for the ones in the penitentiary or that committed suicide that you rebirth them and give them life. If I had to choose between life and death, I choose life until there's death until there's nothing left. The world's crazy, we don't understand. That's why a thug cries, so God, please help us understand.

By Michael Smith

*Michael is 19 and currently enrolled in Columbia County's GED Program. Once he earns his GED, he plans to attend college. He is very involved in his community and church and serves as a positive role model for students.*

## **Conscience**

The smile on your face...gone  
The laughter in your heart...gone  
Everything that matters...gone  
You're left heartbroken and hurt  
To the point you had to desert...me,  
You had to be set free  
Catering to your every need  
You're left confused, lost, and out of control,  
You're no longer whole.  
You're beaten down and damaged,  
You're left with a challenge  
A thief had stolen everything from you,  
You didn't think you would make it through...this one  
You forgot how to have real, pure fun  
In the end... You didn't know where to begin  
You couldn't stand yourself,  
You didn't care about your own health.  
Just where you could get your next fix,  
Not realizing just how sick and didn't believe you had any conflict.  
See it's what they call a bad habit and it's real hard to break,  
But you better ... for your own sake.  
Think about it before it's too late and all you have left is hate.  
Is this how you want to live your life, full of anger and strife?  
Take a minute and reflect on how things have been.  
Do you want to go through all of that again?  
See, I'm your friend and they call me "Conscience",  
I'm here for your own benevolence... in order to keep your true  
and sincere existence.  
You also have to keep your distance...from the bad habits, write  
this experience in the tablet in your heart and make your brand new  
start.  
Take this message and turn the page...

And start all over again

By Audrey Soles

*I'm young, fun, and carefree. I love to write poetry and take photography.*

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### **My Next Summer Vacation**

Some people prefer to spend money on jewelries, expensive restaurants, clothes, and cars but I prefer to spend money on traveling. I think that when I travel, I am opened to learn about different cultures, traditions, and geography. It's very interesting to meet people with different ideas and lifestyles. It is amazing how much we can learn about them.

I am thinking about my next summer vacation. Where can I go? There will be two other people traveling with me, my husband and my baby. It is not easy to travel with a baby but it is not impossible. He has proven to be a good traveler. He likes to visit new places and he likes to see new faces, too. Twice, we were out of United States with our baby and he was great! We took a long trip to Argentina. We flew from Miami and caught a connection in Bolivia. It took us a sum of twenty hours. After that we went to visit Cancun in Mexico. That was a short flight. We had a great time when we travel with the baby.

I am thinking about visiting Peru this summer. Peru is located in South America. The capital of Peru is Lima. We would like to visit Machu Picchu and the Titicaca Lake. The idea for this trip is to take a good close look at the cultural and archeological make-up of the country.

Machu Picchu has an amazing Incas' ruins. Nobody knows how the builders and designer managed to transport the huge

blocks to the top of the mountain for the construction in the city. Machu Picchu is located 2,300 meters above sea level (7,546 ft) and is 70 miles from Cuzco. It is divided into two large sectors – one the agricultural sector and the other the urban. The sanctuary is an urban citadel made up of palace and temples. The more luxurious and spectacular are the mausoleums carved in the rock. The buildings are connected by a system of narrow lanes or paths which cross the terraces that follow a flat longitudinal axis. Since 1982 Machu Picchu has been declared a “Historical Sanctuary” by UNESCO because of its archeological importance.

In South America the winter months are from June until August. The Titicaca Lake is ideal for lovers of ecological tourism and those who want to visit the life of civilizations. This lake is the highest navigable lake in the world. It is 3,812 meters above sea level. Peru splits the lake with Bolivia and the total area is 8,300 square kilometers.

I am hoping to go there. My plan is that we would fly from Miami to Lima and stay there for two or three days. Then we would take a flight from Lima to Cuzco for an overnight stop. The next day we would take a train to Machu Picchu. We would have to come back to Cuzco if we want to go to the Titicaca Lake. We could take a bus or another plane. The idea is to spend at least two weeks in Peru visiting Lima, Cuzco, Machu Picchu and the Titicaca Lake. I am thrilled!

By Catalina Minnig Solomon

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### **The American Dream Becomes a Reality**

After being married for 18 months and with one child, my husband and I decided to come to live in the United States. We were looking for a better life for the family we had already started in our homeland, Ecuador. As it was very difficult to come all at

once and because I was a professional, we decided that I should come first as a permanent resident. My husband and son had to stay in Ecuador until I could ask for them to come as permanent residents. After a long time of praying, thinking and talking, we decided to do it. It was a very hard decision for us.

It was a very long and sad trip. A very sweet lady, who had been my teacher in Ecuador, and to whom we will be eternally grateful, was waiting for me when I arrived at JFK airport in New York. She generously took me to her house and offered all the help I needed. With her, and her niece's help, I soon started to feel as if I was with family again. After a week, I started to work in a factory, painting plaques for airplanes and cars. I also started going to school to learn English and was blessed with an ESL program that helped me make progress in this great country.

After 6 months of hard work, the day finally came when my husband and son arrived and we were together again. My husband had the same kind of help that I had had from my friends and her family. When my husband started to work, I stayed at home, taking care of our son. Soon, we were able to rent our own apartment. The next year, we had another son and then we brought my mother from Ecuador to help us take care of the children so I could go back to work.

Two years later, we had another child; this time a girl. Soon after that, we bought our own house. When the children went to school, I had to help them to do their homework which forced me to learn more of the language of the country that was now our country. At the same time as I was helping my kids with their homework, I was also learning what they were learning in school. I also watched the English channels on TV, listened to English programs on the radio and read English newspapers, although I didn't understand everything.

We lived in New York for a time, before we came to live in Jacksonville, a city we liked very much. It was not as easy as it seems. It was very hard to start a new life where everything was so different. That the United States is a land of opportunities is very true, but one has to work very hard and be wise to take advantage of them. We are grateful to this generous country. We consider it as ours and that is why we became American citizens. We believe that everyone who comes here and works hard can honestly make the American dream a reality as we did.

By Magdalena Soria

*Magdalena is an Advanced Writing student of Dr. Virginia Hash, and is working hard to perfect her writing skills. Her program of study is offered by the Clay County Literacy Coalitioon in Orange Park.*

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### **Studying English**

I have many reasons to study English. I want to communicate much better with people around me. I need to continue my studying at OWC because I want to get a good job. I need to speak English more correctly. I need to practice writing in English. In my country Latvia, I was working as a lab tech. I want to work in medicine in the United States too. I need to study very hard in my college class.

Speaking English is difficult for me. Sometimes people cannot understand me: in the store, in the restaurant, or in the office. When I do not agree with my husband, I cannot explain to him **why I am right!**

Writing is more difficult for me than reading English. English grammar is a complicated thing. I need to practice writing in English at a higher level.

My purposes for studying English are to get a good job, to learn to speak more clearly, and to write better. I live in the United States, and I want to feel more comfortable communicating with people. I hope they will be more comfortable speaking with me, too.

By Nina Spencer

*My name is Nina Spencer. I am originally from Latvia. I am married and have a daughter and two grandchildren. I study English at OWC in Fort Walton Beach. My teacher is Mary Ann Adams.*

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### **The Effects of Losses**

My family has affected me a lot. Growing up really not knowing my mom or siblings has made it hard for me to have feelings for them. Not being able to go to family events, or celebrate holidays has made me feel lonely and left out at times. One positive thing about growing up in foster care it has made me tougher and resilient person.

The loss of not having a family has made me feel left out. I have no one to confide in or to help me out when I'm in need. A couple years ago my oldest brother Travis was gunned down and killed. After this event occurred I couldn't show no reaction, no affections towards him, because I really never had a chance to get to know him. Much of our childhood was spent in different foster homes.

Another way my family has deeply affected me is that I don't have an extended family to share and enjoy the holidays with. Not being able to have someone who is close and special to celebrate holidays with is very emotional. Seeing other people getting

together with their love ones during the holidays can get very sentimental.

Being raised in foster care has really taught me to be a strong minded and resilient individual. Even though I didn't have a family of my own there were other families who allowed me to enjoy the holidays with theirs. This gave me an opportunity to experience what having a family is like. In my experience with family there have been losses and gains. Not always, having a family is not a bad thing, because you will always find other family who doesn't mind sharing their family with you. But there are times it gets very depressing not being able to rejoice with loves ones. I know how to spell my name.

By Jamie Stewart

*Jamie is a 19 year old full time student who attends the GED program at Lively Technical Center in Tallahassee, Florida. She plans to get her GED in order to study criminal justice at Tallahassee Community College.*

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### **A Long Wait**

I am very happy to take a pen and write a letter personally and socially. I have been in Florida for two and a half years. I am married but my husband doesn't live here. When I came to Florida I didn't speak English, just a few words. I enrolled in school at MID FLORIDA TECH.

I went to school from 7:45 to 10:45. I tried to go to school every day without missing, but sometimes, the bus came late then my teacher wouldn't accept me being late. I explained to her what's going on. I didn't have a car and I lived far from the school.

After that, I learned a lot of things from school. Then I went to some friends, who have lived a long time in the United States. I asked them about some information on how I can apply the paper work for my husband's immigration into the US.

I filled out all papers for him to get a Green Card, and then I spent \$185 Fees. After that, I received a letter from immigration. They said "your husband will wait 999 days" almost three years. This duration will soon finish but I searched online in the website of the immigration. I found two years ago and I checked his case. You know what! Immigration is now reviewing January 2005 cases.

I always returned to follow his case every day online. They were in same month and year 2005 so they didn't have any information about my husband`s case.

They said when your husband finishes his duration, you can mail us. Actually, I often asked myself the same question. Why is immigration law into America so difficult?

I need help or an answer for my question. I hear around me that there were a lot of people waiting five years to get a citizenship. That's terrible and not fair. They have to review the duration between two married people. Some of them can't wait five years. They can look for another way or go to divorcée.

Finally, I hope that immigration will hear my case soon.  
Thank you

By Anonymous

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### **Sarah and Caleb's Story**

There once was a little girl who loved babies. She begged and begged her mom to have just one more baby. Finally, when the little girl named Sarah was thirteen years old, her dream came true.

It was the middle of October when Sarah's mom came and got her from her grandparent's house where she had spent her Sunday. It was late in the afternoon when Sarah's mom pulled up and got out of the car. She told Sarah's grandparents and Sarah to come outside. Sarah and her grandparents went outside and then Sarah's mother said, "I'm pregnant!" Sarah's grandmother shouted for joy and Sarah was speechless. But inside, Sarah was filled with happiness and joy.

Before Sarah knew it, it was June 19<sup>th</sup>, 2002. Sarah's ten pound baby brother was born. Sarah waited and waited to see her brother. Around three hours later, she was able to see their little bundle of joy. Sarah asked her mom and dad what his name was going to be. They said, "Caleb." They were not so sure about the middle name though. So, Sarah said, "What about the name Elijah?" They decided, "Yes." So, Caleb was named Caleb Elijah.

Little Caleb grew and grew. He is now five years old. Sarah still loves to take care of him. Sarah baby-sits him so her parents can go out on dates. She will play with him any time of the day. Sarah is proud that her mother had another baby boy.

Sarah is so thankful that her mom allowed her dream to come true. Caleb has been a bundle of joy and means so much to Sarah and her family. Caleb is a true blessing wherever he goes.

By Sarah Summerlin

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## **Heart's Hope**

Nina

No one can possess my heart of the times we've shared, and the passionate love.

I have a remarkable longing for you, "Oh God!"

Why must one be parted from one who so loves you and yet my life in here is now a severed life.

So, thinking of your love makes me the happiest man alive in our moments.

By Larry Silvester

*Silvester left formal Education is the 8th grade. He was the victim of a violent crime and was shot in the head. He is 80% deaf from birth. Silvester has overcome these obstacles and has been making strides toward his GED. Learning is difficult but remains Silvester's primary goal.*

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## **You Can Travel But There's No Place Like Home**

When I was born in the state of Virginia, my eyes were open. When I became two-years-old, my mother died. Then my father, my sister, and I left and came to Florida. He took care of me and my sister until he married again.

As I got older, I liked school but I had a hard time in school learning. I moved on through but I still didn't understand. I kept on trying, so I made to the 12<sup>th</sup> grade. I decided to stop before graduating from school.

A few years later, I worked at Jax Shipyards as a mechanic helper. One night at work, I had my first voyage at sea. We were at work when I was at the bottom of the ship. I had to go to the restroom so my supervisor told me to go ahead. I came up from the restroom but we had left the yard, about 10 miles out to sea. That's when I fell in love with the sea.

I went to seaman school. I trained for six months. When I finished seaman school, they put me on my first flight going to Japan. This was my first time on an airplane. It was a long flight to Japan and it was the first time I was out of the country. This is a beautiful country.

Then I caught a ship out of Japan going to Indonesia. We spent about two weeks at sea. The sea is so beautiful—big and blue all around you. We arrived in Indonesia going to the jungle where we picked up gas five miles off the equator. I saw a Kimono dragon when I was playing golf. We drove to the sandtrap and it came out and we ran!

I saw the Panama Canal where ships go from the Pacific to the Gulf. They go through the locks from one side to the other. I have seen the Egyptian pyramids. It still looks the same as it did centuries ago.

I have seen this wonderful, beautiful world. My last voyage was to Australia down under. That was the last time I was at sea. I'm happy to be home. Like they say, "There's no place like home."

By Aaron Thaxton

*Aaron Thaxton is an ABE student at Learn to Read in Jacksonville. He attends grammar class twice a week. In his spare time, Aaron likes to fix things because it gives him peace of mind.*

## **The Effect My Dad Had on Me**

My dad influenced my life by not being there for me. I learned to do things for my kids from what I needed as a child but didn't get. I learned strength, independence and motivation because he wasn't there. My mom and he say he is my dad, but to me he was just a man.

As a man, my dad wasn't there to play with me as a child needed. When I played sports, my dad wasn't there to say, "You still did good." By not being there for me, my dad taught me a valuable lesson: to be there for my kids. We're there at every game for our kids and we take them out to eat whether they lose or win, and we give them a pat on the back.

In life, in order to go anywhere, you have to have respect for yourself and others. My dad didn't teach me right from wrong, or to respect others. When I disrespected my mother, he wasn't there to tell me that was wrong. When I did the same thing to older people, he didn't discipline me. When I started to do the right thing, he still wasn't there to tell me that was the right thing. I learned from my dad that I needed to teach respect to my kids, because he didn't teach me.

Most important, my dad wasn't there to give that fatherly love. And when the kids were picking on me, he wasn't there to run to so I could talk to him and he could make me feel good again. From my dad not being there, I learned to love others, and mostly to love my kids and show so much affection to them. As a child growing into a man I learned so much about what a child needs to be a happy child. Children need love, affection and play time with their dad. They also need that protective feeling from him and that overall feeling that they know he loves them.

By Robin Thomas

*Robin Thomas is a young black man from Quincy, Florida. He has a lovely family and is especially dedicated to his kids. He is currently studying for his GED and hopes to be successful so his kids will be proud of their dad. He would like to thank his teachers for carrying him along the way - Ms. Fowler, Ms. Anne and Ms. George.*

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### **If I Were President**

Everyone's dream is to be a leader, helping their society in something. But where I come from, the word "power" is a strong disease, wonderful like oxygen.

For the Haitians there's only one way that can make you a millionaire, to be President. Once they get their goal, you always see the same thing, the poor became poorer because they will never be accepted even if they have what it takes, and the rich became richer because tax is becoming the worst enemy.

In Haiti we are divided by some illogical word-people who live in the downtown are the poor ones and those who live uptown, the colored ones who think they're Haitians without power and white with it.

If I were president, I would like to be the voice of those people who work hard and never get paid, or who can't attend certain school or place because of discrimination and the word downtown which is the place where they live. I would stop making good speeches and start doing actions and say to those people that Haiti is dying and Haiti doesn't have a color.

By Francia Toussaint

*My name is Francia Toussaint, I'm single with no child. I moved to Naples and trying hard things and getting ready to help my country and others. Taking the GED class.*

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### **My Dream**

When I was a child, I liked astronomy and I dreamed of being an astronomer. At that time, I used to stand outside to see the stars in the sky on every clear night. It was very interesting to me, so I didn't know that Vesper and Daystar is the same star. It only appears differently when it is in different positions. So time went on. I grew up and became a reporter. I had many things to do for busy days and I really forgot about my childhood dream.

After coming to the USA, I had many things to do for my family. I rarely had free time to think about the past. So one day, when my husband and my daughter went to his teacher's house to enjoy an American party, I stayed at home. I turned on the TV. I heard someone on a Vietnam program said that the Vietnamese in Vietnam are poor and ignorant. I thought this was funny. I didn't know why Vietnamese who live in the U.S.A. have a bad impression of their homeland.

I went outside to look at the sky. Looking in the sky I saw Vesper again. At that time it was Daystar in my country. I suddenly thought, "When Vesper appears in US, Daystar will rise in Vietnam." What is the different between them? It is like American-Vietnamese and Vietnamese. I remembered my teacher said, "The war is over. Now we breathe and share the same air and water. That is why we have to know how to love and do something better for each other". And here is my husband's teacher saying, "Time and tide wait for no one. So everyone has to learn to improve his or her knowledge". And I asked myself, "What is the better way to follow, the speaker on TV, my teacher or my husband's teacher?"

By Khuong Tran

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### **The Happiest Day of My Life**

The birth of my daughter, Payton Kendall, was the happiest day of my life. For many years I dreamed of becoming a mother. The day of Payton's birth we both almost died; however, what could have been a tragedy turned into the most wonderful miracle a woman can experience. I was given a precious gift, and that was my beautiful daughter, Payton.

My journey to become a mother began when I was nineteen years old. My husband and I wanted a child more than anything. After five years of anticipation, I discovered that I was pregnant. The happiness was short lived, because I lost my precious baby. This was such a sad time for me. More than anything, I wanted to become a mother.

I had almost given up my dream of becoming a mother. Five years had gone by, and I have gone through many changes. One day I was feeling really ill, so I went to the doctor, for what I thought was an infection. To my surprise I was pregnant! It was a big shock, but I was so happy, and scared at the same time. My fear was that I would lose this child, as I did before.

I had a very difficult pregnancy. I have Lupus, which just added to my concerns. Due to all of my health problems, the doctors decided to induce my labor a month early, which in turn, caused my kidneys and liver to shut down. Due to all of the medicine I was given, my daughter almost died. She had breathing problems and many other health issues.

Even though my journey to become a mother was the most difficult thing I have endured, it is also the happiest event in my

life. Every time I look at my beautiful daughter, I realize what a miracle she is. Every birthday brings back the memory of her birth. I will always remember my daughter's birth as the happiest day of my life.

By Donna Turner

*Donna is 32 years old and is the mother of one beautiful little girl. It was Donna's desire to finish her education, so that she could make a better life for her and her daughter.*

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### **A New Life**

I came here 27 months ago from Albania. At first I was afraid to live in this country so far from my family, but thank God they came here one year ago. Now we are together and life has changed so much for us.

My oldest daughter Mirena has a seven month baby girl named Tessa. I love spending time with her. My younger daughter Arjola is pregnant and we are waiting for a new baby to come into our lives.

First I tried hard to learn English, and then found the school, Adult Literacy League ESL program that my daughter found online.

The Literacy Program has special people working for them. They opened many doors for me. I can do everything for myself now. I learned to listen to American music, watch American TV, go to the bank, find a job, pay my bills, and go to the doctor. These things were difficult for me because my English was zero when I came here.

My teacher Vince Scalise never lost patience with me. He helped me with my driver's license test and State Day Care test. I never imagined that one day I would drive or do things that I had never done before. In my country very few people own cars; I have one now. He sends lessons online to me and spends time explaining things when I'm confused.

It is amazing how much has happened since I have been here. I am working hard and most enjoy spending time with my family.

By Rexhina Umizaj

*Rexhina, pronounced Regina in English, is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. She attends ESOL classes there and her teacher is Vince Scalise.*

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### **A Good Day**

I remember a good day: Graduation Day. It was August 2001. It was a good day for me because I had overcome so many difficulties. I felt very happy, the ceremony was beautiful, the Philharmonic Orchestra from Neiva was wonderful! After the ceremony, I went to the discotheque to have a fun time because my father made me feel bad. Why? Because he didn't want me to study and he said some rude words to me. I don't know why I have so many difficulties in my life. I think it is because I need to be stronger!

Another big memory is the week during my crossing to the U.S. This began on Tuesday, August 24, 2004 and ended on Tuesday, August 31, 2004. At first, to leave my country was very hard, it was like pulling out my heart, it was to leave my life, my family, my friends, my work, my career, everything. But I knew I would begin a new life with my husband.

I left my country on August 24, 2004 and arrived in Mexico City. Then I traveled to Cancun the same day. I met with my father-in-law in Mexico City and then we traveled to Cancun together. We stayed at a hotel. Then, the next day (Wednesday) we traveled back to Mexico City. Then we took a bus to travel to Nuevo Laredo. The trip was for 20 hours and was very long for me because we were stopped by the police and they ordered the passengers (except for me) to get off the bus. I was surprised because they were passing near me and they didn't see me. I think my angel was with me because if the police had seen me, maybe I couldn't have continued the trip.

When we began the trip, we were about 40 people and we arrived at New Laredo with only 7 people because the police didn't permit the other people to continue the trip - maybe because the police thought that they desired to cross to the U.S. We arrived at New Laredo on Thursday August 26, 2004 and we were waiting for the people in charge (the Coyotes) to cross with me to the U.S. The wait was for another 24 hours. Then, on Friday, the Coyote came for me and I continued my trip with him. I went with him to the farm of an old man and we needed to wait between cows, bulls and horses in a pasture, like a desert, full of manure.

We were waiting maybe for two or three hours until the other persons arrived to complete the group to cross the border. Then we were walking through the desert maybe for two hours. The day was very sunny. Then we arrived at a river and we were to hide behind some trees, waiting for immigration to pass so we could cross the river and pass the border and then: run as fast as you can! And then, to take a van that was waiting for us.

I swam and ran as fast as I could. Then we arrived at the home of the American (Coyote, too) and we waited for some people. A couple picked me up and I hid under suitcases and some blankets to pass the stop of the Immigration Police. Then, I traveled for maybe 8 more hours more to arrive in Dallas. In short, I met with

my husband that Sunday at 4:30 a.m. to finish my trip with him. We still needed to travel for a long time - until we arrived in Orlando, Fl. We arrived Tuesday at midday. It was a long trip for me.

By Anonymous

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### **Honduras**

Honduras is the land of peace, prosperity and beautiful beaches. Her principal exports are bananas, coffee, tobacco and wood. Hondurans eat eggs, beans, plantains, rice, and meats. And they never forget the delicious tortillas at every meal. The women love to cook and meals are a very important time to spend with your family as well as with friends and neighbors. Education is very important here and all schools, including universities are free, there are many educated and professional people because of this.

One of the biggest holidays in Honduras is "Holy Week." This Catholic tradition is very important and this a week when only fish is eaten and many people travel to the many wonderful beaches during this time.

Most people in my country own their own houses. Not everyone owns a car and you either walk or use public transportation. The buses are always full and sometimes the people look like sardines in a can.

I sometimes miss this beautiful place and the friends and family I left there. Honduras is an amazing country.

By Besy Valasquez

*Besy Valasquez is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando. She attends ESOL classes there and her teacher is Vince Scalise.*

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### **How I Learn English**

My name is Luz Angela Vasquez and I have been studying English for eight months at the Library Public Tavares. My country is Colombia. It's a land full of friendly people and workers.

Colombia has problems. There is one group called guerrilla warfare. They are a minority, but are powerful because they handle the drugs business and are terrorist. The government has some success in combating them. I hope to see my country in peace. The Colombian people deserve to live happy and be proud.

In Colombia I studied Business Administration and after I got my degree in 2000, I worked at my father's company. In 2005, we were unlucky and had some economic reverses. I made up my mind to come to this country. I am single and my all family lives in Colombia. Someday, I hope to go back to Colombia talking perfect English. I lived in West Palm Beach for two years with my uncle. There I worked in the Latin store. I was a cashier. A year ago, I moved to Tavares and I'm a housekeeper in a resort.

Tavares is small town. It's a beautiful place. The mansion where I work is rented for weddings and special parties. I began to study English in the Tavares Library eight months ago. I feel I have made a big advance at this moment. I can now watch a movie in English and I understand. I feel very well because it is very satisfactory to understand when people talk. I can write. The problem is when I have to talk. My mind is blocked. I want to say a lot, but I can say only a little bit I can read a magazine or newspaper. I am successful thanks to my teacher George Cooke. He taught me how to speak in my daily work. He taught me how to

make questions in different places, for example, in the stores, restaurants, in a doctor office, hospitals, etc.

Sincerely, the best way to learn English is study the grammar, listen to the music, and watch TV in English, read any text or book to increase your vocabulary. That is how I got to understand the "crazy English spelling system" my teacher calls it. It was very hard for me, but with more sacrifice and dedication, I have better English. I hope to speak, read, write and understand perfect English in a short time.

By Luz Angela Vasquez

*Luz Angela Vasquez has been studying English at the Tavares Public Library for the past eight months. She was born and educated in the South American country of Colombia. Luz (pronounced Loose) is delighted with the progress she has made in reading, writing, and understanding English. She is working hard to improve her English speaking ability. She has made good friends in the class for English as a Second Language, where the students help each other and work with their teacher. Luz is determined to study until her English is perfect.*

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### **Ailed's Gift to the World**

If I should give a gift to the world, that gift would be my **smile**. I am just one simple person in the whole world. My gift is not expensive; it is just one way to contribute to people's happiness. The smile is the first impression that people can see. It is a way to talk to different people and to bring a positive vibration to keep going and to enjoy the world. The holiday is when people receive all kinds of material presents, but I think, "If everyone gives some simple value, the world would be better every day".

By Ailed M. Velez

*My name is Ailed Velez. I am married with my wonderful husband Jose who is in the US Air Force. I am from Puerto Rico, and I have lived in Fort Walton Beach about a year. I am an ESOL student at Okaloosa Walton College with Mary Ann Adams. The class has being really helpful in my writing, grammar, and pronunciation. Also, I learned a lot from people who come from other countries.*

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### **My Expectations**

Before I came to the U.S, I expected to stay with my husband because after we got married, he came here. I thought that the U.S. was the best place to live and the easiest place to get a job. But that isn't true; especially when you don't speak the language. This was my biggest obstacle because I spoke Spanish and I had to attend English class. After I got a job in my field, Accounting.

Also I had my first baby. He was born with many problems and I had to quit my job because in New York the weather is very different. Every time he went to the hospital, he had to be an inpatient. For that reason, my husband and I decided to move to Orlando. The weather here is better for him. One year later, I had my second child, Kenny.

Five months after that I re-started English and computer classes at Seminole Community College, when I was in third level, I had to stop studying, because, Kenny got an ear infection and he had to have surgery.

Three years later, I had my last baby, Kent. When he was two, Kent, Kenny and me started at Grows. Grows is an institution that has different programs and helps families with English class and takes care of your children. At Grows, the children start to learn English while you learn, too.

One day we had a conference and the speaker was a person that does classes of PCT(Patient Care Technical). I was interesting in that class and I decided to start. Now I have a technical license in EKG, and Phlebotomy, and I am going complete an M.A or Medical Assistant before March 2008.

I am thankful because on November, 2007 I took my citizenship test and I have done a petition for my parents.

By Yudelkys Vilchez

*Yudelkys is a mother of three and has recently attained US Citizenship. She came to the US several years ago from the Dominican Republic.*

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### **Why I Admire My Mother**

The person I most admire is my mother. She loves her children and her family and she also made many sacrifices for her husband and her children. Many times she cried when her child was sick, and she always advised me to become a good person in the future. My mother is the only one I have.

My family was very poor; therefore, my mother had to work very hard to support us. Actually, it was a common responsibility of a good mother. I will always love my mother with all of my heart. I hope she will live for many, many more years.

I remember the loveable way my mother taught me, such as cooking food, cleaning the house and praying to our God everyday.

My mother is very special to me. I know she is very happy, because my brothers and sisters are living in the same town with her. They have been coming to visit her very often.

Unfortunately, I am not too happy myself, because I don't have the opportunity to visit my mother as often as I want. However, I talk with her every weekend.

I hope one day my family and I will be able to move to live near my mother; so I can see her whenever I want. I love my mother very much and hopefully I will be able to visit her soon.

By Thu Vu

*Thu has been a learner in the ESOL program at Literacy Volunteers of Leon County since 2005. She is originally from Vietnam. She and her husband have one daughter.*

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### **Give Thanks**

There are many things in life that I find myself thankful for, however, I am most thankful for the things that inspire me, motivate me, and keep me focused.... LIFE, LOVE, FAMILY AND CAREER.

My life, I am thankful for, because I am here and have an opportunity to live it! In my opinion, LIFE would be meaningless without the elements of love, family, and purpose. I am thankful for the sacrifice, mercy, and grace that God has extended to mankind, in order that we may have an abundant life!

Love is one of the things that I am most thankful for. Love can be most rewarding, in that it inspires me, gives life its passion, and provides grace. Foolish people sometimes abuse the gift of love, but they are of a narrow opinion of the power of this mysterious emotion called love. I sympathize with those that weakly define love, because they may only ever experience the basics of love, and love is like a deep rooted tree that looks to the sun; it cannot be

uprooted, as it continues to grow in its beauty and strength. LOVE is good!

Family is another element that I am most thankful for. Family can inspire us, provide stability, invaluable memories, and give us tender love and affection, and much laughter. I have yet to have my own family, but I have watched my sister and her family, and having a family brings her much joy. FAMILY is important!

And finally, I am thankful for my education and the opportunity for a career as a nurse. I am glad that I pushed myself to finish school through the GED program, and now I am ready to go on to the next phase, as I enter nursing school at my local community college. The thought of a CAREER is what motivates me and challenges me to expand and stretch my ideas and goal for my future.

I am truly thankful for all of these things and the part that these different elements have played in my life, and I know that they will continue to work together to bring me joy and success.....LIFE, LOVE, FAMILY, and CAREER.

By Anthony Walker

*Anthony is 20 years old and began his educational journey when he enrolled in our GED program almost three years ago. Anthony completed his GED in 2007, and will be entering nursing school in June. Anthony is a perfect example of a student who persevered, even when his studies became difficult. Anthony is now able to realize his dream of finishing his education and continuing on to reach his career goals.*

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## **My Granny's Funeral**

The most difficult thing I ever had to do was go to my Granny's funeral. It was something I wasn't ready to deal with.

First, it happened so fast. When I heard the news on Thanksgiving Day, I felt so weak. I started screaming and crying. My family was telling me to calm down and take it easy.

Secondly, we had to start making all the arrangements. I didn't feel right picking a dress that my Granny was going to wear. We had to pick the casket, where she was going to be buried, and all the flowers.

Finally, we were going to the funeral. I felt like it was my fault, but it wasn't. I walked thru the door to go in and my body felt so cold. I had to sit down and catch my breath. Just seeing her lay there was crazy and I didn't know what to do.

So, that's the most difficult thing I ever had to experience. It's a part of life and something you have to deal with.

By: Kolada Walker

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## **I am Anne Frank...**

I am Anne Frank...  
I hear the evil in my head  
I see the wall so cold and dead  
I say to myself I'll soon be free  
I want to live life just as me  
I am Anne Frank...  
I pretend to live life like a bird  
I need to fly from this world so blurred  
I feel the breeze running through my hair

I touch my heart when I am scared  
I cry...to belong in this world that sank  
I am only human I am Anne Frank  
I wonder if I'll ever fly  
I dream that the hidden will breathe the sky  
I understand that I'm only a girl  
I try to make it in this lonely world  
I hope we'll fly  
I am Anne Frank

By Levi Wallace

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### **A True Friend**

I have a true friend and her name is Jennifer Williams. I know she is my true friend because she shows specific qualities that I think a true friend should have.

True friends should be able to trust each other no matter what it is. When we are around each other, we're able to leave money lying around and she trusts me not to steal from her. And I trust her not to steal from me. We are able to tell each other secrets and we trust each other not to go back and tell any one else. Some friends that people have, you have to trust them around your boy/girl friend. But we don't have a problem with that because we have trust.

Another thing a true friend should have is your back. And what I mean by that is, when your friend gets into something. You are there and ready to help them. Like this one time it was around eleven o'clock at night and I was in my bed almost asleep when she came knocking on my door. These girls had called her phone. They were talking about how they were going to beat her up. So she came and got me. I made sure they didn't jump her. Because, if they did I had her back.

Another quality of a true friends should have is love. You can tell when a person loves you, when you tell them that you love them and they say it back. I love my friend like a sister I never had. We can sit and talk about anything. Wear each others clothes, do each others hair, and ask each other for there opinion.

It's not all the time that you can find a true friend. But if you are looking for one these are the qualities you should look for in a true friend.

By Lonniesha Washington

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### **An Invention that has Affected My Life**

Inventions-there are a million and one of them, it seems like a new one comes out everyday. My personal favorite, the Internet-you can do so many things on there, from looking up cooking recipes to talking to friends and family.

I love getting on the Internet, logging on to AIM and myspace, talking to girls. Sometimes when there's nothing on TV, I get on the Internet and watch movies. On the Internet there is always something to do; you can play pool, solitaire or any other game that you can think of.

On the Internet, it seems like every piece of information you could ever want is there, but you have to watch what you read because some of it is not true. I have failed quite a few homework assignments because of that reason.

Life without the Internet wouldn't be any life at all. It seems I spend almost half of the time on that thing. Some call it an idiot box, others their life, what is it to you?

By Robby Wells

*Well lets see. My name is Robby Wells. I am currently enrolled at the Golden Gate Adult Learning center. My teacher is Polly Spring. I am 16 years old.*

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### **The Lunar New Year**

The Lunar New Year-Spring Festival- is the biggest holiday in China. A month before the date of the Chinese New Year, people begin to prepare foods and to buy new clothes and presents. Houses are cleaned and decorated.

Red is the New Year's color. Doors and windows are repainted. Red spring couplets are posted on the doors. Red lanterns are hung at the gates. People wear red clothes. Children get red money packets from adults.

On New Year's Eve, each family has its members gather together to eat a family dinner. In the north of China, people eat a dumpling called "jiaozi"; in the south of China, people eat a sweet rice cake "nian gao". Both of these mean good fortune.

In the early morning of the first day of the New Year, children greet their grandparents and parents, and they get red money packets. Then, families greet other families; people visit and greet their neighbors, friends and relatives. The message is one of happiness, wealth, longevity and peace for each other.

The Chinese New Year falls on a different date each year because the traditional Chinese calendar follows the lunar cycle. February 7, 2008, is the Chinese Lunar New Year. Its symbol is "Rat". The Lunar New Year is celebrated in many Asian countries around China.

By Benqi Weng

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### **My Life**

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 and 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 and I've come a long way as I'm now working in Challenger Book 6,

Book 4 of Patterns in Spelling, as well as the *Write All About It* series, which has helped me a lot to be able to write this story.

Back in 2001, when I first started to improve my education, it was very hard to understand my speech. I am now also 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 and her name is 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. Last year, with Monica's assistance, I went through Ambassador Training. I've continued working on my education and see vast improvement. It has helped me to assist my

children with their homework and 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 Country Oaks Learning Center. Mary Ann 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 this year; 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. The Country Oaks Baptist 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 my community because they have really helped me be the person I want to be. 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 things with confidence. Thank you for taking the time to read my story.

By Mary Wheeler

*Mary is a mother of three girls Christina, Heather and Nicole. She is a student of County Oaks Learning center in Chipley Florida. Mary feels that literacy has changed her life for the good and will keep working to get her GED. Her teachers are Maryann Pelletier and Monica Baxley.*

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### **My Teachers Shel and Sandy**

My name is Jack Whitaker. I started coming to MCC on January 4, 2007, to get my GED. I'm 47 years old and I never finished high school so I thought I would see what I could do seeing that I do need a better education.

Thanks for Shel and Sandy, that really care about teaching and spending time to teach students like me that need extra help, I couldn't have gotten as far as I have without their help.

When I first started the M.C.C. GED class my grades were so bad that I just wanted to walk right back out of class, but Shel was very stern with me and said "Jack we know your street smart, now let's get book smart". I really was so thankful that Shel and Sandy thought I could go somewhere with my schooling.

Shel and Sandy worked with me on things I have never done before and showed me I could get book smart. When I first started M.C.C. GED class my grades were, Reading 5.1, Math 5.2, Language 4.1, that was in January of 2007. Now one year and one month later, my grades went up to Reading 8.0, yes Math 8.4, yes Language 9.2 that's a real pick up for me, I just don't know how I could have done this without their help. They are so good with teaching others like me that I just can't thank M.C.C. enough for having great teachers like Shel and Sandy.

Thank you M.C.C., Manatee Community College, GED

By Jack Whitaker

*Jack has one son and three grandchildren. He has worked at Manatee Printers for 19 years. Jack attends GED classes at Manatee Community College in Bradenton, FL. He enjoys his Harley, his biker friends and especially his 86 year-old mother.*

## **Working in the United States**

My first year was hard but thank God for helping me to survive here in the U.S. with no friends or family. This is my story of that first year. I was only 16 years old at the time.

Having no car, I had to walk to job hunt. Walking in the rain and the cold and I did that for several months. One day I finally found a job. Then I still didn't have a way to work so I had to find someone to take me to work until I had enough money to get my own car. Thank God I had a place to live.

When I got my first job, I started to work 12 hour shifts. I worked that shift for a long time until I could help myself and others. The hardest part was coming home so tired that I fell asleep in the tub full of water... more than once! I started to cry because I never knew I had to work so hard in life. I asked myself why my mom didn't explain about working to me and I had to find it out on my own.

One day when I just got on my feet and my first day driving my car. I came outside my house, and no one was around. A man popped up beside me. This man was crying and begging me to give him something to eat. I know God blessed me so I didn't try to push him away. I gave him some money to buy himself something to eat at the store. It was like a sign to me so I felt I should help him.

After so many years, I find myself back at school learning how to read and write. I can help myself much better than those years in the past. I am also now a proud citizen of the United States.

By John Winter

*John was born in Jamaica and has lived in America for over 25 years. He has been working with the Adult Literacy League for 2 years improving his reading and writing skills. His teacher is Mary Lo.*

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### **A Touch of Life**

My name is Norman and I was born in Jacksonville. I live in a house with my father, mother, sister and brother. I went to school and had a paper route with my brother. I went to school. It was fun. I was a fair student, but I was slow in reading and writing.

I had a girlfriend in high school which came to be my wife. We had two sons together and we lived in a house. But one weekend I got sick at the house and went to the hospital and they said I had a nervous breakdown and I was out of work. My wife was working to keep things together. One day she said she wants a divorce and she went to go into the Army. Life went to my two sons. My sons are doing good. They live in Atlanta, Georgia close to their mother. My son dose good in school. One finished college. He is a teacher at a school and one is a telemarketer. I have one grandgirl.

One day I was driving down the road looking and I saw a sign. It said Learn to Read and had a phone number to call. I came to learn to read to understand. Since October 2007 when I started, I understand more about writing and reading.

By Norman Woods

*Norman Woods is an ABE student at Learn to Read in Jacksonville. He attends grammar class twice a week and is meeting with an individual tutor once a week. He likes to go to the gym in his spare time.*

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## **Cassandra's Dream**

To make the world a better place...

My dream is for everyone to stop judging one another and treat each other with respect and kindness. Show equality to each other, no matter the skin color, but my real dream is to reunite with the family members that I have left. To make up for all those years we lost, and for me to become a better person and I know being with my family would stop a lot of the bad stuff I do. I wish to get to know them on a one on one basis; I need for them to know how much I have missed them and how much I love them. Another dream is for the war to stop. These are the dreams of Cassandra Denise Wright

By Cassandra Wright

*I was born in Statesboro, GA. I'm 27 years old. I'm an only child of my mother. I've been on my own since I was 13 years of age. I just had the greatest miracle happen to me. My family sought me out after almost 20 years of not knowing and seeing each other. Teacher: Ms. Judy Drymon Gadsden Correctional Facility, ABE III.*

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## **My Life Story**

I was born April 24, 1990. Two years later came along my twin brothers. We had a bad life. Every time when the three of us would go to my Papa's house we would be hungry and stinky. I would always ask myself, "Why don't I have great parents?" I decided that kids like us can't have great parents.

My young childhood life wasn't so good. I was raised around drugs. Mom and Dad would always smoke, drink, and do other drugs, I had no idea what they were. They always chose money, drugs and body piercings over us. We were their precious children,

but to them we are just trash. It's like we were never born. Mom would always give us up. She would leave for days or months. When she came back from wherever she went I was always so happy to see her. Mom would always say the words, "I love you", but truly, in my heart, I knew she didn't.

Dad was never in my life. He left when I was three. Dad was very lazy. He never wanted to work or even try to get a job. I remember that just to keep his shoes together he wrapped tape around them. Before he left, my brothers and I stayed in a hotel with him and Mom. The hotel was always trashy and full of roaches. Every time when my brothers and I would be sleeping, roaches would be crawling on us. We were known as trash because of him. We didn't have nice clothes or anything because he didn't have a job. Nothing matters to him, not even us. He is such a greedy person all he wants is things for himself.

My brothers and I got adopted by our Papa. He had to adopt us just to keep us out of danger. If it wasn't for him, life would be bad for us. Our mom always wonders why Papa adopted us. He always told her, but for some reason she would never listen to him. Even though we are legally theirs, our grandparents would always let us stay over at our mom's house. All he was trying to do was give her a chance with us. All she was doing was taking advantage of everything he was giving to her.

Finally, our grandparents got tired of her ways and we started living full time with them. I know that what has happened to me isn't my fault. I am happy with my life now and the people I love. My experiences in life are the reasons why I have become who I am now, and I like me!

By Heather Yeckley

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