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REFLECTIONS

A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

REFLECTIONS

Reflections

A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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



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

Special thanks to the Florida Literacy Coalition's
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Thanks to the Corporation for National and Community Service
And our AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers:

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***This Book was made possible through a grant from the
Florida Department of Education
Division of Workforce Education***

Preface

This book was designed to give adult learners the opportunity to build confidence while also improving their reading, writing and critical thinking skills. Adult learners enrolled in adult education, literacy, ESOL, and family literacy programs throughout Florida were encouraged to submit essays. The imagination and creativity of these students shines through in their writing reflecting a range of perspectives and life experiences that are as diverse as the authors themselves. The editorial committee chose to minimize 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 reflections.

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I Am Having a Great Time

My name is Markhamat Abdujalalova. I am from Kazakhstan. I was born there and am now married to Farkhod Rakhmatov. We have three sons who are all college graduates. My mother has left us for quite a long time. My father is still living. He is 79 years old now. I have a brother. He is married and has two sons and one daughter. My husband is an airplane engineer. When I first came to the United States, I was a tourist. Now, I work in the housekeeping department at the Ocean Key Resort and Spa. I have been working for seven years.

At the present time, I am studying English because I know that it is very important for me to speak fluently in order to maintain my employment. I am very happy in Key West because I have many friends and a stable job. My teacher is very nice. She is very helpful. In class, I am starting to read and write the proper way using Standard English. Also, I am learning how to use the computer to do my assignments and study lessons.

I am very excited because I have the opportunity to dialogue with my classmates in English even though we make many mistakes in our pronunciation. To me, this is fine because I must open my mouth to speak in order to learn how to speak well. It does not make me feel bad or discouraged. The more I speak in class the better it is for me because this is our training camp to learn English. I am very glad in the class because we have many people from different countries that are here for the same reason as me. They make me feel young and lively.

I know that if I keep on coming to class, one day I will become an expert in English. In the future, I will be able to help other non-English speaking men and women in my country.

Markhamat Abdujalalova (Maya) is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

Living One Day at a Time

My turning point in my life was when I had a car accident on July 1, 2000. I was 17 years old at the time. That day changed my life completely. Now I am a C-7 quadriplegic in a wheelchair. I went back to school at Leesburg High School. At the time it wasn't wheelchair equipped, so I could not take some of the classes I needed. But I did graduate high school. I moved to Orlando from Leesburg because I knew there would be more opportunities for me.

I don't let being in a wheelchair stop me. I am still going on with my life. I have my own apartment and I love living on my own. I have nurses who come out to help me. I love to cook, go to the movies, and sporting events. I am on a power soccer team called the Orlando Hurricanes. I love to play the sport, which is basically soccer for people in power wheelchairs. We travel places to play games and it is so much fun.

I work at Universal Studios. I work at the exit answering questions and waving goodbye to the people as they leave the park. I like working there because they treat you like a real person. I like the job because it makes me feel happy inside to see other people happy. I live one day at a time.

I want to go back to school to study Business Information. My goals are to go to college and finish, then work for a big company. Eventually I would like to own my own business, once I learn what kind of business I am interested in. To achieve these goals, I am getting help from the Adult Literacy League. I am working with a wonderful tutor. Her name is Adrienne. She is helping me with English. I am learning a lot and having a wonderful time working with her. I have achieved a lot since my turning point, and I want to achieve even more in my life.

Sabrina Abdullah is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando

What Education Means to Me

The ability to learn was just as foreign to me as another language. However, this has changed, as education slowly became the center of my world. Education has given me confidence, goals to reach, and a desire to give back. When I first arrived to prison I was convinced that I just wasn't one of those people who could learn from books. This was built up because most of my life I was called stupid and began to believe it myself.

I was put into adult basic education where they center most of my class on math. With much practice and time I learned about decimals, fractions, and I wouldn't believe geometry and even algebra. My self-confidence was rebuilt. I could learn! Over that I was so excited.

Next, I began to have goals. Which is a good thing because now I can be in prison and build a future? This still keeps me amazed. When I get my G.E.D I will be taking another class called auto-cad, it's a very hard class but now I'm not intimidated because I know from experience now that I can learn.

I know what it feels like to have difficult time learning. I would like to be able to give back by helping others to learn. I will be taking the L.V.A training class when I'm approved, this is to learn and become certified in tutoring people. Also I now have a tremendous amount of understanding, which gives me more patience with people.

Now I know education has become what motivates me and I couldn't think of anything better I would want. Well, there is one thing and that is to let people know that no matter what anyone has said or done, you can reach your goals, it may be a lot of hard work and perseverance but it is well worth it.

Antoinette Abiden is a student in Mr. Hendrickson's GED Prep class at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy

Standing on My Own Two Feet

When I came to Dallas, Texas for the first time I was just married, full of hope and unsure of my destiny. I am originally from Mexico. I was a lawyer and I had a good job in my country. I worked for the government and was by myself many years. Then one day I fell in love and I left everything behind to chase my dreams.

For seven years, my life revolved around my husband. My circle of friends was small, but I did make friends with another girl from Mexico and her husband. They were my best friends and would play an important part in my life during the most difficult times that were to come.

One year, I went to Destin, Florida to visit my sister because she was pregnant. On the day I returned home from my sister's, my husband called me at the airport and said, "You don't have anything here anymore; no house, no dog, no husband." When I got to my house it was like being in a nightmare. The house was empty and nobody was there. It was very hard for me in the beginning with no money, no family and no English at all. I lived with my best friends for awhile during the divorce process and will never be able to thank them enough for all they did to help me.

After I got my divorce, I decided to go back to Destin to look for a job. Fortunately, I found work in a Chinese restaurant called P.F. Chang's. They believed in me even though I didn't speak English. Little by little, day by day, I was learning. I started out as a food runner, then worked in the kitchen, following recipes, and then became a server, taking care of people. It wasn't easy but my needs forced me to do it.

Through my experience, I learned an important lesson; nobody can hurt me again and now I can be myself. I'm getting the tools to be successful, here or anywhere, because I'm speaking English and one day, I'm going to be fluent like a real American citizen. I would like to be an example to all abused women and abandoned

wives like me to show we can stand on our own two feet and get ahead if we work hard to learn English. It's not easy, but not much in this life is easy. You just have to try hard and be thankful to be alive. That is the most important thing. Now my life has another color. I live in Destin with my sister, brother-in-law and my little niece and everything is fine.

Yolanda Aguilar is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College

Retrospect

The light we see is from our vanity.
When material things are lost and we're found
by the wayside of insanity.

We've forgotten about self, no real beauty,
no sense of honor and no sense of duty.
Scavenging for crumbs, not knowing why the caged bird sings,
we are successors to king and queens.

Screaming at the top of your lungs, because you want to be heard,
shout from your spirit, but silence sometimes can be a louder verb.
Jesus died for the past, present and future sins.
If the future was the past - would he have to do it again?
God never stops talking, although his words are choice and tamed.
For his word has always been yes,
Even before King James.

Now can you honor what's in heaven when you
don't understand what's on earth?
We're still confused about the date of our savior's birth.

Don't be misled; I'm an instrument too,
so I direct my quests toward the will to create -
and it tells me what I must do.

I pick up the pen and paper with willingness to write
and with guided hand held motion my father talks back.

Satan will come to twist words - sowing seeds of discord,
struggle and strife, there are some who believe not.
and some who'll receive God's spirit of eternal life.
There is no sin past or present that Abba will not forgive.
Wake up from death of retrospect, claim your destiny and LIVE!

*Joseph Alnisa is a student in Mr. Hendrickson's GED Prep class at Gadsden
Correctional Facility in Quincy*

Why I Came to the United States

I came to the United States because I have a son. As all loving mothers want the best for their children, I want the best for mine. I thought that living in the United States would give my son great opportunities in his life. He will have opportunities such as a good education and a good job. The best of all is that he will have the chance to live under the United States law.

Education is a treasure that nobody can steal. Being educated in the United States is the best that can happen to anybody. In my thoughts I am giving my son the best I can by having him study here, and at the same time I am learning a lot of new things. For example, I am learning English and soon I will achieve one of my dreams which is having my GED diploma.

Now about the work, he will for sure have more opportunities to find better jobs in the United States than if we were in my home country. Yes, I believe so, because the United States offers many job opportunities and the right tools for you to succeed.

I love living in the United States because of its laws. They are wonderful. To me, this country is perfectly managed and that gives me peace of mind because I know my son is protected.

As I have shown, I came to the United States because I value this country very much and I want my son to grow up in this marvelous country.

Osmara Alvarez is working on her GED at the Clewiston Library Program

Life

In life you are born, then you die. But there is so much more to life than that. When most kids are young they do not realize that so much stuff could happen for you. They do not know that you can get a good education and have a good family. Most young adults think that they will not amount to anything in life, but that is not true. You need to work hard to accomplish anything in life. I grew up thinking I would fail until I grew up and really realized I could succeed. I wish I could go back to high school and let kids know what they could accomplish in school and on the outside life in the world. When you do a lot in school, you open up a lot of possibilities on the outside world in your life. When you open these possibilities, you are able to do a lot in life.

Kevin Amell attends the Santa Rosa Adult School

Old to New

In the past I neglected all that was good,
and never did what I know I should.
Now I have time to go over in my heart,
every wrong thing I've done from the start.

It hurts me so much each and everyday,
so I am taking the time to find what to say.
Saying that I'm sorry just doesn't seem to fit,

because it's not enough, not even a little bit.

As I sit and think of what I should do,
I often wonder the many ways
that I could show to you.
What I imagine could possibly be the way,
to show how I've changed
my actions and things to say.

So, I'm working on that better me,
and one day everyone will see,
that through everything that has been lost,
It will all be made new through the cross.

Janet Amundson is a student in Mr. Hendrickson's GED Prep Class at Gadsden County Correctional Facility in Quincy

A Treasure Search by Jim and Max

This story is about two brothers named Jim and Max. They like to search for treasure. One day, when they played ball in the old house that they had just moved into, Jim threw the ball too hard and too high. Max could not catch it and the ball hit a picture on the wall. The picture fell to the floor and the frame broke. Max bent down and picked up the picture. When Jim and Max looked at what they had done, they found a map behind the picture. It looked like a treasure map. When they took a better look, they saw it was a map of their back yard and it lead them to a secret place behind the house.

Max ran to the little shed and got two shovels. He and Jim started to dig where the map told them the treasure would be found. They dug down about a foot and found a secret door. When they opened the door they found an old money bag and some bones. Jim and Max were very shocked to see the bones. What could they be?

Jim and Max decided to call their Dad. When they told their Dad what they had found, he got their Mother and came right home. They looked at the money bag and it had a date on it of 1941. They opened it and found a lot of old coins. Dad said to count the money later and called his friend, Dr. Anderson, who was a forensic specialist to look at the bones. While they waited for Dr. Anderson Dad asked Jim and Max to go to the library and see if they could find any information on who had owned the house in 1941. The boys went and looked at old newspapers from that year and found that the home had been owned by a man who had a circus.

When Dr. Anderson came and looked at the bones and heard about the owner of the house, he said that explained the bones - they were bones of a gorilla. They all thought that the gorilla had been a good friend of the owner and he had buried it along with the money. They all went into the house and opened the bag of money. When they dumped it out they found a note. The note was from the man who owned the house and it read, "To whoever finds this money, I leave it to be used for an adventure to find more treasure." Stay tuned for the further adventures of Jim and Max.

Andrew Anderson, Literacy Student, Lehigh Acres

Definitely Different

The first thing that caught my eyes when I first came to America is the number of people from all over the world who live here. In comparison, they speak many more languages than we do in Haiti.

In America I live in a rented apartment but in my country I live in my own house. Back home I didn't go to work. I just went to school, played basketball and soccer. Apparently, I don't play those games anymore because I have to go to work a lot. Then, I

have to go to school to learn English. These make me very tired and all I want to do is go home and get some sleep.

What I like about America is its richness in diverse culture, various languages, many jobs, businesses, stores, movies, food, colleges, electronic games, videos, and many more. Just name them, you will find them. I don't have all these in my country. We are very limited in many things. Now, I have more money. I am more comfortable. I am more educated.

That is why I come to America to make my life more stable and interesting. God bless you America!

Jean Alrick Annylusse attends the Key West High School Adult Program

A Turning Point in My Life

In recent years there have been two things that have changed my life. Both happened on December 28, 2008. They made me look at my past, present, and future in a different way. On this day, I heard that my beloved father had died. I also found out that my husband had not been faithful to me and that he had two twenty- three year old daughters. I have been married for thirty years. I am the mother of five natural children and one adopted one. I have seven grandchildren. After all these years my husband revealed his secret to me. I could not believe what he told me, but I know it is true. It was heartbreaking. He was an idol to me. I always trusted him and I was never jealous. I had never suspected anything.

Here in the United States, I am correcting my mistakes and learning to take care of my daughters and myself. I can see that my perception about my marriage was wrong. He makes new promises and says that he loves me. I want to believe his promises, but I am not sure.

I am waiting to go back to my native country. I am unsure about the future. I am only sure about my desire to be a good person and follow God's commandments- especially the 7th. I hope my faith in God will help restore my faith in my husband.

Anonymous

Why I Came to Florida

I came to the Florida to look for the best opportunity for my family, especially my sons. I wanted a new quality of life and a good education for them and for me. I wanted to improve my English because I knew I would have more opportunities to find a job in my profession if I am bilingual. I hope to be successful and give my family the best I can. I know I can do this.

Jusmannny Anzalota is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

Let Me Tell You about Someone I Admire

My home at this point in my life is Charlie Dorm, #2, Bed #11 lower. A lot of people won't call this place home. To me a home is wherever you feel comfortable, safe, and secure. The officers make you feel that way in Charlie Dorm.

They treat me, a convict, someone who didn't love anything or anyone, with respect. They are very helpful. They make you want to do better with your life. It is the little things such as saying, "Good morning ladies," when they come to do count. It is the pep talks someone gets when they are going home. When you are upset all you have to do is ask and they will stop what they are doing to listen. Sometimes it is just the simple, pleasant smiles that they have. All of these things make me feel human, like I do

have a chance. So I can't say there is only one person I admire, I admire a few ladies that work in Charlie Dorm.

Paula Arlail is a student in Ms. Moseley's Adult Basic Education class at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

My experience in adult education and literacy has been the most important thing that has ever happened to me. It has opened my eyes and my mind to improving my English writing, reading, and comprehension.

My experience in adult education and literacy makes me realize that without education, I can't go anywhere. It is the key for a new beginning and an opening for a new beginning for my own welfare.

My experience in adult education and literacy helps me develop strength and trust in myself. It instills confidence that I have to continue and never look back. It makes me feel confidence that it is never too late to get an education. I feel that it is up to me. I can put my effort into doing something good in life for my own self-improvement.

Maria Arocho has obtained her GED and is improving her writing and vocabulary with the Voyager program at the Clewiston Library

A Tribute to Jaivyn

The most difficult time in my life was March 16, 2004, when I was diagnosed with systemic lupus, an autoimmune disease. It was very frustrating to deal with so I became sad and depressed. As the months went by I thought of suicide until August 10, 2004, my life

changed forever. That was when my daughter gave birth to a beautiful baby boy. That was when I started to live again.

When the doctor placed the tiny little body in my arms, and he opened his eyes and gazed into my eyes, the tears started to run down my face. I knew from that day that the most difficult time in my life had turned out to be one of the greatest days in my life. As I hold my grandson close to my heart, I think about the changes that have transformed him from that tiny baby into a handsome little boy. I am happier now than I have been in a long, long time. Thanks to Jaivyn!

Glorida Atkinson is a student at ACE studying for her GED

My #1 Mom

The person I admire is my mother. When I was little she was both my father and mother at the same time. My mother and I went through really hard times before and after we came to the U.S. My mother is the person that everybody goes to when they need help especially when they need money. I didn't spend much time with my father because he wasn't always around. My father had two families and most of his time he spent with his other lady and son. My mother was brave enough to fill his spot. When I was ten years of age, my mother and I came to America. My oldest sister was already living here. She helped us by letting us stay at her place. Not long after that my mother got her first job at a small restaurant as a cook making \$2 per hour from 7:00 a.m. until 10:00 p.m. every single day. I'll never forget that.

I have always been close to my mother and I've seen the hard work she went through to earn her living. That is the reason why I try not to give her a hard time. I try to solve my own problems and make my own money to buy stuff I need so that she doesn't have to spend any money on me. My mother is my inspiration in life. She is a very strong woman, she has never

given up on anybody, and she always has lots of love to give. The only way I could ever repay her for everything she did for me is by giving her lots of love and care.

Juan Avendano is a student at Key West High School

About Me

When I was a child, I was one of twelve children. I had to work to help my family. My family and I were migrant workers. We moved state to state, that's why I didn't go to school regularly. Years went by and I tried to go to night school. When I met Miss Mari, I was 58 years old. I was so happy to meet her and to hear she was going to help me. Now that I am working with her one-on-one at the library, I feel that I am learning one step at a time and I will reach my goal to become an excellent reader. Thank you so much Miss Mari for all your help.

Rosie Avila studies in a library program with the Hillsborough Literacy Council in Tampa

How Numbers Influenced My Goals

When I entered high school I decided one of my goals would be to become an accountant. I knew math was very important for everyone's life. Everybody needed to know about numbers. Every moment in everyone's life, an incident occurs to make us aware of numbers.

When I thought about myself, I was single, so I was "one." Then I got married and became "two." Shortly after, I had a baby and became "three." When I started working, I had to think about how much money I would earn and how much money I expended. It seemed like every single moment I had to count or use numbers for something.

I was born in Bangladesh. I was one of three children. Dhaka, the capital of Bangladesh, is a city with the population of approximately 6,737,700 persons. I went to Lalmatia College, in Dhaka, for my Bachelor's Degree. In my country, it is called B.Com (Business in Commerce). I graduated from Dhaka University seven years ago with a degree in accounting . . . a world of numbers.

In my country, I was able to find work in a bank or a financial organization that needed an accountant on a 20 hour week basis. When I worked in these places they paid me well, but one of my dreams was to go to America. Another was to learn more about using numbers and accounting. On August 28, 1998, we arrived in the United State of America. One of my dreams came true. Three of us came to America together. My new goal is to be an accountant in the United States.

My husband got a job in Key Largo, Florida. The Florida Keys can be a very isolated place. We did not see anyone in our neighborhood except on weekends. At that time I did not know how to drive. I took five driving lessons and got a license to drive. Everyday I read two or more newspapers. One day I saw an advertisement in the newspaper stating that McKenzie Petroleum was looking for bookkeeper. I applied in person and they hired me. I worked for McKenzie Petroleum for almost seven years. This job helped us purchase a house in Homestead.

To successfully reach my goal to get a job in a well known company, there are several steps I need to take. Number one, I need to improve my English. Number two, I will take 15 credits in accounting courses to refresh my math skills. Number three, I will review my accounting/computer skills, and number 4, I will search for job.

As I reflect on the world around me I see clearly that numbers will always be part of my life.

Fahmida Aziz is a level 7 ESOL student at Miami Dade College, Homestead Campus

The Environment Is a Wonderful Place

The environment is a beautiful place. Many people destroy the environment by throwing trash on the ground. We need to respect it. It is very important to save the environment and keep it healthy because we have to live in it. There are many ways it can be saved; by recycling, saving water, and saving paper we can make a difference.

First, the environment could be helped by recycling. Recycling is very important. There many things that can be recycled. A partial list includes; plastic cups, water bottles, and plastic straws. When people recycle things, these things are used again. Also, when you recycle things it makes you feel good about yourself because you did something to help the environment by stopping littering and keeping the landfills clean.

Secondly, the environment can be helped by saving water. It would be a horrible thing if there was not enough water on earth. Water can be saved by taking shorter showers, turning the water off while brushing your teeth, and containing rain water in rain barrels (for the purpose of watering the grass). Saving water is a perfect way to help the environment.

Furthermore, the environment can be helped by recycling paper. For example, a student can use the back of their paper to write more things. Also, paper can be recycled when you are done with it. If you like to read the newspaper, remember to recycle it when you finish. Many trees are cut down because we use so much paper. If we recycle more paper, fewer trees could be cut down. This in turn helps keep the carbon dioxide out of the water.

In conclusion, many people litter and throw things on the ground. Our environment is a great place, but we have to take care of it. It would be helpful if more people would recycle, and save

water. Those are some things that can be done to help the environment. The environment is a wonderful place and should be respected.

Nicole Bainteris in the GED Program at Indian River State College

What Got Me Here

The reason I am here is because of my brother. It's like I was at the right place at the wrong time. My brother had made a bad decision in his life which was to sell drugs. He ended up becoming very popular in our neighborhood and at the time, he was staying with me. A lot of people would come to my house all times of the day and night for him. One day the wrong people came and it was the police for a drug bust! I ended up being the only one in my house and I went to jail. I got out one weekend with a \$25,000 bond. So today I sit here in prison doing 31 months on behalf of my little brother. All because I wouldn't tell on him and turn him in. I really regret this situation I'm in but I can't change it. I am here now and have to do this time!

Tamara Bannister is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Going to the Next Level in My Life

My name is Edward. I came to Key West from New Orleans, Louisiana eight years ago in search of work in the bar business. Because I found it to be quite difficult to acquire a job in that field, I ended up working in construction. This has taken its toll on my back and my body according to my doctor's reports and my daily experiences of aches and pains in my body.

I am now enrolled in school working towards my G.E.D in hopes to then go to the Florida Keys Community College to train

for a good paying job that is not so physically demanding. Even though sometimes I find learning all the new things I am learning to be difficult, it can also be rewarding. Maybe one day my dream of a different type of work will come true.

Edward Bath is a student at Key West High School

What is it About John?

My name is Mikus and today I am writing about someone who I admire. The question sounds very easy but to answer it is difficult. Apparently, the person who I admire is a friend named John. He is a very successful business and family man. Everything he does seems right. Even the advice that he gives is smart and helpful. Not only he is smart, he is also emotionally strong. He just knows how to handle difficult situations. John owns four restaurants in Key West. So, he has a lot of employees. He is happily married and has a beautiful family. On top of this, he is active in sports. He is one of those people who I can learn a lot from to be successful in life. The truth of the matter is that not everybody is as hard working as John. No one is as smart and as successful as he is. On the other hand, if you give a try, you might be that someone who is extraordinary. I bet one day somebody would like to write about you as the one he or she admires.

Mikus Berzins is in the Adult and Career Center at Key West High School

Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions in life may be simple to some people, but for me that is what I want. What I would like to achieve is to study business and receive a degree in the field. I want to be my own boss, to know all the ins and outs of owning a business. The benefit that my family would receive in owning a

business would be to have something that I could pass down over time to my children and grandchildren. Something that would be appreciated and also leave behind a legacy. Family members would know how the business started and maybe expand and open a chain of some kind.

The kind of business I would like is a “place of history”, where antiques and old relics could be appraised and sold. Things that have a past to them can be interesting and educational to others. It wouldn’t matter what it was, if only knowing that someone took care of and nurtured the item. This would be its own reward. For myself, I’ve always been fascinated by old Civil War relics and where they were found. It will take a lot of time and effort to get where I want to be, but it will be worth it. Owning an antique shop would mean the world to me, but I know it will not come easy. So for now, I am going to study hard, keep an open mind, and strive on being the best I can be as a business owner and human being.

Shawnee Black is a student at Columbia's Adult Education Program

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

At first, when I came into Mrs. Moseley's classroom, I was bored and wanted to get out of her class the first week. Then I came to learn that she was an excellent teacher because she truly taught you the math work. She'd go over it until you understood it. I graduated from high school but everything that I learned I forgot after some years of not using it. My math teachers in high school did not go over the work with you like she does. I can honestly say that she enjoys her job. I was in her class for 60 days before I took the TABE test. I can say that what she taught me, I am now able to teach others and I sometimes do. I brought my TABE score up

from a 6.4 to a 10.5. So now I have achieved my goal by bringing up my math score. I am now waiting to go into the Culinary Arts Program.

Shacara Blunt is in the ABE Program at the Gadsden Correctional Facility

Life in Russia: Education and Financial Systems

The education and financial systems in Russia differ from the one in the United States. According to the law of Education of the Russian Federation, every child from the age of seven must attend school. The elementary stage of education includes grades 1 through 4, and the secondary stage includes grades 5 through 11. In contrast to American schools, all grades from 1st to 11th are located in the same school building. After graduating from the fourth grade, children continue to stay at the same school. All students are usually assigned to the same class through all eleven school years. Moving up from one grade to another, these classes don't change.

The school year for all Russian schools begins September 1st and ends at the end of May. Summer vacation lasts three months: June, July, and August. Educational programs in Russian schools are more difficult and intensive than in American schools. In the 4-5th grade children begin to study a foreign language (sometimes two or three) and algebra, then in the 6-8th grades history, economy, geography, physics and geometry. Children typically have homework every day for each subject. In the 10-11th grades they usually have one day per week for early professional education. It can be driving, typing, sewing or other industrial study. After the 10th grade children train at the industry they choose for a few weeks during the summer.

After graduating from secondary school, most students attend institutes or universities which are called "Highest Educational Institution". This program usually lasts five years. After

completing a study, graduates are granted a diploma of higher education (equivalent to a B.S/M.S.) and are ready to start their professional career. After the 9th grade not very advanced children could leave school and go to the college, education at which is called “Middle Education”. These colleges offer education to be a specialist like a nurse, an auto repairer, a motorman, a chef, a baker or a builder and so on. This program lasts 2-3 years and it is usually free. I enjoyed being at school and still keep in touch with of many of my classmates and university friends.

Next, financial services in Russia are not as well-developed as the same in the United States. Credit cards, personal checks and money orders are not very popular yet. And, not all supermarkets, restaurants or other places take debit cards. It is important to have cash on hand. For example, my husband forgets to have cash very often, especially when he is away from Russia for a long time. There were several times in restaurants when he realized that he hadn’t money at the time of payment. But he was lucky because of me; I always remember to have cash.

As for me, Russia is the best, most beautiful, unpredictable and unusual place in the world. Now our family lives in the United States, and I hope that America takes a significant part of my heart.

Anzhelika Bogdatov is a student at the Hillsborough Literacy Council in Tampa.

My Life in Thailand

My name is Yaowalak Boning (Bea). I come from Thailand. My father worked for the Thai Army, and my mother worked for Khon Kaen University. My dad served the Army all of his life.

Anytime my father left home for his duty, he gave me permission to make decisions if something happened to him. My father depended on my decisions even at that time when I was just thirteen years old. When we were young, we were not close to him

because of his job. We contacted him by letter, but did not know an address. The family had a chance to spend time with him three or four weeks a year.

The Army still controls the country. Some people do not want to stay because they feel fear and are insecure. After my father passed away, my mother made a big decision to move to the United States with her four children and to try to forget her bad memory.

My mom got married later on and opened a restaurant business. It was hard for everybody because we never worked at this job before. She used her skill from cooking class to train us and to change herself from office lady to chef.

I married and had two sons. They are in college right now. I hope the right choice for them is to study hard and to get a good paying job after they are finished.

Life in America gives me the opportunity to go to school to study and to work. When I look back on my past, I feel very lucky for my children. They do not have to feel fear to live. I thank God everyday to be in this country. My life is more relaxed and enjoyable.

Yaowalak Boning (Bea) is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College

Someone I Admire

I can tell you about several people that I admire but it seems that one person stands out the most. That person is my cousin, Vernita Boone. I admire her for a couple of reasons. One, she has an outside appearance that would blow your mind. Two, when you say personality, it is definitely her that you are talking about. Three she has accomplished things in her life.

First, she has an outside appearance that would blow your mind. My cousin has a natural beauty that could be used as modeling material. She stands 6'2" tall. She could have played basketball but instead she chose to do crew. One thing about her beauty is that she is not vain about it. Two, she has a wonderful personality. She has a personality that can't wait. If you are down she'll pick you up. She's never upset and she doesn't let small things get to her. Every time you see her she always laughing with a smile on her face. Third, she has accomplished a lot of good things in her life. After she graduated from high school around 2004, she went to college. She even received a scholarship for crew. She was so good at crew, which is rowing, that she beat her coach's best time. She went to Clemson in South Carolina and just graduated from there in 2008. She is now working as a psychologist with children.

In closing, I love my cousin and am very proud of her. That is why I admire her so much. I would follow in her footsteps any day. She is a good inspiration to others and to me.

Tayanita Boone is in the ABE program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Goals

First of all, one of my goals is to find a job. I am looking for a better environment and a better pay rate. I enjoy working with others but I also love working alone. My goals are really to be a successful woman. I can and I will do it because I believe in me.

My second goal is to get a house or apartment. As a parent, I need my own house. My plan is to work hard toward saving money for a house. Meanwhile, I just have to bust my butt for the little changes I do accomplish. I will succeed because, like I said, I believe in me. My third goal is to pursue my education. I've been trying to go to school but I've been slacking. Due to my living arrangement and no childcare, it is kind of hard. I mean, how can I focus on school when I don't have a place to stay? I told myself

that I am going to go to school more often. I am going to work harder on my education because I realize that if I want anything out of life, I need an education.

I want more for myself and my children. Education is very important. Without an education it is a pretty hard life. Life is difficult enough even if you have an education. That is why I am getting mine. I can and I will do it because I believe in me.

Laquanda Boyd is a student in the Even Start Family Literacy Program

Pot Pourri

There are about seven billion people on planet earth; about 90% of them believe there's something out there, a "god" or "gods". We are not alone; our world is not the product of the 'big bang theory' rather the work of a higher engineered being. If so, this "god" or Supreme Being is the maker of the world. If the world was the internet, God would have been the most searched topic on the internet. What if there's no "god", what if we are the one who can change our tomorrows. What if the idea of "god" is just one big fat lie that we were forced to accept from the get go. What if the evolution theory is right and our chimpanzee ancestors are still evolving. Such thinking would make of me an atheist. But, there has to be a "god" or a just plain God known on many names Jehovah, Yahweh, Allah. How could more than 2000 years of history be a conspiracy? God exists and many faces can be his witness. The world could not just happen; chimpanzee could not just evolve into man. So what happened to that evolution? If there was no God, where would be the world balance? Too much knowledge can create confusion. In our eternal quest of power and knowledge, we want to take God out of the picture. Well when we are lifeless this God we had denied, would still be there and controversial for other generations, who will like us, passed away. America as the capital of the world is the example of low and high in humanity. Forty years past, black was the epithet of damnation.

Two Americas were coinciding in the same country with interdictions to mix the salt and the pepper. The shadowing brother was in the back, in the field, out of the schools, because he was not politically the equal of the less shadowing brother. This shadowing brother had a dream that the sun would rise and there would be two different men aspiring to the same dream of freedom and equality. Less than ten days from now, the dreamer would prove us he was right. A God nation chose a son of humanity to try his dream of change to the world. His roots from the core of Africa and America will prevail and show anything is possible. Well there had to be a God for that dream to become true. Good job America by making it right! God bless America.

Joseph S. Bien-Aime attends Adult and Community Education in Naples

Reading Is Good To Learn For Ourselves

Learning to read and spelling words is good. You can spell better words and learn how to write your thoughts with new words. We get advice on our writing and spelling. Together we can do it. DO NOT STOP trying to go for it. I did, so you can do it too! We can do it! When I tried it, I liked it. I called Learn to Read. I was scared at first. But I kept on trying and trying till I get it. So, you can do the same! Give it a try, you will like it too! We will help you!

Tracy Bradshaw is an ABE student at Learn to Read in Jacksonville and attends math classes at the Women's Center

My Favorite Place

My favorite place in the world is St. Petersburg, Florida. The reason why St. Pete, as many call it, is my favorite place is because it is my hometown. I love it so much and can remember my old house address and phone number.

In St. Petersburg, there was a lot to do. I would go skating, shopping, hang out with friends, and go to the beach, park, and community pool. I used to live right next to the water down the street from the St. Petersburg Pier. The pier is a building out in the ocean and is six to seven stories high. You could fish at the pier, go shopping, go to shows, or go to the rook and have dinner and listen to music. Looking over the balcony, you could enjoy the ocean view and watch the sun rise and set. It was the most beautiful sight!

Another reason why I love St. Pete is because of the great time I had with my friends. I had a friend that lived directly across the street and we were both born at the same time. I knew him my whole life. As we grew up, his parents had three more children and we all became close friends. They were known to me as the Andrews boys, and they called me “Briz”. As we grew up, we spent most of our time together and we always kept a picture book of what we did for fun. We would make plans on what we would do for fun each day. We would go swimming, fishing, climbing and would play games, such as soccer and hockey.

All that changed when my family thought that I needed to live somewhere else where there was less trouble. They packed me up and loaded everything in a moving truck. I said my goodbyes to my friends and started a new life here in Lake City, Florida.

Joey Brisbois attends classes at Columbia County's Adult Education Center

My Birthplace is Thailand

I was born and grew up in Thailand. I grew up with one brother and three sisters. We lived in a small village fifty miles away from a city. I went to school for four years. I was born in a small village; my mother gave birth to my three sisters, a brother and me. My parents did not get my birth certificate until I was six years old. I am not very sure they can remember the date or even the year. I do not feel too badly about it; all my sisters and my brother are in the same situation as I am.

My family was farmers. They grew rice for eating; rice is a big source of food in Thailand. People there ate rice three meals per day. Thai people worked hard; they got up early to go to work at the farm, and they stayed until dark. The farmers used the buffalo to plow the ground for planting crops.

The school where I used to go only went up to the fourth grade, so most of the children had a fourth grade education. Some could read and write, but some could not. I was one of the blessed students. I kept going. There were no laws against it, so some parents made their children go to work instead of going to school. Today, Thailand has changed to better ways of doing things, and the Thai government is trying to promote education.

Thailand was my birthplace and where I grew up but my home and country is here in the United States of America.

Janet Bristow attends the ESOL class at Northwest Florida State College

What Education Mean to Me

We are all in this community together. If we help each other and stop being so selfish we can have better teachers, good students and no guns in our schools. I feel education is very important and it will broaden your mind. Education helps people

feel self worth. It helps me help my children and grandchildren with their homework. I realize, now that I'm 50 years old, that we can volunteer at our local library, reading books and stories to children in the summer time. When you have an education you can keep a better job and be able to manage your finances. And so right now I'm here at the Women's Center of Jacksonville pursuing my education. I'll be getting my GED soon. My GED will help me to write a letter to the Oprah Winfrey Show so that I can talk and tell my story. My education will help me put together recipes and cookbooks. When I get my GED I'm going to open a restaurant. I'm already a cake decorator. I love cooking and making people feel good about themselves. I love to encourage people.

We were put here to help each other and see our children grow. With your education and my education we can help the world be a better place. Iron sharpens iron. I've only read one book in my life and I know there are so many more books in this world. I can't read them all, but I can read more of them so I can learn more about different people all over the world. I'd like to go on an adventure in my mind just reading a good book. Get your education while you're in your youth. It will not be as hard on you. Be a good student, there's a whole world out there waiting on you. I thank God that He let me stay here so that I can see my mind change. We have to change our way of thinking. Stay in school. Get your education.

Patricia Brooks is a student at the Women's Center in Jacksonville

Why I Love Arkansas

There are a lot of reasons why I love Arkansas. Everybody may like other things, but I love Arkansas. The reasons I love Arkansas are fishing, hunting and the Razorbacks basketball team.

First of all, fishing in Arkansas is great. Our lakes are beautiful. Fishing for Mudcats is awesome. Mudcats are real big catfish. They can get up to 12 lbs in weight.

Second, the hunting is wonderful. I love to hunt in the gorgeous Ozark Mountains. Have you ever been boar hunting? It's very awesome, like when a 350 lb boar comes charging at you. Then you get to kill it with a shotgun.

Finally, the Arkansas Razorbacks basketball team, they have the greatest fans in the world. You will go hog wild over them when they do their fast breaks and win the game.

In conclusion, the three main reasons I love Arkansas are fishing, hunting and the razorbacks. One day I plan to go back. Other people have things they love, as for me I love Arkansas.

Rufus Brooks, Jr. is from Arkansas and attends an ABE class in Monticello

What Education Means to Me

I guess I can say education does mean a lot to me. It goes all the way back to my childhood when I dropped out of the sixth grade and then went back. I always had problems in school. My mother never pushed the issue of me going to school because she was on some other type of socializing mess. Therefore, I went to school when I felt like it. Some dropouts like me never take the chance to go back. I did because I knew I needed my education. When I did attend school, I made sure I put my all into my schoolwork. I was determined not to be illiterate. So I earned a little bit dropping in and out of school. I might not be the smartest person around, but I was smart enough to get some education. I think that is why my education means a lot to me!

Vivian Bryant is in the ABE program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Reading is Fundamental

Reading is the foundation of education, knowing how to read means a lot to me. I always like to read. I can read almost anything; magazines, newspapers, and any kind of books. I love to read history books. My house is full of books.

When I came to United States, I brought with me a couple of books in Czech. After that I became sad because I didn't have anymore books to read. So, I started to study English. Slowly I could read short stories, then, fashion magazines. Later on I could read the newspaper and finally an English book. Now, I enjoy reading several books from the library. Every week I will drive to Key West Book Store and buy books for my little private home library.

Martina Bublakova is from the Czech Republic and attends the Adult Education and Career Center in Key West

Kelly's Story

I dropped out of Citrus High School when I was sixteen. I didn't think I needed my diploma. All I wanted to do at that time was hang out with friends and sleep in. I always said I wouldn't get pregnant as a teenager. When I hit seventeen I found out I was pregnant. I was terrified! During the nine months of being pregnant I knew I needed my GED. I wanted to get my GED and start a career. I didn't want to work for minimum wage and week by week. I wanted to live comfortably. I also wanted to be a good example for my son, Hayden. So I started at WTI for two hours a day and two days a week. I took my test and failed. So I stopped going to WTI and started going at a great school called Even Start, a school for only parents.

Starting at Even Start was the best thing I could have done for my son, Hayden, and me. My son loves coming to school and seeing

Mrs. Becky, Mrs. Connie, and Mrs. Sandy. I've noticed a big difference in Hayden. Hayden plays very well with other children and he shares well, too. Mrs. Connie and Mrs. Sandy do all kinds of neat learning activities with the children. Hayden loves bringing his projects home and showing the family.

If it wasn't for Mrs. Seijas, I wouldn't be able to write a decent essay. The essay is what stopped me from getting my GED. Mrs. Seijas made me write essay after essay until I was ready to take the GED. I took the GED test and passed. Now I have my GED. I feel so much better about myself!

I also like that Even Start has a parenting class in with the school. Mrs. Quinn is the parenting teacher. She has taught me a lot. I read to Hayden very little before I started here. She taught me that reading to your child is very important. It's the first step to your child reading. Since I started Even Start, I've probably read Hayden hundreds of books. I see the difference in Hayden. Before, Hayden didn't sit and let me read to him. Now he loves for me to read to him.

Kelly Burlew is in the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Crystal River

My Goals and Ambitions

In my early teenage years I realized that I had a lot of goals and ambitions that I would like to see completed. One of my first goals in life was to move out of my father's house and get my own place. Another goal of mine was to get my driving license. When I had achieved these goals it just seemed like the more goals I completed the more driven I became.

After getting my driving license I decided to get a car and that's what I did. My first car was a Ford Escort. I paid for it with my taxes. Now it was time for me to start a career, not just for me, but for my son. I decided to go to school to become a CNA. It took

me thirty days to complete school. In January of 2008 I took and passed the State CNA exam. I thought I was going to make all this money being a CNA. In my first job as a CNA I was not making as much as I thought I would, plus the job was not stable, so I kept looking until I found something in which I was satisfied. Once I found a position that was secure and had adequate pay I started looking into buying a house. This process took me about 8 months to complete.

Now I am focusing on my present and future goals. I attend the Women's Center of Jacksonville 3 times a week for GED classes. When I am finished with my GED I will go to school to become a nurse. I would also like to start some of my own businesses, such as a nursing home, daycare center or a home health agency. I think I have a lot of ambition. Accomplishing one goal always motivates me to set another. Everyone should follow their dreams and set goals no matter how old you are.

Laneisha Byrd is a student at the Women's Center of Jacksonville

ANGELS

It's been a while since I've seen you,
but I think of you everyday.

When I do, I want to cry,
but I kneel down and pray,

I pray the angels are with you,
when you go to sleep,
when you are awake,
and when you are feeling weak.

I send with them my love,
no doubt they fly fast,
to bring it to your doorstep,
from the first to the very last.

The angels know you're my baby,
no matter how much you grow.
They are always watching you;
I just wanted you to know.
So, when you are feeling sad,
and you're wearing a long frown,
just know that your angels are always above,
always looking down.

April Calhoun is in the GED Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

The Economy

My topic is about the economy. Lots of the hard times are due to the war, oil prices, and even the food prices going up. I have a lot of stress for myself and my family. My husband works most of the time, but we still have a hard time making ends meet. We used to be able to go out to theme parks and go out to eat on weekends, but now things are tough for a lot of families.

I met my husband 10 years ago. We met by chance and we started a family soon after we got married. First we had a daughter and soon after came a son. We moved to Houston, where we lived for a few years only to return to Florida due to work-related issues. Soon after we got here, work has slowed down to a snail's pace. We sometimes have to make decisions on what bills to pay, hoping and praying that we made the right choice since we are part of a struggling economy. I see we are not the only ones going through these hard times. But even in the bible it is written that we will go through trials and tribulations.

So if we have faith and hope, we will see daylight ahead. So let's be patient; we know that President Obama cannot change the world in one day; not even God could create heaven and earth in one day. So we can rest to sure that time will get better so let's hope that

everyone is strong enough to survive. My only fear is that our children will get the short end of the stick because they are our future and what happens now will leave an effect for a long time.

Ramona Cardawa attends Grows Family Literacy Council in Apopka

Questions

Why is it I get this ripping tearing feeling?
Where do I put it?
How do I release it?
What is it made from?
Lonely pain, trying to find a friendly name
and face to take its place ?
Have you ever been so lonely and lost?
Would you do anything no matter what the cost?
Just to be free?

To be free from the lonely darkness
that has covered your soul...
To be able to open up your heart
even if you don't know where to go?

Erin Caron is in the GED Program at Gadsden

What is Your Dream?

When I was at school in my country, I thought that studying English was a good idea, but I wasn't sure it was good for me. One day my English teacher told me that I was very good in English. She suggested that I study it. I still wasn't sure because at that time I had some problems. I had to come back to the United States to take care of my problems.

I came to the United States and stayed with a very good American family. They asked me what I wanted to do. I told them I wanted to study English. They thought that was a good idea. I was scared, but I really wanted to follow this dream. People think it is very hard. It is, but if you want to do it, you can.

I don't know about the future, but I know I am very thankful to God for my family and friends and for my very good teachers. I'll never forget the support and help I received. My English teacher said, "Never say no to your dreams because tomorrow might be too late. Never forget what you have learned and always keep it in your heart forever!"

Denia B. Carrales is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

. "Omen" Fortune or Curse

It was a quiet December night, when the silence and tranquility of the village of San Lazaro was broken by cries of a new born baby boy. The son of Natalia and Lorenzo Carillo. The mid-wife assisting was shocked to see the baby was born with a Kaul or a Veil on his face. At that time it was believed that whoever was born with a veil was either cursed or of good luck. One night everybody was awakened by the screams of the baby. He had been crying as if something was hurting him really bad. No one could figure out what was wrong suddenly he stopped and went back to sleep. His parents were confused they didn't know what happened. But the only tragic thing that had happened that night was the death of his uncle.

As the boy was growing up the sudden screams and desperate crying would only happen when relatives and close friends of the family would die, or were about to die. His mother grew more concerned as she noticed the odd occurrence. No one could give her an answer to this bizarre situation. As he became a teenager anxiety, sadness, and depression were the signs of an

upcoming tragedy. All this feelings would mysteriously disappear as he became aware of the news.

One rainy afternoon the boy and his cousin were left to care for some equipment that was near the cane fields the family owned when a strange noise caught his attention. He walked out to the road and saw a man figure with white clothes and white hat zig - zagging in his direction, but somehow never getting nearer. He tried to show his cousin but he couldn't see it. Turning, his cousin said you better stop playing around and please stop making up stories about your weird ghost sightings. While jogging after school with his friend down the same road he came to an abrupt stop. His friend could not see anything, he was the only one. After twenty nine years and after many weird feelings and ghostly sightings, I ask myself, am I fortunate or am I cursed?

Yamil Carrillo, from Belize, is in the Collier County Literacy Program

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is my home. The reason I enjoy being at home is because I can do whatever I desire. When I am at home, I can relax and have peace of mind with no interruptions. If I want to cook all day, I can do just that with no interruptions which is just the way I like it. I really don't like people in my kitchen when I'm cooking. So when at home, I really enjoy my time, space, and opportunity to do whatever.

Carla Carroll is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Samantha's Story

It all started when I moved back from New York. I enrolled back into Crystal River High. They told me none of my credits would count. Then about a month before I turned sixteen, I found out I was pregnant. I admit I thought it was the end for me. I'll never be able to catch up now, I thought, so I dropped out.

Then I heard about WTI's pregnancy program. My mother and I were so excited! When the school year started back, I went and enrolled. It was difficult. I was up until one in the morning, sick, then I had to be on the bus at four in the morning (not to mention I was huge – being 7 ½ months pregnant).

Well, it didn't look like I was going to graduate on time, so Mrs. Eckstein told me about Even Start. She told me if I worked hard I would be able to graduate in 2009 like I was supposed to.

So, I went and checked out Even Start. They told me I had to wait until my daughter was born and got her shots. Finally, the day came. On September 28th I received the best gift ever - my daughter. In December, I went back and got into Even Start.

They were good to my daughter and to me. We got parenting classes, home visits, and lots of support. The school year came to an end. We still did work out of school and met up at the library for stories. It was great. As soon as the school year started back up I was ready. Then I started having lots of family problems. One day my daughter had a fever of 104.6 degrees. I was scared because my uncle got brain damage from a fever. When it went down I was very clingy with my daughter. I didn't want to leave her and it made it harder to study. I started getting discouraged with school. I felt I needed a job instead. I got too overwhelmed and dropped out. Family problems got worse and now I was wishing I never left Even Start because they were like a second family to me, so I went back.

Personally I felt more mature. I learned what I would be missing if I didn't finish. They put me in for my GED test in December. I got a part-time job working after school. It made me feel better because I was able to go to school and make money to support my daughter. On days I wanted to just lay in bed, I had my husband and mother pushing me to get in. I got the result! I passed with the Class of 2009 just like I was supposed to.

Samantha Catrett attends the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Crystal River

Hope

"Since we cannot change reality, let us change the eyes that see reality." Nikos Kazantzakis

Last year we saw many alarming economic events. Prestigious firms such as Lehman Brothers collapsed, and Merrill Lynch was taken over by Bank of America. The insurance conglomerate AIG was bailed out by the federal government, and Seattle-based Washington Mutual was under a cloud. Financial meltdown, corporate bankruptcy, inflation and economic crisis are everywhere. If you turn on the TV or listen to the news on the radio, you soon notice that these words occupy a large amount of time. During the news, the financial trouble of some large banks has sent shock waves through the stock market resulting in a downward shift in many people's portfolios. Seniors wonder if their savings will last. Young adults wonder if they will ever be able to retire.

Sixty-eight percent of the people in the US are feeling financial pressure. People have stopped buying homes; instead they are using their money on everyday expenses. Small companies are rapidly going out of business. Families are in such a strain that they have stopped paying their mortgages and are defaulting on their loans.

In this turbulent environment two things remain steadfast. They are faith and hope. Will things get better? I believe that they will (being the optimist I am), but of course, I cannot answer that question. How long will it take? I certainly cannot answer that one either. What I do know is that everything happens for a reason and what we see happening to us today is only the building block for tomorrow. No matter how hard times seem, how stressful times are, how hopeless times feel, or how helpless we may feel, the one thing we always have is the strength and resources within us to keep a positive attitude and to keep the hope that pushes us forward.

Is this a huge depression? Or has the media blown it out of proportion in order to capitalize on negative news? After every downturn, recession or depression, the US economy has come back stronger than ever. In the late 1920's and early 1930's, the US had the Great Depression. The country survived. In the early to mid 70's, when gas prices doubled, again the country survived. In the 80's, when the stock market lost 20% of its value in a matter of a week, the country survived again.

Economic health requires that we work together; changing attitudes could be the first stop. We must trust again, have faith and hope. With this and perseverance, we will not only survive - we will thrive.

Anna Maria Ceballos is from Venezuela and attends English Café' at Southwest Regional in Pembroke Pines

The Long Way

I was born in a little town called Camoapa, Nicaragua, on October 20, 1971. When I decided to go to the United States, I was twenty two years old. It was a very hard and sad decision, because I would be leaving my mother, my brothers, my friends,

my house, and my culture. I had never been separated from my family.

On February 2, 1994, I boarded a plane to Guatemala. Flying in an airplane was a new experience. I was very nervous. I began to cry thinking about my family. I didn't want to leave my country, but I needed to work to help my mother. Two days after I arrived in Guatemala I needed to continue my trip. The plan was to travel from Guatemala to Mexico, through Tijuana, to San Diego. There were about fifty people wanting to go to the United States. We did not have transportation. We had to walk with groups of people from different South American countries. The persons who were helping us to cross the frontier were from Mexico.

My trip lasted fourteen days, but it felt like one year. We were cold. We slept on the ground. I was afraid of snakes and other animals. It started to rain. We had no shelter. We had no food for two days. Then we came to the desert. There was no place to shower or wash. The hours for traveling were from twelve o'clock (midnight) to two o'clock in the morning. It was always dark. When we ate, after two days, the guides gave us bad food. I was feeling very bad. I threw up. I thought, "I cannot believe they gave us that horrible food." I wanted to go back to my home, my country, my Nicaragua, but it was too late.

One day during our travels, Immigration got knowledge about some groups trying to cross the frontier and decided to follow us. We ran, ran, and ran because we do not want to get caught. Then we needed to cross a bridge. I could not run any more. I was very tired. I fell to the ground three or four times. My knees hurt me. The people walking with me offered to help me. I was too weak and tired to cross the bridge. Two men lifted me with each arm and I said, "I can not do it. I can not cross the bridge." The people told me to run or I would be left behind. I said, "No, I can't." But, I did! A tunnel lay ahead. We needed to pass through this tunnel. We did not know what was inside the tunnel. I could not stand up because the tunnel was very low and very narrow. The only way to travel to the other end was to crawl on our hands and knees. My head touched the butt of the other

person who was going in front of me. It was so dark I could not see my hands. There were rocks and dirty water that smelled bad, I could barely breathe. I needed water to drink. I carried all my possessions in my back-pack, including clothes, jacket, and shoes.

After we crossed the frontier to San Diego, the guides provided transportation to a safe place. The guides used a little car and put us in the trunk of the car. In my case, four women were inside the trunk. We were like matches in a box. I could not move and was hardly able to breathe. I am not sure how I survived, but finally I arrived in the United States of America. Thank you God!

Maria Cerda is a student at Miami Dade College, Homestead Campus, in the ESOL/ABE Program

A Turning Point in My Life

Hi, my name is Angel Chamberlain. I came to the United States from Taiwan in 1973. I was born in Taichung, Taiwan in 1949. I have three brothers and one sister. I am the oldest. I am married, and I have two sons and I am a grandmother of two. And I love them very much.

I have a little story to tell about my life. All my life I wanted to learn to read and write, since I was a little girl. However, life gets in the way. When I was eight years old, I quit school and went to work to help my parents. I worked ten hours a day with one day off a month. I got married when I was 20 years old. I came to the United States when I was 23 years old. At the time my husband needed me to help him with our financial situation, so I went to work.

I have been working in the factory for 32 years. I am a seamstress. Sometimes I have the dream about going to school, but I have to help my family first. At work some of my coworkers have laughed at me because they found out I could not read and

write. I remember well the day I was hurt and I went home. I was crying. A person without a good education cannot find a better job. You always have to take the lowest job. This is why we are in need of a better education, to learn to read and write.

One day my good friend Anna and I got to talking about education. She said any person should have an education. Then I told her I cannot read and write. She told me I needed help. The next day she gave me the name of the Hillsborough Literacy Council and the phone number to call. She said "They will help you!" I have been in the Hillsborough Literacy Program since August 2005. I have learned knowledge and confidence. I am able to read street signs and many books. When my husband and I go to restaurants I can read the menu. He does not have to read them for me any more. I have quit my job, and I do not have to work any more. My husband is supporting me, so I can continue with my education.

My goal is to be able to write very well by January 2010. I want to be my own boss. This is my goal and my dream! I want to give special thanks to my dear friend Anna. God bless her soul, Anna gave me the phone number to call. Special thanks to Hillsborough Literacy Council, who helps me out and gave me the opportunity to learn. I am so grateful that you can help me out. My tutor is Jessie Bush. I am glad she gives me the home work. She even checks my home work. I think it is great I have a good teacher. Thank you so much. You are the best.

Please tell your friends about the Hillsborough Literacy Council and tell them about the education. It is very important to our life. We must learn as much as we can for our life. Without education it is like being without light. Please don't laugh at those who cannot read. It is not right to be laughed at. Please help them out, like my dear friend helped me. Tell them it is a wonderful gift to be able to read and write.

P.S. I will continue to work hard for my education.

Angel Chamberlain is a student at the Hillsborough Literacy Council

Friends Forever

Polo Montenez, friend; a lover of the simple things.
Forever humble and true to his roots,
my thoughts are always with you.
I identify myself with you.
I wish that you can be my friend forever.
I deserve to imitate your being.
This is what my heart is telling me to do.
You are not with us today,
but our people and the word are smiling forever,
because of you and your music.
The music you humbly continued,
giving us happiness even at the height of your career.
You and your music never changed.
Your name should echo in the mountains!
You are our Cuban idol, reminding me of Beny More
and Camilo Sin Fuegos Benny, Camilo, Polo;
authentic guys from our town. You are like Beny, with the same
cultural background ...self-educated and a natural “Guajiro”.
That is why we all love you and feel sad that you are gone.
We will always remember you, our thoughts are with you.
Every time we listen to your music,
every beat of our heart becomes a memory. In every song we can
feel your soul’s poetic message from our awesome creator.
Today, I feel so sorry about your death.
Today is also the National Olympics in Cuba.
Your voice turned off at the same moment the Olympic flame
turned on.
I wish you were there at the opening ceremony to sing your songs
to inspire us all.

You sang to Jose Marti, our apostle;
the man who gave to the universe everything he had.
That is why you will always be with us,
in our hearts and in our minds.

Zulema Gonzalez Chavez, is a student at the Parent Power Family Literacy Academy

Learning English

I have a plan to learn English and to use it comfortably. At first I just wanted to learn English to make a high score on tests for getting a job, but now I really want to be fluent in English. Speaking freely with Americans and laughing while watching American movies is my dream. I decided to keep studying English after I go back to my country, Korea.

I have tried to learn English by diverse experiences. I think that being used to foreigners' good pronunciations is the first step to learning English. I could not understand whatever somebody told me in spite of easy words that I had already known, so I have watched American TV every day more than one hour. I could not understand all they said, but it is good for me to be familiar with foreigners' pronunciation.

Also, I am a student in an ESL class. I really like to go to my class three times a week. I can learn English step-by-step in reading, grammar, pronunciation, speaking and writing in my class. My teacher makes it interesting to learn, so I want to go to the school.

I usually do volunteer work folding the region's newspaper in a service center with my grandmother every Wednesday afternoon. I can meet American people and talk to them in English, and they sometimes offer good foods and drinks to me. This is a good chance for me to learn English.

I do not have my car, so I cannot go anywhere by myself. When I have a chance to go somewhere with my family, I always go to see and hear everything to help me to learn English. The experience in contacting real American life makes me understand the American culture, so I always follow my aunt and cousin somewhere, just like their pet.

It is not easy for me to become used to English, but I will study hard. I have already spent a lot of time studying English in America. I hope that as time goes on, I will get good at speaking English. I will do my best.

Jang Kyu Choi is in the ESL class at Northwest Florida State College

I Voted

One reason I voted was because I recently registered to vote for the very first time. The second reason is because the person I was voting for was talking about change that reflected on my life. The third reason is that it is an honor to vote if you can vote. Do it! Now, I'm going to tell you how I voted.

First, it was a Saturday morning. My parents and I had all decided to go down and vote together. It was so exciting because it was my first time voting out of my 19 years here on Earth. On the way down to the election office, I was so nervous. Once we arrived, I saw the long line. It looked as if everybody was trying to vote. When it came my time, I showed them my license and they gave me my voting ballot, and I went to a booth and voted. After I got through, I was so happy and proud!

Second, what really made me want to vote was watching the news, and the person I voted for was talking about change. I was happy to hear positive things about how the world could be if

he were elected President, and I really feel like he cared about what is going on.

Third, I feel like if you can vote, you should. It is an honor, not everyone can vote. However, if you are eligible to vote, please do so. Every vote counts and your vote can make a difference. Voting is a way of making a difference, and that matters a lot.

Finally, now you know my three reasons on why I voted. It was my first time, and it was the right President I had wanted to vote for, and it is an honor to vote!

Sava Choice is in the ABE class in Pensacola

Why I Came to the United States

I came to the United States because I married an American man. My husband had been staying with me in my country China about eight years. It was time to go back to learn about my husband's country. I decided to go back to America. I wanted to know more about my husband and his family. That could help me know about his thinking and communication.

I did not want to be selfish. My husband did not speak Chinese, so that made it very hard for him to live in my country. It was time for me to cross the line to learn about the American way. This is why I came to the United States. The reasons were to learn about America, to know more about my husband and his family and to develop an easy relationship for a healthy marriage. It will be a long way to go.

Mei-Ching Chuang is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach

My Favorite Place

I would have to say that my favorite place is California. One of the reasons why California is my favorite place is because I was born there. You never get bored because there is a lot to do. Another reason why California is my favorite place is because that is where all of my family lives. I know that just because I was born in California is not a reason for it to necessarily be my favorite place, but it is. I was raised in Lake City after we moved from California when I was six or seven years old. We have gone back and forth to visit, but never to stay for good.

California is so full of life. It is nothing like Lake City because there is plenty of stuff to do like, go to the San Diego Charger games, go to the beach, or go to Disney Land. In Lake City, you can't go to any of these places. The closest thing to a beach here is a lake. You have to go all the way to Jacksonville to see the beach.

Another reason why I love California is because all of my family lives there. My Mom, sisters, aunts, and uncles all live there. The last time that I saw my Mom was when I was six years old. That is okay, because when I get my GED and get a job, I plan on going back to see them. I've just shared many reasons why California is my favorite place. Now, I would like to hear about your favorite place.

Carl Coleman is a student at Columbia County's Adult Education Program

Why My Home is Special to Me

A place that is special to me is my home. It is important to me because I worked so hard for it. It is a place I can also run away to and get away from outside problems. It is a place where my family and I can have fun together. That is why my home is special to me.

The first reason that my home is a special place is because I worked so hard to get it. My boyfriend, Cody, and I have worked on our jobs to bring in extra money, to get our place. We went through living with a lot of people and dealing with people who had bad ways. Going through that showed me how important it would be to have our own home. We saved our money and got our own apartment. That made my family's life a lot easier. My family and I all really appreciate having our own place.

The second reason my home is special place for me is that I can get away from outside problems. When I have problems at school, work, or anywhere else, being at home always makes them easier to handle. As soon as I step one foot in my home, life just feels better. Sometimes I think of my home as a peaceful getaway.

The last reason why my home is special to me is because it is where my family and I have fun. One of the things we do that is fun is movie night. We pop popcorn, get a couple of movies and enjoy each other all night long. Other things we do together to have fun at home are play games, read books, and play I spy. Meal time is also special because we are all together in the kitchen and then at the dinner table. Those are the three reasons why my home is special to me.

Tyshecia Coleman is a student in the Even Start program in Clearwater

The Carnival

The Dominican Republic celebrates “The Carnival” on February 27th. It is so exciting and colorful. Men and teenager boys wear animal masks that they make from wet newspaper. When the mask is dry, it is painted.

They wear colorful and bright clothes with a long piece of fabric flowing from their heads. They put little dolls, bells, feathers and mirrors that sparkle in the sun. The costumes are called “Diablo

Cojuelo”, meaning “the devil.” The Diablo Cojuelo carry balloons made of dried pig bladders. They hit the young people with them. It was scary and exciting.

Every weekend in February the children wait for them to come. When they pass by the houses, the kids hide and then follow three blocks behind to see the fun without getting hit.

The last day of the celebration is February 27th. Many groups of Diablos Cojuelo come out, as well as men couples dressed as man and wife. It’s so funny because the fake husband will pick up the wife to make people laugh. Some guys play music to the couple’s dancing. “The Carnival” is a great way to remember the independence of the Dominican Republic.

Consuelo Concepcion is from the Dominican Republic and is a student of the Bradenton Literacy Council

My Life Experiences

I am from Peru. I was in the Peruvian navy for many years. I liked the beauty of the ocean and watching the fish. At night, the moon and stars seemed very near. It felt romantic and good. After a while, however, I got tired of the navy. I had a crisis in my life. I found help from the Lord in 1985. I came to the United States. I have opportunities here to make money and be happy. This was not possible for me in Peru. This is the best place for me. The people are very nice and I am glad to be here.

Miguel Condor is from Peru and is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

Why My Education is Important to Me

My education is very important to me for several reasons. It is a gateway to my success and a career path of my choice. In addition, having an education will help me obtain a higher paying job. Finally, by pursuing my education, I will be setting an example for my daughter as a role model.

To begin with, successfully completing my GED and then continuing to graduate with a degree will open several career paths. Certain jobs I am not qualified to do because I currently lack the education and experience will no longer be an obstacle. As a degreed graduate, I will have the training and certifications to show I am willing to make the commitment to learn and process what is needed to effectively demonstrate the skills and attitude employers are seeking.

Secondly, I will be able to make a more privileged income. Dead end or fast food jobs do not meet the financial needs of my family. I need an elevated income and to become financially successful. I want to work in a career that is both satisfying and can support the financial needs of my family. I am currently considering a career as a sonographer with a two year degree.

Lastly, I will be setting an example for my baby. She can learn from errors and my successes. Education will be a success for her in ways that it was not for me early on. I will be providing her with the oversight and school involvement that will compel her to be successful in school. She will see firsthand that hard work and dedication are the formula for educational success.

In conclusion, those are my three main reasons for the importance of an education. Education and career is a gift and opportunity that is not to be wasted. I can hardly wait to get started creating opportunities for my daughter. She is my life, I want her to be proud of me and I know she will.

Christina Conover is a student at Even Start in Pinellas County

A Turning Point

They asked us to write an essay on several topics and I chose a turning point in my life. I reached that point several years ago when a drastic change happened in my life. I was living pretty much the American dream. I was married had a house, a job, a car, and a boat. It was everything a young couple could want and worked hard to get. I was proud of us and we were striving to do more. Then one day, I didn't know it then, but my life would change forever. I woke up feeling very sick. That was odd for me because I never got sick. I made an appointment with the doctor. When I got there he told me that I had a bad sinus infection and gave me a medication to take for the next 14 days. I did but only got worse.

I went back and he gave me a different medicine. I found myself getting worse and worse, so what did I do? I called my mom. We always seem to do that because Moms always seem to know what to do. She came over and saw how bad I was and said even my eyes looked like they weren't focusing right. She called the doctor and brought me back in. He said it was probably an allergic reaction to the medication and gave me another new medicine. Mom took me home and stayed with me until my husband got home. A couple of days later feeling no better and my eyes seemed to get blurry. I stopped taking the medicine per the doctor and made an appointment to see him the next morning.

That night when I went to bed, little did I know how my life would change forever. I woke up, opened my eyes, and could not see anything. I woke my husband up and told him that I could not see at all. He told me to stop playing and I had to tell him I was serious. He got upset and jumped up and called the doctor. He told me to come in immediately. When I got there, he sent me directly to the eye doctor. The eye doctor said I need to go down the road to the neurosurgeon because I have pressure on my brain. My husband and I got to the neurosurgeon and when he examined me, he told us that I needed to check into the hospital right then. He believed I had either a brain tumor or a blood clot and it needed

to be taken care of as soon as possible. So I did it without calling my family first. They put me in a MRI for a couple of hours. They then put me in a room and finally came to me with the results. I had something called mastitis which is a severe sinus infection that had no where to drain itself. It clotted the back of my brain and, in the process, the clots severed my optic nerve and I was completely blind. I would have to take several medications to dissolve the clots and possibly a surgery or two and I might then be able to see again.

I stayed in the hospital for over a month with the same results: no eyesight. I would have to have surgery. I went home and what a turning point for me! I had to learn to do things without being able to see. I didn't want anyone feeling sorry for me, I wanted to do it on my own. Everybody who loved me and was around me, was crying and upset but I refused to give up. I got a Seeing Eye dog named Sunshine and took classes and learned to do for myself. Somewhere along the line my life changed again. My husband could not handle me being blind. Money was tight because I wasn't working. All the things we had worked so hard for didn't seem so important and bills kept piling up. I would like to be able to say that there was a happy ending to all of this and in some ways there is. I had two surgeries and after a year and a half of being blind, I could now see enough to function but I still have no side vision.

Sunshine the dog was one of my biggest blessings. My husband and I divorced but are still good friends. We both had to start over. I found out how important your eyesight is as well as how important family and friends are in your life. I never take anything in my life for granted, good or bad. I am a firm believer in the fact that everything happens for a reason. We may not know the reason at the time, but eventually, we will know. I am a completely better person because of going through this experience.

Jane Cooper is in the ABE program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Testing

Life comes with many tests
We have the choice to either pass or fail
Congratulations to all those who get it right on the very first try
But there are many who have failed maybe once, twice
Or several times

Making the right choice is something only you can do
You may be one of those who have failed a test or two
But you know that you are not alone

Yes, you may feel as though the tests in your life have been unfair
Don't stress because we all have our faults
There is really no need for you to compare
Strive not to be like those who have carried out their destiny
Living a life full of regrets and despair

What separates you from the rest is the choice you decide to make
Will you accept defeat or will it be a risk you take?
The choice is solely yours; it is your happiness at stake

You may be afraid, confused, feeling lost and hopeless
But with every step and test you must strive to remain focused
Continuing to hold on while giving your very best indeed
One day your diligence will be noticed

No one ever said that this thing called life would be easy
You will have vulchers flying all around saying
"You cannot succeed"

To make a better life for yourself is your choice, not mine
I encourage you to get started now
Because you never know when you will be given the last time
You have the power to let a smile on your face stop the crying

Shara Cooper is a teacher's aide at the Broward Correctional Institution

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are to catch up on my learning skills. I am currently attending an Adult Education class so I can get my GED and go to college to become a Patient Care Technician. When I was in high school I should have paid more attention to what a diploma was all about, but I wasn't caring about that. I was just ready to graduate and receive my diploma. I later learned you cannot do anything with that mentality. I now know, but I guess I had to learn it on my own.

Attending the Adult Education class is a first step and I am going to put all my might into coming to classes every day and learning. I am so tired of working minimum wage slaving over a hot stove. I want to do something that I will enjoy until I can't enjoy it anymore. Better yet, I don't want my kids to see me struggle. I don't want them to come home from school with the lights out, phone turned off, or even having an eviction notice on the door.

My kids admire me and they tell me every day that they love me and my oldest daughter tells me she wants to be like me. I tell her that I want them to be better than me. They are the reason why I returned to school to better myself and to make sure that my kids have the things that they need in life, because nobody is going to do it but me. These are the many reasons why I made the decision that I was going to get an education.

Trishina Cooper attends Columbia County Adult Education

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

I am having a very good experience in adult education. Because of the knowledge that I get from teachers, I feel that adult education has improved dramatically. Teachers in adult education care about

their students and, of course, they have the knowledge to teach them. We, students, should appreciate our teachers.

First, I'd like to say that my experience in adult education was mostly online. I have been learning to polish all my subjects in order to get my GED. At adult education they make it easy to learn. While at home, using internet you can learn a lot. Day or night, I was able to learn more about algebra and science during my online class than I did during my regular school time. With adult education I have improved in algebra, essay and science. Those are the areas that I was having trouble with learning at school.

Second of all, I think that no matter if the classes are online or not, you still need to have a good teacher to help you learn. I am lucky to have a great teacher during my adult education experience. Thanks to her, one of the best teachers there, I have been learning a lot. My teacher doesn't just push students to get their GED. She is there to help, teach and support all the time. I really appreciate my teacher as well as other teachers who created online classes.

In conclusion, I recommend that people should give adult education a chance if they don't have a diploma. One thing for sure - after you get your diploma or GED at adult education or anywhere else, you will feel good about yourself.

Miguel Coronado has been taking GED classes online at MTI for over a year

Watching the View

Sitting on my bunk watching the view,
when you're sitting in prison there isn't much you can do.

Some girls argue, some girls fight,
some go creeping, when you turn out the light.

Some talk crap and tell a tale,
others tell the story of how they landed in jail.

Some sold dope standing on the block,

others would steal to smoke rock.
Some used guns, others used knives,
when it comes down to it, we all were wives.
I had a house, kids, and even a car,
with life on the street, I didn't get far.
I'm sitting in prison, because of the life that I knew,
sitting on my bunk just watching the view.

Carrie Corlett is in the GED Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Why I Came to Florida

I was born in Puerto Rico. It's beautiful and I love it. However, my daughter has been sick since she was twelve years old. She has epilepsy. Her health got worse. She now has three children and needs a lot of help. We made the decision to come to Florida for her to get good healthcare. My daughter has gotten good attention here. Her condition is better.

Martha Coto (Delia) is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech.

The River

Her impetuous barriers finally evolved
And enveloped her languid mind,
Vivid images at war played in front of her
Causing blindness by design.

And while in her shallow lair she holds,
Trepidations in eyes so cold.

Standing high on arid ground that surrenders
Towards the tides of her emotion,
Mark the ravages of time marching past her

And the wisdom of mellifluous motion.

And as she's slogging hip-high through the mire,
Her 10,000 tears have drowned all desire.

The thirsty banks of her river are littered
With fragments of her future,
And decayed bodies of the foolishly intent
Still wishing they could be near her.

All blinded by the brilliance closely held outside,
All hooked by the 10,000 tears she cried.

These feeble boundaries laden with bends
Have taken all her strength to willfully defend.
With exertion of agonizing force it appears,
We have silently conquered what constructed our fears.

Anonymous

The Rural Girls

My name is Sorn and I was born in a small village in Thailand. I was too small when I was a baby. They didn't think I would live, but I'm alive today and this is a story about my childhood and how I came to America. My parents were rice farmers. They also planted long green beans, red peppers, and many other kinds of vegetables for themselves and to give to our neighbors and our cousin who lived nearby. When I was young I went to elementary school, but I also had to work on our farm with my parents and my brothers. I really didn't like to work on the farm. I worked very slow and was always upset until my older brother would tell me I could stop work to rest or do anything I wanted. Those were my happy times, because I could go inside the small forest close to our farm to find fruits to eat with my younger brother.

We lived without electricity. I remember when electric power came to our village around 1988 when I was 17 years old. In my whole village, only my aunt's house had a television. It was a black and white television that used batteries. I loved to watch the TV on Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays at 8:00 o'clock each night. It was my favorite time because nearly all children in the village sat in the big room downstairs in my aunt's house to watch movies. My aunt turned it off when commercials came on, to save the batteries. During commercials, we sat in the dark quietly and tried not to make my aunt angry.

Each night after dinner, I walked to the big yard by my aunt's house. All my friends knew that place, because we always met there to play together. There were six of us girls in the group and we loved to play beauty contest. We would decide who was the most beautiful and talented. I always won, and was crowned "Miss Thailand", because my dear friend always got to decide the winner. It also helped that my friend and I were the oldest of the group. While we were playing, if we saw an airplane in the sky we would all yell, "Hello! Hello! Hello!" and make loud noises. We would watch the planes lights until they were gone. I always wondered how it would feel to sit in an airplane. I never thought it would happen, until I met my husband in Thailand. Thanks to him, I made my first trip to America last year.

I flew alone and was it was so exciting. A person from another country sat beside me, and when we landed in Japan, he helped me carry my heavy bag. He also gave me directions before he left for another airplane. I was very thankful to him for helping me. Next, I flew from Japan to Minneapolis, changed airplanes and downloaded my suitcases again. This time I met a Thai lady that spoke little Thai because she grew up in America. She tried to speak Thai and helped me as best she could. Once I got my suitcases and knew what to do next, she left me for her next plane. I'm thankful for all the kind people that helped me and make my first airplane trip a wonderful experience. All of them reminded me of Thailand. In my country we're told to always try to help each other, especially visitors from other countries

traveling in Thailand. After my wonderful trip, I know why that is so important. Now when I see somebody that needs help, I never hesitate to do what I can.

Napasorn Crown is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville

The Worst Place I Have Ever Eaten

The worst place I have ever eaten at was Cheese Burger Cheese Burger. It all started out when my mom wanted to go out as a family just me, my brother, my mom and my step dad. My mom asked my step dad where he would like to go eat at. He said that he would like it if we could go to Cheese Burger Cheese Burger. He said he wanted me to see how big their cheese burgers were. When we go there, my step dad said “Jamie, you should try the one pound cheese burger.” At that time in the back of my mind I was saying to my self that this was going to be great. So I went along with it and said ok. When the giant cheese burger came, I was so happy because I was extremely hungry. As soon as the lady put it in front of me I just started eating. I know what I did was rude but at the time I was so hungry I did not care, after taking a few bites my step dad took one bit of his cheese burger and said that his was not cooked all the way. As soon as he said that, I looked at the cheese burger in my hands. I saw that my cheese burger was not cooked all the way either. I spit the rest of the cheese burger that was still in my mouth in a napkin when no one was looking. My mom looked at me and said your cheese burger is not cooked all the way is it? I said in a disappointed voice no. My step dad got the waiter’s attention and told him his cheese burger was not cooked all the way and to take it back and have it cooked longer. My mom asked me if I wanted to have my cheese burger cooked longer. I said no. I was so disgusted that I told my self that I was never going to eat there again.

Jamie Curtis attends the Golden Gate Adult Learning Center in Naples

Faith Has Faith

I am Faith Cutliff, a recovering addict who has been diagnosed with bipolar syndrome. I have been clean for almost six years. Since I made the decision to turn my life around, I have set several educational goals for myself which I am currently in the process of achieving. My first educational goal was to return to classes and obtain my GED diploma. I accomplished this objective in December of 2003. In January of 2004, I entered credit classes here at Miami Dade College Wolfson Campus with the intent of pursuing an A.S. Degree in Human Services with a concentration in Addiction Counseling Studies. Upon completion of my degree, I would like to focus on additional classes in the field of theology and ultimately, combine my knowledge in these areas to better qualify me to work in the area of adolescent counseling. I want to be able to use my past experiences to council individuals and hopefully prevent them from making the same mistakes that I made earlier in my life.

In addition to my academic pursuits, I am an advocate for the homeless population. Having been homeless myself, I fully comprehend the lifestyle of these people and the importance of programs which target their needs. I am involved with the non-profit organization, the Homeless/Formerly Homeless Forum, as well as the Betterway Treatment Facility and the Homeless Trust. Over the years, I have participated in toy drives, the annual homeless memorial and most recently, the “Miami Cares Day” which brought homeless individuals to the Miami Area for a wide array of services.

My volunteer services are not limited to the homeless. I maintain constant contact with the GED Coordinator here at Wolfson Campus. Each semester, I am invited to speak to the students and convey my life story and how important it is to earn a GED diploma. I am a living testimony that students who have a GED diploma are eligible for scholarships. Moreover, for the past six semesters, I have spoken with students in the off-campus site

located at the Youth Opportunity Center of Transitions, Inc. Talking and sharing with these young people who have been incarcerated and court-mandated to attend classes is challenging and extremely rewarding as I gain experience in my field of study and hopefully make an impact on their lives at the same time.

I was selected by the ACCESS/MEED Departments here at Wolfson to work for the Division of Blind Services as a part time reader for two legally blind students in the GED program. This provided me with the opportunity to help those less fortunate than me and implement my knowledge that I have acquired in my degree studies. Happily, they have gone on to obtain their GED diplomas as well. My experience with them has also helped me to obtain a full-time position as a recovery coach in a local rehabilitation center.

In conclusion, I have dedicated my life to service for others. I am an honor student and I will graduate this year. I have even been invited to become a member of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society. Who would have ever believed that I could accomplish all this?

Faith Cutliff attended the ABE/GED program at the Wolfson Campus at Miami Dade College

100% Nicer and Better

I am Feliza Dale. I was born in the Philippines on January 7, 1954. I am married to a retired military man for 23 years. I have a son and two grandchildren. My life in my home country is so different because my house is made of bamboo and coconut trees. We use bamboo for the floor and stairs. Coconut leaves are woven for the roof and coconut tree trunks for the post. We sleep on the floor of woven palm leaves. We don't have electricity or water inside our house. We use kerosene lamps for lights and firewood for cooking. We don't own a car for transportation. We

use the buses, jeeps, and tricycles. I thank God that I married my husband and that's why I am here. Life here is so much nicer and better than in my home country.

Feliza Dale is in the GED Program at the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

Let Me Tell You About Someone I Admire

The person I admire was born on a small island in the Caribbean called Nevis. His is a very kind and loving man, and I am proud to call him Dad. He is blessed with a beautiful wife, 5 children and 3 grandchildren. He loves and cares about his family. My dad has a very good job as an Oil Inspector. My dad loves to help people. Sometimes he would help people who do not have transportation. I love when he takes us on family trips and also to eat. We go out for breakfast every Saturday morning.

When I do something wrong, my dad will get upset with me, but I know he still loves me. The Lord has blessed my family with a great dad. I love him very much. He always calls me his "Duece." I feel very special when he does. My dad loves to play Dominoes and a game called cricket. He gets very happy when the whole family watches him play. He also likes to buy junk cars, not brand new ones, because he enjoys fixing old cars.

I want my dad to know that I will always be his "Deuce." I love spending time with him. We both love the same kind of music. Elton John is one of our favorite singers. He has many friends and everyone loves him and respects him. My dad doesn't go to church with me, but I know he is still a nice man. He is the best dad ever. Every girl should have a dad like mine.

I pray for my dad everyday that the Lord will always give him joy and peace. I know that God will save him when the right time comes. I thank God for giving me such a wonderful dad and for blessing him and working in his life.

Berlynn Davis is in the ABE Program at Learn to Read in Jacksonville

I Believe

I will accomplish...

.... The freedom to vote
The will to achieve
The pride as L Tote
The strength to believe!

For...

Everybody has an agenda
Though yours may be different then mine,
We all wish to achieve
A life that flourishes with time!

I can only believe in me
For my choices are the chances I take
If only I believed in you
Tell me, what sense would that make?

Being led by a leader, who's as blind as me,
Could sink any ship on a raging sea
Or caged a life that once was free!

So I'll be my guide
As I humble my pride
Depending only on the Llord
As he stands by my side!

My vision will rise above life's tunnel
That lies in the shadows of darkened domain

As I rise above with confidence
To claim, success as my fame!

See yesterday, I had no hope
No vision, no goals, no plan
But today, I have dreams - to focus,
Have direction, and strength to stand.

Tiffany Davis is in the GED Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Trip to Mount Rushmore

Two years ago when I was 49 years old, my boyfriend said, “Let’s go to Mount Rushmore.” We headed to the Black Hills of South Dakota. My boyfriend, Bill, had been there, but I had not. It was so great.

The history of the Black Hills is like something that came out of a book. I had never seen a slot machine, so we stopped in Deadwood, South Dakota, and my boyfriend, Bill, turned me on to gambling for the first time. Deadwood is where Wild Bill Hickok was murdered in a place called Saloon Number 10. The bar is a museum during the daylight hours, and they have an actual shoot-out in the street like it was 130 years ago.

We went to Mount Rushmore the next day. Now this amazing sight took my breath away! It was unbelievable. How can man make such a sight out of Mother Nature?

When we left, on our way home we stopped in a town called Mitchell, South Dakota, to stay the night. The man at the motel told us about a restaurant that was just down the road. Bill and I walked in, and a man in a tuxedo met us at the door. We had been on the road all day, so we were not dressed for this place. But, we sat down anyway, and what a place it was! I had a lobster

and a steak. I have never had a lobster as big as this one. It was a three pound lobster ... one big boy!

What a trip! I will always remember this trip to Mount Rushmore thanks to my boyfriend, Bill.

Kimmie Day attends classes at Seminole Community College

Oye Vida...*Hey Life*

Hey Life, I'm talking to you!
You who have existed with me,
Who have seen me stumble,
And have seen how I recover.

He Life, I'm talking to you!
You who know me well,
Who have lived through my tears
Of sweet scented joy,
And of bitterness tasted.
You who shadow me
Who follow my every step.

He Life, I'm talking to you!
I'm awaiting an "enough"
But you continue to court me,
And although I have fallen
With your encouragement, I rise.

I journey toward my destiny
with You counting my steps.

Hey Life...how far?

Hey Life, until when?
Hey! Life!
Hey!

*Luz Del Valle is a student at the English Café at Southwest Regional Library in
Pembroke Pines*

From Hesitation to Happiness

When I first walked in an Adult Education class, my expectation was a big surprise. Hesitation was the first mode of the evening. Looking at the environment, I almost panicked. It was not what I thought it would be. It looked so chaotic, confusing, and intimidating. The instructor broke the ice by welcoming me to the area. She showed what need to be done to start the evening. Little by little my hesitation changed into a more trusting feeling. I felt welcome and begin to feel at ease.

The biggest fear was when she said to go to the computer. I told her that I have never touched a computer before. She walked me into it and showed me how to start the machine. As the evening rolled into couple of hours, I saw before my eyes that the intimidating piece of equipment is being utilized by me. It looked unbelievable but it is the truth. So, the fear of the computer was overcome. I began to relax knowing that the instructor is there to help me.

After a few evenings, my environment was more visible to me. I noticed the other adult students who are there to learn like me. They are so involved in what they are doing, showing eagerness I've never seen before. These people come from different parts of the world and through them I draw the inspiration that I too could learn.

*Carmelita Delostrinos is from the Philippines and attends the Adult Education
And Career Center in Key West*

Hold on to Your Limits

A beautiful mind, a beautiful soul
You've started out with, and you're slowly spinning out of control.
Slowly turning into a girl with a broken smile
And a twisted mind
You're too far away, you've fallen behind.
You must move forward before you rewind.
You're decaying within.
I wish you could see you're turning into
What used to be me.

My time had come and past,
To me it seemed like fun, a total blast.
You are still young and so am I,
But I realized what was going on, it was an artificial high.
Made you feel like you could fly
Until it drops you down and makes your spirit die.

I know that what you want to do is to be hanging out with
People that are constantly wanting to party
And be on the scene.
But it's making you act different,
Less like an adult
Flirting with the wrong types of guys,
Acting like more of a teen.
It is still okay to go out and dance
And have a good time.
But please, do not mimic others' bad actions,
None of them need a mime.

A beautiful mind, a beautiful soul
You've started out with and are slowly spinning out of control.
You may not see it, and maybe no one else can,
But the ones who don't care to notice,
you wouldn't want to call your friends.
It is the ones that see how you've changed, and what you're
turning into.

They are the ones who really care about what's going on.
They don't want anything to hurt you.
A fake friend won't care how you feel.
They will let you do whatever you want, make a fool out of
yourself,
Drink alcohol and think that it's not a big deal.

A true friend that cares for you
And wants to see you succeed, won't let you endanger your life
with bad habits and drugs that you do not need.
And if you decide not to listen to someone who truly cares and
Is trying to be a genuine and kind friend,
You will throw out all of your limits and drive yourself very close
to the end.
If that happens, you will soon see a girl with a broken smile and a
corrupted mind.
You were intoxicated with too much, and now you are blind.
Blind to see your real friends who really care.
You're fading into a stranger that I do not recognize.
It isn't fair.
You're too far away in a blackened hole.
You've lost your sight.
You've lost your soul.

Franceska Diaz is a student at Broward Community School South

Realize your Dreams

This writing has been dedicated personally, and is also for all those who can identify with it. Many times we believe that life is difficult, especially when something bad happens to ourselves or our families. We feel that perhaps the world is falling apart in front of our eyes. In life there exists moments of sadness and happiness. In everything that you experience day to day, try to take the good and leave the bad that continues to happen and avoid the wanting that ties us.

Every person has wishes, yearnings, objectives, and goals to reach whatever they will be (mother, wife, child, etc). Everyone of us has their own light with which to shine and triumph in this life. The important thing is to propose for ourselves a goal, to be a little more and to do a little more to complete it and in this way successively go on creating more difficult goals to give us notice that we can do it.

In all things that we propose to do, the most important is to do it with pleasure, love, and dedication so that every objective has its reward. I've heard it said in the transcript of my life: this person was born with a star. In my thought each person creates their brilliance. I believe that it's never too late to retake the dreams being somebody in your life, like when you were a child. In this life, the majority of what we wish for is difficult, but not impossible.

We try to struggle for our dreams...
That they are inside us...
Ready to go out and be realized.

Samantha Diaz is from Mexico and attends the GROWS Family Literacy Program in Apopka

Goals and Ambitions by Tammy Diaz

I have many goals and ambitions. My utmost ambition is to spend more quality time with my family. To achieve this I will have to, in the beginning, be away from them a little more. As I attain more of my goals, I will be working my way towards realizing my ambition.

One of my first goals is to get my G.E.D. I am now attending classes at one of our local middle schools, at night to get my G.E.D. certificate. I chose this location for my classes because I

could bring my children with me and they could get help with their homework while I'm studying. When I pass the G.E.D. test, I am planning to start school for something in the medical field. I realize that it may be late in my life to start this ambition, but with the times the way they are, I have heard that the medical field is the field to get into. Everyone will always need some kind of health care.

I have investigated the medical field online and after I finish school I have established that I will pretty much be able to have my pick of jobs. One field that truly interests me is becoming a midwife. I will probably have to intern somewhere, but after that, I would love to start my own center. This is a dream of mine. To have a full range of Homeopathic and midwifery services available to pregnant women.

To spend time with my family in my own home would be the ultimate goal. My family and I have pretty much lived in condominiums and apartments since we have been a family. For nine years we have thought about how nice it would be to have a backyard for our children to play in. A yard for our dog to run in and to have a shop for my husband to tinker in. As for me, I would love to run my center from my home. Yes, I realize that it will take more time away from them initially, but it will all be worth it in the end.

Tammy Diaz is an Adult Education student in Manatee County

Why I am Taking this English Class

I am taking this English class so I can improve my English skills to make my life easier. My family has been living in the United States for twenty-two years. All of these years I have been worried about jobs and making more money. Now, I want to go to school to learn English so I can communicate with my family. I would

like to have more of a role with my children and their school. I also want to go to GED class.

I want to be able to communicate with my family. When we are sitting on the couch and having a normal conversation, I want to express my thoughts and ideas. I want to talk comfortably with them. Another reason I am learning English is to be able to help with my children's homework. I would like to be involved with my children's school activities.

I come to this ESOL class to get to the GED class. I started twenty years ago a similar class, but I never had the chance to finish it. This time I really want to finish because I need to speak, read and write better.

These are my reasons for taking this English class. I would like to communicate with my family. I want to help with my children's homework and support the school. I also want to go to GED class and get a diploma. I am attending class five days a week and working hard. I want to reach these goals.

Judy DiNini is from South Korea and attends ESOL classes at Northwest Florida State College

Education an Essential Ingredient in My Life

In this world each person has an important thing in mind but as for me the most important of them all is education. The question that I have been asked is "What does Education mean to you?" I am going to try to answer it right now. A lot of kids fall for drugs, go into prostitution, hang out with the wrong crowd, and do foolish things. My question is why? According to research, we can understand that this is a miss in education. We should realize that a country that does not emphasize education is inviting a lot of problems such as stealing, drugs, violation of law, murder and many more. For instance, check out how many people are behind

bars because of the wrong things they do in their lives. The truth of the matter is that they make poor choices due to lack of education from home, school, community, and people that are knowledgeable. Therefore, they possess stolen properties, have mental block, and get locked up in the jail house, murder good people, and so on. Recently, education has allowed an African-American educated man to become the first black President of the United States of America. Personally, education means a lot to me. I don't take it lightly. That is the reason why I am struggling to learn English so that I can obtain my GED diploma and then pursue further education at the college. Education means and proves progress, development, and success.

Jean Wilson Dor is from Hait and is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center in Key West

My Experience

My experience in Adult Education and Literacy has been an enjoyment. It has let me see what I am capable of doing. I have been successful since I started the class. It has made me want to further my education. At first I was scared, wondering if I could do this. I've been out of school since high school. Now that I am in my mid- forties, I asked myself could I do this with the changing times? Did I wait too long to come back?

I started to come to class in the morning. I picked up the books, started reading, and doing the lessons. I forgot things, but with the help of my teachers I did pick it back up. It felt so good, I did have the capability to learn again. After I finish my GED, I want to go to college. I am not for sure what I am going to major in yet, but I do have some ideas. I just know I've enjoyed learning. Opening my mind to new knowledge feels really good. I would recommend the class to anybody, who is really interested in getting their GED.

Finally, I just want to say I couldn't accomplish this without the

help of Adult Education and Literacy. The teachers are all wonderful in helping me to succeed in my education. I would like to sincerely thank all my teachers for the help and knowledge you have taught me. The learning experience has been great!

Anita Duck attends an Adult Education Program at Northwest Florida State College in Niceville

My Favorite Place

My favorite place to visit is the shopping mall. It has two stories and there are many different kinds of stores to visit. There are clothes stores, music and movie stores, arcade rooms and restaurants.

One of the stores that I like to go to is the music store so that I can check out the new music releases. My favorite music is country and I can enjoy listening using the store's headphones and music screens. Whenever I go, I always go to the country music section and look for particular artists and their new songs.

In the clothes stores, they not only have clothing, but sell jewelry, perfume, shoes, and other items. My favorite section is the perfume counter. I always check out the different scents. I also like to try on clothes and I like to buy them! Sometimes I look at jewelry, particularly earrings, but there are times when I look at rings and watches.

There are times when I like to go to the arcade room to play some of the games. There are games that give you a certain amount of tickets depending upon what score in the game you receive. They also have games that you just play with another person. I enjoy the game of pool the most.

I also like to eat in the mall's restaurants, especially if it's a Chinese or Mexican restaurant. I love stir-fry and tacos. This

makes my visit to the mall worth it and these are the reasons why the shopping mall is one of my favorite places to go.

Melanie Durbin attends the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Lake City

My Favorite Place

I guess my favorite place is home. I love being home, surrounded by my loved ones and all the things I love. Home is truly where my heart is. I have so many loving memories when it comes to home. My favorite memories are holidays. When family from all over the United States comes together for Thanksgiving and for Christmas.

I love the smell of my house when the turkey is in the oven and the fresh baked breads and cookies are cooling on the counter top. My grandma makes special home made apple cider. I can smell the cinnamon and brown sugar, mixed with the apples simmering on the stove. It is a truly heavenly scent.

The sounds of everyone having a good time, children laughing, grandpa snoring and sleeping while his belly is full of good food, Auntie Jean telling stories and the other sounds of life and love all around you. I yearn to be home.

I worked so hard to make my house a home. I hand painted every thing in my home. Every molding, every rail, every piece of woodwork was sanded, varnished, and waxed. I love the way I can see my reflection in my cabinets when I polish them. My hard wood floors I also love to keep polished. A clean home is a happy home. So my home is always clean but well lived in. It takes a lot of work to keep a house a home but I love it!

Lana Earle is a student in the ABE class at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Who are we? Do you know? Do you want to know?

We are mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles of many great nations. We are kings, queens, emperors, princes, princesses of blood- not relations.

We are descendants of cotton pickers, sugarcane and tobacco croppers, plantation workers and housekeepers of a long, long, long time ago. We are the builders, creators, inventors and laborers of this country, but they don't want anyone to know.

We are the seeds of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob who God said he will bless and multiply thy seed as the stars of heaven and as the sands which is upon the seashores, We are Queen Nefertiti, King Tut, Cleopatra, Shaka Zulu, Nelson Mandela, There's more.... We are Marcus Garvey, Harriet Tubman, Malcolm X, Shirley Chisholm, Booker T. Washington, Mary McLeod Bethune- all of whom helped set us free

We are superior, notorious, intellectual, multi-talented, brave-hearts so don't you sleep, We are motivators, innovators, demonstrators, participators, cultivators, originators, and regulators, I know you're feeling me!

We are money makers, entertainers, ball players, persuaders, movers and shakers, gamesters and terminators, I'll be back...

We are the head and not the tail above; only thou shall not be beneath for it was written in the word and that's a fact

We are teachers, doctors, lawyers, mayors, governors, senators, congressional workers and now the First Black President

We are gospel, hip-hop, r&b, rap, soca, reggae, rock and roll, jazz, and a little country

We've conquered them all and made the music sound sweet

We are Cain and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Delilah and Sampson; strong but weak, We are the greatest, Muhammad Ali, The rhythm in Michael Jackson's feet, Rosa Park's seat, The air beneath Michael Jordan's feet, The soul to Billy Holiday and Mahalia Jackson's beats, The guitar strings for B.B. King, The eyes for Stevie Wonder to see, "We Got Game", like Spike Lee, We are the piano notes for Alicia Keys, The lyrics that 2Pac Shakur speaks, Wimbledon for Serena and Venus who were hard to defeat,

Rodney King, who was pulled over and beat by the L.A.P.D., Emit
Till, who they killed by beating and dragging down the street;
May his soul rest in peace
We are “Still Rising”, Maya Angelou, We are living “The Dream”,
Martin Luther King
I bet you didn’t know we were so deep
I just took you through our family tree
If you still don’t know and are confused about who we are, Go
research our black history

Sabrina Eccelston is in the GED class at the Broward Correctional Institution

Key West is the Best

Among all the Florida Keys, I like Key West the best. It is a small island measuring 2 miles by 4 miles. It has quiet neighborhood except when you go into town. It gets loud when you stroll on Duval Street. There are many bars than churches and schools combined. It is pretty save here. People are very friendly. Crime is minimal compare to Miami. I am happy to live here because there is a school I can get my education, computers in the class where I learn how to use one, sunshine almost all year round, nice beach to relax, good food at the restaurant, interesting historical houses and sites, and simple jobs to have. Every thing is within easy access by bicycle. Therefore, you don’t have to pay the high gas price. As you come to Key West, you would love the 7 mile bridge ride. It is exquisite. Come and visit us. There is peace and tranquility in this place.

Jean Eliophene is from Haiti and is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

A Secret Place

I'd like
To imagine a

Place
Far away,

A little less cold,
A little less gray.

Where every one loves
And nobody cries.

A place
I can run to

Without having
To hide.

Somewhere to find
What it really means

To know whom you are
And be set free.

Now, I've found you
I'm on my way home.

Don't have to imagine
This place anymore.

Lissette Estrada attends the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility in Quincy

What Learning to Read Means To Me

Learning to read is not something you should do, but something you must do. I wanted to shape my history and forget my memory. I am over my head because my parent's bad decision took what I deserve from me. It is learning to read.

Now I am getting older and strive to climb a mountain and turn around. Well, the landslide will bring it down. I would like to know what love is so I can produce a clear image and concentrate on learning to read.

I cannot learn without trying. It is never too late. To the Adult Literacy League, Inc.: I remember what you have done for me. I am not afraid to tell you how you have been changing my life because I have built my life around you to learn to read. I need to learn more. I appreciate your help. Only God knows my appreciation for you.

As you get older, learning gets harder. Learning a new language takes time and patience. Learning to read means a lot to me. I just could not get it out of my mind.

Suzanne Judith Eustache is from Haiti and takes classes at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando

Dear Ariel, My Best Friend

Among the men and women of today, there is a lady sweet and kind, her name is Ariel Towns, the love of my life. I met Ariel and her three beautiful kids just about two years ago. They have been my family and she has been a good mom to my son Elijah. She is my best friend and my lover, and way too cool to have in my life. I don't know where to start or stop about all the good things she has done for me. Through all the tough times and the sad times, she stuck with me. That is why she is my best friend.

Ariel is a person that cares about me and wants to see me prosper in life. That's why I want her to be my wife.

We are now about to have a baby boy, any day now. It is hard for me now because I know she's in a lot of pain from me and the pregnancy. I know that I have not been a good man all the time to her. Through my foolish actions, I know I hurt her heart. I would like to say I'm sorry, if that would help. If it can, I know I need to respect the relationship much more. I hope you can believe in my words, even though I have broken promises to you. I hope I can gain back your trust, if you let me. I know you are tired of the problems we are having, but let's not give up on each other.

You know I can be a great man at times and we have a lot of fun as a family. You are someone I would die for. You are my heart beat. I promise to always love you and honor you. You are my true love. Let's start something completely different – a new life as husband and wife and from now on I promise to be honest with you. Take my word on this one. I would not give you a reason to give up on us again. I love you and it's real important that you understand this, because you are a blessing in my life, so let us take this relationship to a new height. Love always.

Chainy Ewen is a student of the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg at the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center

Someone I Admire

The one person I always admired was my grandma. My grandma was a great person and had a big heart.

When I was younger, about three years old, I was sick and my parents got into an argument, so my grandma told us to go stay with her. She took care of my sister and me for three years while my mom worked. My grandma and I were very close. She lived in New York, and even after we moved to Florida, I would still fly

to go see her. We talked on the phone all of the time and she would always send me money.

Even if my mom and I would fight, she was always on my side and understood where I was coming from. I miss her a lot. I feel like I lost my best friend. I never had to worry about anything because my grandma always found a way to help me. Even though she is gone now, she is the one person I truly admire.

Alisa Facto attends the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Crystal River

Many Ideas But No Money

I have many goals and ambitions. To name a few are; how to make a lot of money, ways to find the right woman, solutions to stay happy, and to write a book about myself. My ambition, for most of the time, makes me broke because every time when I have new ideas I will always tell others who are around me. These people will implement my ideas and become rich. On the other hand, I have nothing in my pocket. Frankly, by the time I get every thing I want, I will be putting all these thoughts in a book and at the same time for the next generation, as well.

Vicente Fernandez attends the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

Who I Admire Most

My mom is one who I look up to for many reasons. She has many great qualities, intelligence, strength, and kindness. It's amazing what a wonderful mother she is, words can't say enough. I could never ask for a better role model. I don't know what I would do without her, because no one could ever replace her.

I have never met such a beautiful intellectual person my entire life. My mom is very smart; she has always used gargantuan words when she spoke with us. When we would ask what the word meant, she would promptly hand us a dictionary and we would look it up. If we didn't know how to spell it, she would help us sound it out. Then she would get us to read it aloud to the others. Having a wider vocabulary has helped in understanding many others. One year for Christmas, she bought my siblings and I each our very own dictionaries. She joked that they made excellent stocking stuffers!

She is also a very strong and independent woman. She raised three children with no help from my father and never failed to meet the needs of her kids. She was always there when we needed her most, and never gave up. Now she has just recently started remodeling our double wide. She has come a very long way, and it is an incredible transformation. It feels nice to know that she has worked so hard to make everything better for me, Erin, and Devin (my brother and sister). I have never seen such time and dedication to give us a better home and life.

To be all this, and still have room left in her spirit to be so kind. She really has the motherly touch, always caring and keeping us warm, safe, and close to her heart. She has always kept the house tidy and clothes on my back. To me, there is nothing better. We have always come first in her eyes. I also just love being around her. She is fun and has an awesome personality!

I love and care for her more than anything, she means the world to me. If not for her, I don't know where I would be today. She has inspired me to be a good and caring person. I only hope that I can be as wonderful and as strong a person as she is. My main goal is to be successful and make her proud, because I admire her so.

Jessica Fincher is a student in the ACE program in Tallahassee

My Most Important Role

If I could teach anybody something important I would teach my daughter. I would teach my daughter to read, write and be very successful. Now I am going to explain to you how I will do just that.

First of all, if I could teach anybody something I would teach my daughter to read. I read to her everyday and night. I sound some of the words out so she'll understand how to say the word. When I am reading to her I will do hand motions or expressions to show her what the word means. If a sentence says she waved and smiled while walking away I would wave and smile while I am reading to her.

Secondly, if I could teach my daughter anything, I would also teach her to write. I would practice with her all the time. I would write a word out and have her copy it. I would say the word and tell her to copy what I say. She is so smart she always comes up to me and says things I never heard her say.

Thirdly, I would teach my daughter to be a very successful woman. I would teach her to respect herself. I would tell her to always keep her head up and not to let anybody cut you down in any kind of way. She is a beautiful little girl right now and I know one day she is going to grow up and be gorgeous. I have to keep my eye on her and lead her in the right direction. I want her to value her intellect and recognize the importance of learning all of her life.

In conclusion, If I could teach something to my daughter I would teach her to read. I would teach her to write and be successful. I think it's important to be a teacher and a responsible mother to my daughter. You have to keep up with your kids and never give up on them. I am my daughter's first and most important teacher and I take this very seriously because it is my most important role.

Christina Folds is a student at Even Start in Pinellas County

What Education Means to Me

Why is education so important for us? Where is the beginning of education? There are a lot of interesting, also very important and explosive thoughts for this topic. A few people suppose that refined people are happier than the others. I will show you if they are right!

Good education can lead to a great career opportunity for many people. People have the possibility to get to a higher level at work and earn more money. But it is very important to say that to get a higher level at work does not only depend on the best education. Learning during your whole life and making your own experiences is what makes you successful in combination with your education. To be successful in your job represents freedom for many people. They feel free in their own act.

Furthermore, there is another point of view or rather a question that you can highlight. Is it really important to have a nice or an expensive lifestyle? Probably not, but life can be more comfortable and colorful. Good education can also lead to a nice lifestyle. Sometimes people get more money and consequently they are interested in new clothes or maybe to have a speedy car or to build a bigger house for their family. Everyone enjoys spending a lot of time with the family, going on vacation. However, don't forget that this expensive lifestyle could change your life immediately!

The last two paragraphs show that the career opportunity and to have a nice or expensive lifestyle can improve or beautify the whole life. But on the other hand, it is very necessary to think of the poor and sick people and not only of yourself. These people need the bounties and maybe they depend on people who are able to donate because they live in a better situation. Wealthy people build sometimes a charity organization; they collect money for sick kids or hospices. Getting better health insurance, to go in the right hospital or to find a specialist is not easy for everyone in these days. Many people in the world are not able to buy healthy food

for their kids and for themselves. It seems to be very important to support poor people if you have the possibility.

What education means to me, this is a very complex question! Only a few details could be highlighted. In summary you could say that good education means the material aspect where people live in comfort, in a nice neighborhood and where they donate for poor and sick people. But furthermore there is the mental activity, using the brain as good as possible that describes the same significance. The mental activity or aspect and the material aspect should represent a healthy balance!

Julia Franzen is a student with Even Start in Pinellas County

My Goals and Ambitions

I think that everyone should have a plan or goal that they would like to accomplish when they get out of prison. I have a couple of goals that I would like to accomplish so that I won't come back here. Before I even get home, I would like to go to work release. That way, I can save up some money so that I can have enough to pay off all of my tickets and court costs. When I get home, hopefully I would have enough money to pay off all my tickets so that I can get my license, get the packet for my Diploma, find a job, take my C.P.R. and H.I.V. test over, pursue my Home Health Aide license, and find a nice apartment for me and my children.

Denise Frazier is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Who I Admire

The person I admire the most has to be my mother. She is very beautiful and she has taught me a lot. From day one, I could really count on her. She's been there with me through thick and thin.

My mother is my inspiration. My mother taught me right from wrong at an early age. She taught me respect, which I give her to the fullest. She also taught me to always strive to be the best. My mother is my number 1.

My mother has always been with me through all my trials and tribulations. She showed me that no matter what I go through, or where I am, I should display myself in a respectable way. She also told me that God loves me, and as stated in Isaiah, “I can do all things through Christ that strengthens me”. My mother is a strong believer in the bible and her faith in God. With all the love and care I have received from my mother, I still admire her extremely. She shows me how to be strong, have faith, and always respect myself. With all the lessons learned and experiences we went through, I am still my mother’s number 1 fan.

Jordanna Frazier is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Favorite Place

I have a lot of favorite places. There are many places I like to go. I also like to visit people and have fun. I like to go to the movies. Rave is my favorite movie theater. The stadium seating setup is very cool. The movies I like are action and comedies. The comedies make me feel better when I’m stressed. Comedies make me happy. Going to the mall is fun. Browsing in the stores is a lot of fun. I like to buy movies and videogames. The food in the food court is delicious.

I like to go to the library. I’ve been working at a library since May 2005. I love my job a lot. Shelving in the adult fiction section and checking in and out the books are my main duties. The bookstores are fun to go to also. I like both Barnes and Noble and Books a Million. I like to read books about weather and climate change. The mall, movie theater, library, and bookstore are fun places to go.

Lyall Frazier is a student at PJC in Pensacola

Dreams and Hopes of Life

Let go of losing a loved one, for if your dreams have become a reality, life is like a family of four that sees the little ones grow from babies to toddlers, then as teenagers. That's when I lost my hope, because I didn't know where to turn until I met my Pastor Bobby Reid and First Lady Gail Reid, with such a beautiful smile. I remember the time during my husband's death they all supported my family with loving care. My husband told me, before he died, that there is no need to buy any furniture because the pastor would be giving us some. We had just moved here.

Sometimes things happen in life for a reason that causes pain or sorrow. Each of us face crisis. It could be trouble at home, school, or your job. It could even be the death of a loved one. My husband died suddenly. We all have to learn to cope with things that we cannot change. We may learn to do things differently, or we may simply have to learn to live with the loss. We learn that life must go on in God's eyes, in spite of our pain or sorrow.

My goals are to finish school and get a job as a Medical Assistant. So, I pray that God will give me strength to live to see grandchildren from each one of my kids, and to see them grown and able to take care of themselves.

Once God calls your name of Judgment Day, your life is finished on earth. I'm a single mother trying to cope with the death of my lost husband. I can never get over him, no matter what friend guy I have in my life. His son always brings back memories because they both have the same name.

Donna Gaines is a student at the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center and the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg

Let Me Tell You about Someone I Admire

Throughout my life I have been very lucky to meet people I admire and to try to learn from them, but there is a very special person whom I think is unique.

She is an optimistic, positive and cheerful 86 year old lady who, despite many misfortunes during her life, maintains a very positive attitude. At the tender age of ten, she overcame cancer, then she grew up, got married, became widowed and raised two daughters and a son on her own. All of them became successful professionals.

One year one of her daughters was diagnosed with cancer. A few years later the other one, a Hall of Fame athlete, suffered a terrible accident and became disabled. As if this wasn't enough, her only granddaughter died at the early age of 16 in a tragic accident.

Any one of these misfortunes would be enough for us to give up, but not for her. It seems that all these tragedies, rather than weaker her, have made her even stronger.

She has always been helping people. When young she was a volunteer with the Red Cross during the Second World War, where she was a lieutenant in charge of a group of young women. It was then that she met her husband who had a long and distinguished military career before retiring as a major. She has also been a volunteer in a hospital for elderly people. Once, when she was trying to cheer them up, someone said, "it is easy for you, for you are younger." In fact, she was the oldest of them all. On another occasion, a psychiatrist told her that if there were more people like her, psychiatrists would be out of work.

Nowadays she helps her younger neighbor next door by buying groceries and medications for her on a regular basis. During hurricane season, she provides shelter and food for people in need. She cooks and plays cards with them.

She is a wise and intelligent person. You can ask her about anything and she will give you the right answer, from a kitchen recipe to a more complicated matter. The more I know about her, the more amazed I am. She is still an art teacher where I met her as a student. Since I have known her, she has always been in a good mood, enthusiastic, and full of life, a very difficult thing to maintain every day. Once I asked her what her secret was, and she answered very sweetly, "I just take vitamins."

Whenever I feel down, I picture Frannie and then I smile!

Lidya Garcia de Powell is from Mexico and attends English Café' at Southwest Regional Library in Pembroke Pines

JUST WHAT I NEED

Being a part of the Monroe County Adult Education class gives me the opportunity for a better future. As a Costa Rican immigrant, not being able to speak English well is a big problem. It is not going to be easy for me to live in America but now that I am here I am going to try to improve my English and fight to get my G.E.D. I have two important goals. First, I would like to have a successful life in America. I understand that education is essential. It doesn't matter where we live or who we are, education can help us achieve what we want in life. Moreover, it develops our personality. It is not just me, there are many people who share this kind of dream. I call it personal improvement.

My classmates are mostly from different countries. They bring along with them different cultures and languages. It makes this place more interesting. My teacher is an excellent person. She is always there to help me when I need it. Though it is not always possible for me to come to class, I have not given up studying. I have the option to come to class or study from home using the computer or from the book. This is an excellent idea because I can

study at any time I want, day or night. Moreover, I can go to class in the morning, afternoon, or night. I am having one of the best experiences in my life. I come to U.S.A and it gives the right and the opportunity to have my education.

Karla Garner is from Costa Rica and attends the Adult Education and Career Center at the Key West High School

An Unexpected Tear

The time will come when we each must say goodbye. However, when that time comes, will we allow the tears to fall freely from our eyes? The time came for me two years ago when I received a phone call telling me my sister had a massive stroke, and she was not expected to live. My first thought was this is not happening. The person on the other end of the phone had dialed the wrong number, but the voice that came across the wire was one I had heard so many times before. It was the voice of my niece, my sister's eldest daughter. It was just my inner denial of what she was saying that made me wish she had dialed a wrong number. My next thought was I needed to get to Chicago, I had to see my sister, and I had to look into her eyes.

I have heard taking a plane is the fastest way to travel, and in truth it is a quick way of traveling. Although I was frightened of air travel, I booked my flight. The only thing on my mind was seeing the person that I shared part of my life with growing up. It seemed to me at the time that airplane travel was so slow, or slower than a bus or train. I just wanted to get to my sister as fast as I could. My niece did not give me the full details of my sister's condition on the phone. When I walked into her hospital room, I didn't see the person the doctor's said would not make it through the night. I saw a skinny, long legged teenage girl that once pushed me up and carried me home from the park because I was too tired to walk. I saw the face of the girl that enjoyed playing volleyball, and listening to music. So many images flashed I front of my eyes.

My heart filled with the tears that my eyes refused to shed. On May 28, 2006; the woman hat had once held my hand as we walked down the street said her final goodbyes.

I can not allow my tears to fall freely at her funeral. I guess I was still in denial. The tears came a month later when I was sitting watching an infomercial. The advertisement was for one hundred-fifty songs from the 1960's. Songs that I heard coming from my sister's bedroom, songs that she had listened to as she laid across her bed resonated in my ears. I allowed the tears to fall because I was ready to say, "I will see you soon." I allowed the tears to fall because I was ready to say, "I will miss you, I will always hold you in my heart."

Deborah Garrett is a student of the Northwest Florida State College GED program

What Learning English Means to Me

I came to the United States about two years ago. When I came here, I didn't know how to speak English. Now I am studying the language and it means everything to me. Do you want to know how fascinating it is? When you are trying to learn this wonderful language you are going to be a happy person. There is nothing more important than to know how to speak English.

Do you want to learn English and have something important in your life? I want to speak this language because many people are trying to know how to speak English. When you are traveling to another state and meet different people, it will not be a problem to speak with them. You will know how to talk with them and you are going to have a good experience.

When I came to the United States I only knew three or four words of English. When I heard my sisters-in-law talking with each other in English, and I didn't know what they were saying, I ran to my

room crying and asked myself why I came here when I didn't know how to speak English. When I started to go to school I learned something new every day. Now I have three beautiful ladies that are helping students learn to speak English. I want my teachers to be proud of me and I thank them from the bottom of my heart!

Mirdita Gashi-Qorri is a student in the Even Start Program in Pinellas County

My Haiti

My name is Nove and I am from Haiti. I am the fourth child in my family. I have one younger brother and three older sisters. I live in homestead with my father, my brother Jason and my sister Alexandra. My mother and the rest of my family are living in Haiti. I miss them very much. I love my family and they love me.

Electricity, education, and employment are different in Haiti than in the United States. In my country, we do not have electricity every day. If we have electricity on Monday, Tuesday, and Friday in the morning, we do not have electricity in the afternoon.

When we go to school, each teacher gives us homework to do. If we don't do it, the teacher will hit us with a belt on our open palms. Another punishment we might receive is to stand on our knees for one hour. We have to be in school on time. If we do not, we will have issues with the teacher. The teacher will not allow us to enter the classroom. We must wait until the next class begins and we are given 100 words to write as punishment. Employment is difficult to find in my country, even if we finish school. We may get a diploma to become an engineer or doctor, but we can not find a job.

With all the difficulties I experienced in Haiti, I love my country anyway.

Nouve Geffrard is a level six student at Miami Dade College in Homestead and attends ESOL and ABE

My Special Place

Everyone has a place that is special to them. For me that place is called Lake Ella because that's a hang out spot for me and my friends. The nature of Lake Ella is breath taking. I also appreciate it because it's a place where I can soothe my mind. One of the reasons Lake Ella is special to me, because it's a hang out spot for my friends and me. My friends and me go down the street to coffee pub and everyone orders a delicious cappuccino. We walk and talk so much that we get lost in conversation. Our minds are like a refreshing waterfall easy flowing, and at ease. There is a bond of secrecy between true friends. Next, I have fallen in love with the nature of Lake Ella. Lake Ella is as green as a crayon. Everywhere you look there is a field of grass. Another thing I love about the nature of Lake Ella is they have the most majestic ducks that I enjoy feeding every time I go.

Last but not least, Lake Ella is a place where I can soothe my mind. I let my thoughts become free as I am caught by the captivating scene. Everything that I was sad, angry, and confused about no longer exists. I am taken away from my troubles even if it's just for that day. To end with, Lake Ella is my special place, my comfort zone, because it's a hang out spot for me and my friends. The nature is so breathe taking you have to see it to believe it, and lastly, it's a place where I can soothe my mind.

Laketria Gilbert is a GED student at Lively Technical Center

Why I Want to Learn English

My name is Jessica, I'm from Colombia. I was born in a city called Perero nineteen years ago. When I traveled to the United States I was thinking how different it is from my country. When I first arrived I felt great because I got to see my sister and her children. They are the best things in my life. After a while I began to miss my country, things like friends, family, my home city and even the food. Of course things are different here, the people, holidays, but the biggest difference is the language. This is why I know I must improve my English so I can get a good job and progress in this country.

Jessica Giraldo, from Colombia, is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando

Why I Came to the United States

I am from Colombia. After I got married, I came to the United States to make my life here. My experiences here have been very good. I learn new things every day. I meet different people and learn about different cultures... I'm very happy here.

Miryam Giraldo is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

Why I Came to the United States

Once upon a time a young family came to the United States with a lot of dreams. When we came, I was pregnant with my second child. My first daughter was two years old. That meant that I was not able to work. We desired to emigrate for better opportunities for our lives, better education for our children and stronger and healthier children.

Many years ago when we lived in Colombia, life was dangerous. There was a lot of crime, with gorillas taking our children for money and selfish government. Since we wanted to grow our family, we did not want this environment for our children. Education for my children was my first thought. In my country, if we did not have sufficient money to pay for college for our children, the government did not pay or give a loan. It had been an uncertain future. In Colombia, teenagers had much freedom. For example, teens could drink alcohol at any age, it was not a big deal. Smoking and driving a car were allowed at a young age.

When we arrived in the United States, we had a lot of dreams. In Colombia, families did not have the freedom to do many things. Life was too dangerous with a lot of crime. There was not a future for our children: better education and a lot of opportunities. Living in the United States is the best experience for our lives. I am so thankful to my Lord for giving us a better life, and also I say thanks to the American people. I love the United States of America.

Olga Gomez attends ESOL classes at Northwest Florida State College

Missing You

If I could catch a million stars
I know just what I'd do
I'd arrange them on paper
And sing them back to you

If I could give you gifts of gold
I'd have each one inscribed with special memory
That I hold dear inside
I'd give you everything you want or could ever need

But that could never measure
All you've given me

With honesty and compassion
You lend a tender ear

And when I look into your eyes
My troubles disappear
But I'm not rich nor lucky
To catch a star

I can only give you one thing
That is my heart
This is something you'll never be without
Wherever you are, near or far
For it is a simple but precious gift

Denise Gonzalez is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Favorite Sister

My sister is my very best friend. She is very protective of me, she's always by my side, and whenever I need her, she's there, no matter what. My sister is eight years older than I am. I can remember once when we were younger, I had a fight with this boy and my sister got a hold of him and whipped his behind. I mean she whipped him good. My sister is smart, and she cares about everyone. If you need anything, or need any kind of help, she will help you in any kind of way that she can. I just want my sister to know that I miss and love her very, very, much.

Alice Green is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My New Life

My life in the United States is completely different from life in my country. My family, friends, and little farm with my employees are in Brazil. When I'm there, I feel happy and healthy. I spend a long time with my flowers, fruit trees, and birds. I sometimes go back to Brazil.

I came to Florida when my oldest daughter's husband died. I started studying English at Winter Park Tech three years ago.

My life changed when I was thirty-three years old. I had a kidney transplant. Every six months I have to have a check up. I'm grateful for my new life. Thank God!

Arlete Groziolli is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

Why I Came To the United States

I came to the United States because of war. My country has been at war for a long time. This war destroyed everything we had in our life. We lost our cows, goats, sheep, houses, farms and our people who were killed in the war. We starved to death. We had no food to eat and no place to live. When we lost everything and we had nothing to eat, we ate the leaves of the trees to survive, because if you didn't eat the leaves, you would die. We had no other food to eat. The clothes we wore were torn and dirty. That was a very bad situation at that time and then we escaped from Sudan to the Ethiopian border to look for refugees and we found it. The United Nations helped us with food, clothes and a place to live.

We stayed there for eight years. After eight years, Ethiopia had a war and we moved to Kenya and we lived there for two years. When I moved to Kenya, my wife and son went to the Ethiopian border and Sudan. I went back to Ethiopian border and Sudan to find them and I found them. We lived there for one year and we

moved back to Kenya. By chance, we found a refugee program. It saves everybody in the camp by helping them with an application to come to the United States. We got the application and then we came to the United States.

Gatwech Guandong is a student at Learn to Read Jacksonville

I Am Heralie

I am of Hispanic origin, a public accountant by profession, and I graduated in my country, Venezuela. I am married to a wonderful man. He's an excellent father, brother, husband and friend. I admire his integrity and his ability to "never give up" which he has shown to me since we met; and even more since we came to this country where life is not easy for immigrants. He is always optimistic and always happy and in a good mood. Watching him keeps us all loving each other and happy.

We have two very special children. Santiago is five years old. He is always happy and affectionate. He is a child with a surprising intelligence and an amazing capacity to love. Last year when finished the school year we were very proud of our little boy. He was barely four years old and he received a special certificate that named him "Outstanding Student" of the year award. In his first year of Pre-K class he is learning to read, write and add. Daniella is three years old. She is also very special. When our little girl started school with me, she was very shy and gave few displays of affection. I took her to many places to be with other children, but she would never socialize. Starting this school Daniella has changed enormously thanks to the Parent Power Program! She is more loving and sociable with people. She is much more friendly with children and looking to make friends. We are very happy and satisfied with her change! She loves going to school. She is very intelligent and can write her name, letters and numbers 1-10.

I arrived in this country four and half years ago and like many immigrants I had basic English skills and understanding. I felt totally out of place! I was frustrated to go anywhere because I was not able to understand others or make myself understood. I went to several schools but did not see any results and I thought learning the language was impossible for me. That was before I entered the Parent Power Family Literacy Academy. I couldn't believe that in one year I progressed a lot! I have the ability to understand and make myself understood when I talk to people and that fills me with satisfaction.

My education has helped me to achieve all my goals; to be a better parent and to help our children in school. I even feel more prepared to face my future when it comes time for me to work outside the home. We are very proud of all the achievements we have had, both as a family and individually.

Heralie Guaramata attends the Parent Power Family Literacy Academy in Delray Beach

My Spittitual Journey

When I decided to turn my life over to God, I knew that it would not be an easy road to travel. But I also knew that it was the best thing for me to do. I have done so many different things in my life, but I think by for this was the best decision that I ever made, and I am very thankful for that God has accepted me back with open arms.

So what I'm saying is, that you have come to a place in your life and feel as though you have no where else to go, please try going to God. I promise you won't regret it.

Gina Gunter is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correction Facility

What Learning English Means to Me

Hey! Do you speak English already? I do. I have been studying English for one Year. It is very important to know the language in this country. Let me tell you about the great and difficult times that happened to me learning this language.

Since I came here I am learning the language. When you start it is very difficult but anything is possible. You can learn! Studying the language is helping me to have easier and better communication with everybody. I am improving my skills which will give me more opportunities to find a great job in the future.

When I arrived here I set some goals that I wanted to accomplish in one year. I did it! You can do whatever you want if you decide to do it. I passed my driving test the first time I did it. I was a little nervous in my first interview for work, but everything came right after I got the job. I am continuing to study the language. I know with a lot of perseverance and practice that I will get better opportunities in the future.

English changed my life, everything is different in the U.S., the food, people and culture. But you know what? I am thankful for that because it has given me the opportunities to meet wonderful people and have new friends. I have learned more about other cultures around the world and am getting more education. I want to learn something new everyday. If you haven't decided to learn English yet, let's do it! You will have more experiences in your life.

Adriana Gutierrez is an ESOL student in the Even Start Literacy Program in Pinellas County

Honduras My Home Sweet Home

I am Ana and I am from Honduras. My favorite place is Honduras, my home country. A day that I will not forget is a time on the beach with my family. I enjoyed being there with my families on this day because it was my birthday. Now, every time it is my birthday I will go to the beach and reminisce the precious moments we had together. I can still recall everyone saying “Ana, we love you.” I will never forget this day and it will stay in my heart until the day I die.

Ana Gutierrez attends the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

We All Play Many Roles in Life

For instance, you might be a parent, a construction worker, a political party member, and a student, among others. What are some of the roles you play in your life? What roles have I played in my life? I am a student, military man, husband, father, technician and instructor.

Student: Those were the best years of my life. If only I had know then what I know now, I would have used those years investing more time and opportunity in preparing for a better future for myself. But at the end of time, looking back it has been a great run, one I probably would not change.

Military Man: I did what I was supposed to do. It was difficult, but I am very glad I am still in one piece. I could write a book or two if only I knew how.

Husband: This is where I really lucked out. I am completing fifty-one years of marriage. Sometimes it seems like only months – life is going so fast. Everything has been so nice; the money problems,

health problems and all the small and not so small problems do not mean anything when you luck out with a wife like I have.

Father: Four times – they all have given me the best experiences one could have. I wonder what I did to be blessed with my family.

Technician: For thirty-one wonderful years, I had the good fortune of holding a job I liked - especially those great years in the tech crew. Maybe someday I can put those memories in a book too. I have so much to tell about the fine people who were my co-workers and those marvelous machines we call airplanes.

Instructor: Not only did I have all those wonderful experiences, I also had the opportunity to pass the secrets of the trade to so many young and willing to learn trainees, giving me so much personal satisfaction. Not too many people can feel that.

In all, it has been a wonderful life, and I am waiting for more great experiences in the few years I think I have left.

German Gutierrez is from Columbia and attends the GED program at Manatee Community College

Learning English Means a Better Life

When I came here to the U.S., I didn't understand anything. When people spoke to me, I didn't know what they were saying. I was so embarrassed when I couldn't talk back to them. Everything here is very different from where I grew up, but the hardest problem is the language.

Now I can speak and understand English. But some things I still don't understand. My dad gets angry because he said that I am supposed to know a lot of English by now. He also said that I am supposed to be in college. I know he is right, and that's why I decided to take GED classes before going to college. My dream is

to be an engineer one day, and I know that I must master the English language to succeed.

Johanny Gutierrez is a student in the ABE Dept. at Pensacola Junior College

My Beliefs

Martin Luther King planted in our mind beliefs that all people are respected by god. God said all people are equal to everyone regardless of races, economic ability, language or regions. Martin Luther king did what he said as a behavior. Although he died, his soul and beliefs taught us how to act. I think these actions and beliefs move the world.

The U.S. is a powerful nation. Integrating race is difficult in the past and now. But Martin Luther King could do it. He was a practicing man and he was a man who tried to integrate different races. Today Barack Obama was voted as the first black president. This is a wonderful event. The leader of the world loves people regardless of races, riches degree, age and areas. Martin Luther King's beliefs followed us and were realized in real life. All humans are respected by all people. His soul will let Obama follow. I believe this!

EUN JIN HA is a student in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program

NATURE'S SMILE

Nature's smile came from a tree.
At Inverrary, for you and me.
With sand dunes and squeaking geese,
Hovering over to keep the peace.

Palm tree leaves spread like fans,
Responding to Hurricane Wilma's command!
Trees fallen come uprooted and lean.

A bird flying solo in the sky,
So peaceful it looks without a care on its mind.
Calm and relaxed is the day,
While cars on the road zoom on their way.

A checkered flag is at the tee,
Winking black and white I see,
So quiet now, not a sound,
You can hear a black bird call; caw, caw, caw,
As it passes by, for you to see.

Sonya Hagan is a student at the Whispering Pines Adult Center for Disabled Adults in Ft. Lauderdale

A Special Time in My Life

A very special time in my life was when I gave birth to my son. I choose this moment in my life because I was only 22 and going to be doing it alone. Having a baby gave me an instant sense of responsibility and commitment, in addition to having the urge to prove myself as a single mother.

Everyone would agree that the day to day responsibilities of parenting can be overwhelming. Your every waking moment is dedicated to someone else's wants and needs. Being responsible means taking personal accountability for something or someone. When they placed that screaming "blob" into my arms for the first time I, who couldn't even finish high school, was now 100% in charge of the fate of this child. I knew right then that everything going on out in the world meant nothing without him. So the only option was to stand up and become the leader for my new family.

Second to responsibility is commitment. Anyone can make a baby, it's what you do after that really counts. Being committed to someone else takes a lot of energy!! You must give them what they are lacking by taking away from yourself. This process tends to feel never ending and thankless, but it's not. It takes an incredible amount of daily commitment and structure to see results. But when they finally look up at you and say "thank you" or use their fork right then you get your reward for your continued commitment to your child.

I firmly believe that being a single mother is the hardest thing I've ever done!! I knew I would be doing it alone, but that didn't change the sheer panic I felt every time someone would mention anything baby related. Even before I started showing people had already doomed me as a parent. Supposedly your age determines how well you raise your child. This philosophy enrages me! So I make it my personal goal to prove my mothering skills on a daily basis.

All in all, I believe being responsible, being committed to my son, and having the daily drive to prove myself as a single mother makes the birth of my son the most special time in my life.

Emily Hamilton is in the Even Start Program in Pinellas County

My Favorite Place

The cat stretched a lazy smile baring his feline fangs and extending his needle-point claws. And oh what a lazy afternoon it had been. Though the heat of the day still lingered the sun sought distant horizons on which to cast itself upon another day. The fragrance of freshly cut grass lingered on the warm evening breeze while dragonflies, as if controlled by a child's hand held remote, snared the victims' of their early evening meal.

I had taken my cue from the cat, Streak, who seemed to be able to nap forever. I, on the other hand, was forever trying to nap, but managed on occasion to inspire a siesta. Originally an orphan, Streak had been abandoned in the remote corner of a convenience store parking lot. Fate intervened; Streak was rescued, and is now a permanent member of our endearing family.

I stretched and yawned, orienting myself as my attention was drawn to the ping of glassware echoing from the kitchen. Earlier my wife, and our daughter of four, had treated me to tasty morsels of fruit and cheese: a perfect Saturday noontime meal. I would have been satisfied with stacks of sugar and piles of preservatives, said to be two of America's favorite food groups, but alas, I am too well taken care of. Soon I would have to get busy, for dinnertime was rapidly approaching and I had officially been elected "master of the grill".

I looked forward to searing steaks over an open flame though it's not quite the same as the thrill-of-the-kill, that primal instinct to fend for one's meal. Fending for the almighty dollar and paying tribute to the local neighborhood meat market is about as close to the ancestral slaying as I care to get. If I'm going to have to do any cutting let it be the cellophane wrapper of a pre-packaged New York strip, baked potato optional. With the steaks on a plate I stood before the grill's smoky flame and was struck with an epiphany of almost surreal understanding. There I was, at that exact moment, doing something I truly enjoyed for those who I cared for most: that my idea of goodness, greatness, or best was ultimately no more than a product of my own interpretation, my own private concept.

I remember a time when things could get no better than a warm sunny day or a blue sky afternoon. That changed when I discovered girls. Then came cars – cars and girls. Could it get any better than that? We grow. We develop. Our priorities change with time. Things of importance eventually become the relics of our own passed memories, laid by the wayside of our ever changing lives. Eventually, though, we arrive at a point where all of our

dreams, desires, and ambitions come together. Sometimes this happens slowly. Other times it's as if the proverbial light bulb has been lit over our head.

Since the beginning of creation we have been on a path which inevitably arrives at that moment in time when we say to ourselves: "Here I am". For me, surrounded by life, laughter, and the people I love most: who in return love me too: I can honestly say I have arrived – at my favorite place.

Steven Hamlin is a student tutor in the GED Education Department at the Jefferson Correctional Institution in Monticello

A Different Life

In Colombia, I was living in a beautiful small town. The weather was always hot. You could walk to all the places you needed to go. You could easily make friends. The food was delicious. Here in the United States, things are different. You have to drive or take a bus because everything is far away. People eat fast food. Here there are beautiful places to go. It is safe and clean.

Liliana Hanna is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

It's Never Too Late to Learn

This year 2009 is a great year for me. I am getting a new start for my life. In the past, I have worked in nursing all my life: hospital, nursing homes, and the latest school health. In year 2000, I became really sick and was unable to work any longer. I had an anoxia brain injury. So, I lost my long term memory. I also had to learn how to walk, talk, dress up and feed myself all over again. These are the little things we don't normally think about a lot in life. I tried to return to work but was unable to do my job. Therefore, I

had to retire from the State of Florida Nursing job. Now, I am working hard to get my GED at the Adult Education class. Everyone here is great and they don't mind taking the time to help me. I know some things are hard but I am willing to learn. I'm 52 years old and it's never too late to learn.

Sandra Hardy is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

Money and Lots of Money

My name is Harold Hedman. I'm from Honduras. I have lived in Key West for 2 years. My reason for being here is because I have a dream and I want to make it a reality. I know that I can do it through hard work, patience, and perseverance. My dream is to make a lot of money, save it, and go back to my country to finish my studies at a university. Back home I was an accountant but here I am a plain laborer working in construction. I know it is a big difference but I hope it is just for a little while. In spite of what I have said, I am learning a lot about life. I feel like a little baby when I first opened my eyes in this country. I have good moments and I am going to treasure it for a long time.

Harold Hedman is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

My Experiences in Adult Education

I have been trying to learn English for the last four years. For the first two years I was studying at home. In the third year I started studying in school. I couldn't adapt because I was put in too high a level. I didn't understand anything.

Last year I had the blessing of finding out about Winter Park Tech. I say “the blessing” because here I feel good. The teachers are excellent. I am learning now and making progress.

Every day is a new experience for me. I love to come to school and I tell my friends about the school. Here the students come first.

Lizabeth Henao is a student at Winter Park Tech

Someone I Admire

There has always been one person throughout my life who I have admired. This person is my dad. He has always been there for me, no matter what. He used to be a cross country truck driver, so I didn’t get to be with him much in childhood. Then when I was fifteen, he started driving locally, so I was thankful I had a lot more time with him. We spent a lot of time together up until I got married at eighteen years old.

Two years later he was diagnosed with cancer. They cut it out, but six months later it came back. There was nothing they could do. He kept going just like he always did for about four years. Then, he got bad sick. He couldn’t wait on himself anymore. Now, I had to get used to the fact that “Daddy’s baby” had to take care of him.

Well, I had gone to see him on a Sunday, and he was non-responsive. He was almost in a coma. I went home and was planning to go see him on that Tuesday, but my little girl was sick so I decided not to go. About 6:00 p.m. that evening, I got the phone call from my mom that I never wanted to hear. Daddy was gone. I was crushed.

Even though he’s not with me anymore, I’ll always admire the man he was and how he cared for me. I know he is looking down from heaven now, seeing all my accomplishments and

success. I'll miss him forever, but I will never ever forget him. I will always be daddy's little girl.

Jessica Henderson is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton

My Honey Hole

When it comes to a special place, there is no place special...
but if there has to be one, it would be my honey hole,
where the water is deep,
the fish hit hard
and the flesh from them is sweet.
The panfish are the size of both your hands,
crappie look like bass,
and catfish are as long as your arm or longer.
Very quiet and peaceful ---
this place I call my honey hole.

Sylvester Henderson is a student at the Adult and Community Education Center in Tallahassee, Fl.

My Turning Point

Today is a real pleasure for me to share an amazing experience that is leading my life. My name is Jean Esaie Henriseme. I'm Haitian. I'm 35 years old. I'm married and also a father of three kids. Very early in my life, my goal was to be a surgeon. I studied all the areas in science physiology to get prepared. Unfortunately, my parent's economic situation couldn't help me and it seemed like the chick was being killed in the egg. While I was about to achieve my secondary studies, I established my own furniture shop so that I may be able to take care of my parents who fell under my responsibility. Through sickness, hunger, and all, I had to find means to solve the problems. Without much thought, I was

obliged to stop my studies in 1995 and went to work in carpentry. In the midst of my carpentry work, I used this vocation to study human physiology. Then I started to travel to several countries for many years to see if I could realize my dream, but it was hopeless. To my relief, at no more than 400 miles from my house, United States of America offered me a chance to fulfill my dream.

At this very moment, I am so glad to get back to pursue my studies. My, oh my, I can't sleep at night! This is the turning point of my life. America is the land of opportunities. Though I have heard of this while I was in Haiti, right now it is becoming a reality. Thirty five years ago, I thought I went through the valley of the shadow of death. Presently, I feel like a hopeful baby. My advice for everyone is never to give up hope. Life is full of learning. So, don't stop studying no matter how old you are. Sooner or later you will see the turning point of your own life and achieve what you have been wishing for.

Jean Esaie Henriseme is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center in Key West

I Am Pressing On

When I was young I had many goals. I wanted to be a lawyer or accountant. I love making money. I also love the action in the work place. However, that didn't happen for me. I ended up dropping out of school and now I have four kids with no diploma.

I can't help my children with their school work because sometimes I don't understand what the teachers are teaching them. So, that is why I had to make a change in my life. I am tired of working hard for a little sum of money. I want to be able to help

my kids with their school work. I want to have good education. I want to get my high school diploma so that I can have a better life for me and my family. I thank God for giving me the strength to press on.

Danais Hernandez is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center in Key West

Cuba and the United States

Life varies considerably from one country to another one. I was born in Cuba and lived there for 42 years before I moved to the United States in 2008. Learning that life is difficult in this country, I can compare and contrast specific aspects of Cuba and the United States in the areas of education, health care, and safety.

First, education, in Cuba, is a priority for the government and is one of the most important achievements for the Cuban people. It is free and public. There is no illiteracy because everyone has the same rights and opportunities to study, no matter their age, race, or gender. All citizens have the opportunity to select a profession according to his or her interests and vocation. There are some recognized and accredited Universities and Higher Institutes that graduate thousands of professionals every year and these graduates are guaranteed a safe work place when they finish their training. I graduated as a teacher from a Higher Pedagogic (Teaching) Institute in Holguin Province. I have over 17 years of work experience in this area. I am very proud of my vocational training. In the United States great amounts of money have been cut from state educational budgets. Thousands of teaching jobs have been eliminated and parents are seriously worried about the future of their children.

Secondly, health care, in my country, is another praised achievement of the Cuban people and health care is public. We do not have the most sophisticated and advanced medical equipment

in the world, but we have wonderful medical professionals. It is not necessary to pay to see a doctor, receive a medical treatment, to be hospitalized, or receive emergency care. Citizens do not worry about medical insurance when they need medical services because medical insurance does not exist in Cuba. Health Care Centers in the United States provide quality health care, but many residents can not receive medical services because they do not have insurance coverage or money to pay before they see a doctor.

The third aspect is related to safety. Crime and violence are not a problem in my country. They occur normally as in many parts of the world. Cubans can feel secure walking on the street, in the parks, or wherever they want to go or stay. The use of guns is strongly penalized by laws. Children can go to school without any problems. In public schools, children are protected. Safety is one of the most important factors of life in any country. It is one of the things I miss since I have been living in the United States where crime rates increase every day. Finally, each country has its own characteristics and peculiarities. Many things can identify life in a country and make one country different from another. Cuba and the United States are very different in the areas of education, health care, and safety.

Glennis Hernandez is a student in the ESOL/ABE Program at Miami Dade

Cries of An Inmate

The skies outside my window are cloudy and gray,
The world inside these walls are filled with dismay.

Feelings I cannot explain entrap my lonely heart,
An emotional destruction is slowly tearing me apart.

No one understands me, they know not how I feel,
this is no longer a nightmare, what I'm living is real.

Memories of freedom remain fresh in my mind,
How could I allow myself to be put in this bind.

The beginning is near, the end, so far away,
Ten years of my life, I'll be counting every day.
I hope someone hears me, someone to feel my pain,
As I sit here alone, my cries still remain.

Heidi Holliday is an ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Favorite Place

There is a place where everything has a purpose, a place where realistic colors are everywhere I look, a place where nature in all its extensions is shown. This is the place to which I want to take you. It is a magical place where colors are so vivid that they can be felt, and where perfection is as palpable as the sweet green on trees mixing hope and health. A strong sensation of satisfaction surrounds my heart with the softest tones of nature. With thick, greenish-brown skins that have been proven against all madness, giant trees' torsos stand before me, challenging seasons, storms, and even human hands. Nothing is left other than to admire their green longevity while it lasts. It is a place where the light is a beautiful spectrum, and rainbows cut the sky affording a prism of perfection. Surfing the sky and its vastness, my mind runs over the clouds. Yellow lights play with my eyes like drops of sun over the sea; the awareness of a power enfolds my body with its great illusions—but time will eventually finish this game with the dim, yellowed perceptions that will forge goodbyes.

In this place the sky is blue. Vibrations of tranquility travel around using me as its target. I close my eyes and everything turns blue. What a peaceful moment! Problems have gone. Serene silence invades my head; I am growing small enough to be in my mother's arms again. Sensational colors with a tint of mystery are dancing all around my world. Red candles wreath me, emphasizing my silhouetted thoughts, red passion's rhythm moves as an illusory contour prolonging the final act of perfection. This is a place where butterflies don't sleep and where warm breezes take away worries;

where if I seem unsure about something I only have to look around. This is a place where birds fly around me dropping white petals over my head, alluding to a divine moment of clarity. White innocence plays at the edge of a water pond, discovering its great value on a clear reflection.

In this place, days are long or short depending on people's eyes. Did I say people? Yes, in my favorite place I'm not alone; a multitude of people with strong waves of energy cross my path, sharing knowledge and a desire for success; energy comes and goes opening a safe pattern between human souls, while a purple justice keeps natural order in place for our own benefit, making our journey, unforgettable.

In my favorite place, water is a gift of life. Jumping cascades of it fly and openly cover the mountains, transforming their shadow-ragged craziness on a placid river. Sweetwater rivers travel full of stories only to die in the secret sea. Landscapes of sordid eternity are conforming the meaning of human life and existence itself. There is a only one condition for you to enjoy this beautiful place: nothing complex or unnatural: Open your eyes to this description of the "Earth," thereby fulfilling all of your expectations and wondering at its beauty and greatness. We must cherish it.

Judith Hernandez is an ESOL student at the Brewster Technical Center in Tampa

Not Just Fun and Games

In today's society playing the lottery and getting involved in football pools is really and truly not just all fun and games, although many Americans tend to think it is. These activities' can lead to a form of addiction.

Americans love to play the lottery their states offer. They look forward to that Saturday drawing to see who is going to be the

next millionaire, hoping and wishing it is going to be them. They say, oh my God, I'm going to hit the big one this week, and I'm going to buy my dream house and a new car, however in reality this is an addiction that they will not admit to.

I myself loved to play the lottery, waiting to be the next millionaire, so I could buy my dream house. I also loved to enter the football pools for NFL. Needless to say after participating in these I then heard of dog tracks and the casinos. I loved to play these games. Eventually I ran out of using spare money and started to use "bill money". Later I started selling items, and borrowing money or using my family's money.

Then I really got into the fun and games, so to speak, and I got arrested for spending money that was not mine. My father asked the state for a rehab for me. However they would not accept me because "gambling" is not considered a serious addiction.

Today's society needs to face the reality that gambling is just as bad of an addiction as alcoholism and drug addiction, if not worse. Gamblers need help also.

Amy Holloman is a student in the GED prep class at Gadsden Correctional Facility

A Closer Look at Art

I believe if we took a closer look at art, it affects our lives more than we really think. Art is a form of expression. As far as creative abilities, well I'm no poet, but I like to write. Sometimes just writing down your thoughts and later putting them together you'll be amazed at what you have. I can't draw, but my little "doodles" mean something to me. Colors are wonderful too. Light or bright colors reflect the happiness you feel and of course dark colors can be a reflection of your unhappiness.

If you open your mind to your imagination, the possibilities are endless. Now take my grandmother for instance, she use to sing and tell me stories. How many of her stories were true I couldn't say, but I loved them all. Her songs of course I now sing to my children.

My mother is creative in every sense of the word. It seemed as though when she smiled the sun would shine just a little bit brighter. She played the piano while the family sang. She sewed clothes for my baby dolls and me! She not only told us stories, but encouraged us to tell them too. She even made food creative. So now I pass on to my children the things that I was taught. I can't imagine living a life without expressing yourself.

Clarissa Howard is a student in the GED Prep class at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Experience Learning English

I have studied English in junior high school, high school and college for eight years in total. However, I could not speak English because I did not have English conversation lessons in the Japanese school. Most Japanese people can read English, but cannot speak well, just like me before.

Learning English is not easy; yet, it is fun for me. After I graduated school in Japan, I studied English in San Francisco, Hawaii and private school in Japan again. Now I study English here in Fort Walton Beach. I take ESL class three times a week and listen to an English vocabulary CD at home every day.

Watching TV or a DVD is also a good way to study English. Sometimes I watch TV on the sofa while eating snacks, and then I have a nap. It might look lazy, but it is study for me. My ears are still listening to English.

It is important for me to have confidence when I talk in English. My English is not perfect yet; however, English conversation does not make me uncomfortable anymore. This is one of the very valuable things I have earned from my ESL class.

Hiroko Hewlett is from Japan and is an ESL student at Northwest Florida State College.

A Special Place

A special place that I admire is my bedroom. First it has a lovely, beautiful blue color. Second it has an amazing rug in it. Third it has two great soft, lovely, relaxing mattresses. That is why I love my bedroom.

I love my bedroom because it has that wonderful ocean colored blue. When you walk in my bedroom, you will fall in love. When you enter my bedroom, you will think you are on the beach. It is just so emotional it makes you feel excited because it is so pretty.

I love my room because of the amazing rug. When you walk in my bedroom and see that beautiful, lovely rug. When you enter my bedroom and smell the flowery scent of that wonderful rug, you will want to lay down on it. You will not be able to walk past it. It is so amazing that you can't miss it.

Another thing I admire about my room is lovely, soft, relaxing mattress. If you come in my room and lay in my bed you will fall asleep. It is just so soft and comfortable that you have to lay there for a long time. The mattress just relaxes your body. It makes you feel real good. If you had a long day, then just go lay in my bed and you will fall straight to sleep.

Finally, these are all the reasons my bedroom is so special to me .It has that beautiful blue and that amazing rug and that soft relaxing mattresses .If you come to my house and go in my

bedroom you will be so amazed. It is a very beautiful room. That is why my bedroom is a special place to me.

Zeleka Houston attends the Adult Community Education Center in Leon County

My Goals and Ambitions

My goals and ambitions are to be a singer and to finish school. My children give me ambition. They are what gives me motivation. My children motivate me to be my best.

I believe you should always believe in yourself even when you are feeling low and at rock bottom. Picturing how happy you could be will make you feel better. My dream is to become a professional singer, songwriter and clothing designer. Since I was three years old, I could picture myself on TV or on stage, singing in front of millions of people. In middle school I started dreaming again. I started to picture women in my style clothing line. I got better with repetition. These are the dreams that I want to pursue.

I have goals for myself also. I set these goals for me to live a better life. Goals give me something to live for. My most important goal is to finish school. It would improve my self esteem and it will give me security. Also, I would always be able to find a good paying job.

Finally, my children give me ambition. I want to succeed in life for myself and because my children look up to me. I want them to have ambition. My children can follow my foot steps to a happy spiritual life because, with God, all things will work out for good.

In conclusion, ambition makes my dreams important to me. I strive harder every day to reach my goals.

Angela Hunsicker is a student at the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Clearwater

Ambition

Some people look at ambition in a good way, others don't understand. My ambition is finishing school and getting my GED. I will have to attend school every day to do this.

I am determined to finish school because I have a daughter. I have to show her that her mother can do anything, as long as she tries. Everything in life does not come with a set of directions.

What motivates me? I have already said it. My daughter motivates me. I am determined to prove everyone wrong. To show the world that I can do what they don't think I can. In conclusion, I will try to achieve my goals. I have to work hard. In the end, I will have a good paying job.

Charmaine Jackson is in the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Clearwater

Connected

Entangled by strings as strong as rope
Intertwined up like a ball of yarn
Our souls connected with charm
I'm confused - is this a dream?
I peer through the steam
I see clearly and now convinced we are on the same team
Divided in eternity, born to separate homes
Our roads have finally crossed
Bringing us back to where we belong
Divine presence- the true core of our existence
The central part of our persistence
Can you feel it?
Connected
Connection via spirit and soul, empowered by youth enjoyment
whence old
Authentically connected, where you go I'll follow

No man can divide what has been divinely created; we're together,
no matter the chatter
This connection is better than latter
Shalom

*Monique Jackson and David Brown attend the GED class at the Broward
Correctional Institution*

One of the Goals I Hope to Achieve and the Steps I am Taking to Accomplish my Goal

One goal I would like to achieve is to become a Dental Hygienist. In order to achieve my goal, I first would need to continue working on earning my G.E.D. Upon completion and after receiving my diploma, I will find the best accredited school that offers a dental program and see what qualifications are needed to be accepted into the program. I will need to save money to help pay for classes and books in case financial aid programs do not cover the cost of being in the program. I am willing to study hard, devote my time and patience, and pay special attention in class so I can understand the procedures and the skills or techniques used in the dental world. I will be punctual and ready to work. I will try to complete all the hours and classes needed, in order to graduate and receive my certification.

Shannet James is in the GED program at Seminole Community College

Why I am Getting My GED

I am going to school because it is very hard for me to read my mail and to understand. At times, I am not sure if I understand what my mail is saying to me. It is hard to take care of my life without knowing for sure that I am reading my mail right. That is

why I am going back to school so I can read better and to make my family proud of me too.

I told my Mom and Dad I would get that diploma. I will not stop until I have it in my hand. I want that diploma so bad. I need that diploma so bad that I can feel it in my hands. I am trying really hard to get it.

Rita Jarvis is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult School

What Education Means to Me

Education is a process or art of imparting knowledge, skill and judgment. It is also preparation for life. Namely, it is a sequence of everyone's life. Because people say that knowledge is power, the more knowledge, the more power.

Suppose I drove my car for five years. I woke up one day in the morning, it could not start. I called an auto mechanic and he did a simple diagnostic and he got it running. I came to the United States; I did not know much more English. Now I feel free to answer many questions. Same thing right now for the stock market. Suppose I knew what was going to go way up. I am not talking about a bunch or a trend. I am talking about real, hard knowledge. Suppose I had it. What would I do? I would call a realtor or a broker, I would buy. Then later, I would sell, and I have more money. I would need to know ahead of time how to do it.

Sometimes, some ways are better than others. Most of them have drawbacks. So I use what knowledge I have and invent a new way. I might come up with a perfect method. I need a High School Diploma to go to college, to find that I need to pay a lot of attention to the setup.

Preparation is important. But that will be meat and potatoes to me, after all my training. To achieve to all these I should use the knowledge.

Jonel Jean-Baptiste is from Haiti and attends the Adult & Community Education Program in Naples

I Like the Change

My name is Resnel Jerome. I'm from Haiti. I came to Florida in November, 2007. The reason I am here is because I want to get a better education. I did not graduate from the high school in my country because I did not pass the state exam. So, my sisters decided that it would best for me to come to United States.

According to them, life is much better here than in Haiti. Since both of them graduated from the high school in Florida, they urged me to do the same. So, here I am to discover this myself. The first year when I am in Key West, I can already sense that it is a much pleasant place to live. I feel more secure in terms of safety, job search, and health care.

In my country it is not easy to get a job even if you are a degree holder. In Haiti, when I go out in the open, I will be doing it at my own risk. The doctor does not come to visit the patients unless we can afford to pay him. On the other hand, here in United States, I can go everywhere anytime and nobody stops to ask me where I am going. Also, it is easier to find a job and I can go the hospital even if I do not have the means to pay my bills.

There are organizations and people who can help me in the States. Therefore, life has many windows of opportunities in America though we are in a terrible economic situation. Nevertheless, in the long run I would like to return to Haiti to help my people and my country.

Resnel Jerome is a student at the Adult Education and Career Center in Key West

A Light On The Way

I was living in Colombia sharing my life with my family. All of a sudden, my partner at that time offered me a chance to move to the U.S. We happily planned to travel to U.S with a lot of expectations dreams and goals, nine years ago. Unfortunately, all of those dreams never went through. I faced a nasty surprise after a couple of months of being here in the U.S and then I was left alone. After that incident I felt hopeless, lost, and sad and I was in a depressed state.

I learned that when everything seems dark, it will appear a light on the way. A light which filled my heart with love, peace and forgiveness. His name is JESUS. He gave me my life back in a way that I'm stronger than before and I became a better human being. He had resolved all my problems that an average immigrant will face in this country. He has provided me a good job within a stable company. He has offered me to be part of Adult Literacy School program with a special tutor, Vince Scalise, which helped me to be promoted in my job.

During all the time that I have lived in the U.S, I have not been able to live or share my life with my family. However, I'm faithful that Jesus is working in this petition. I'm thankful for all this blessings in my life. I'm suggesting that if you want or need a change in your life, you just need to open your heart and invite him to your life. Remember that you are the only one that has the key to your heart.

Martha Coy Jimenez is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando

Environmental Protection

It is important to protect the environment because it's essential to our well-being. Three things that I would do to help it can be the following: recycling garbage, planting trees, and avoiding wasting electricity and water.

The first thing that I would do to help the environment would be to recycle recyclable materials. By separating plastic bottles and bags, newspapers, and all the paper that I already used, it can help landfills, trees and lives. By recycling these products it would lessen the chance that these products reach the sea and will help to decrease the pollution that already exists in our beautiful and enormous ocean. These could also help save many of the wonderful creatures which live there and that are in almost complete extinction.

The second thing that I can do to help the environment is to plant trees and keep them green. This is important and essential because they provide the oxygen that we breathe. Watering the plants and grass without wasting water could be also a good way to help the environment.

Trying to save electricity can help the environment a lot. We need to make sure we turn off everything electronic because we're wasting light power when we keep turning on light bulbs, televisions, and electronics that are unnecessary. Practicing simple things like these will help the environment. Avoiding wasting water could be the most simple, but the most important thing to do. Taking quick showers, not running the water while brushing our teeth, and keeping in mind the importance of this precious and very valuable liquid these are all very valuable steps. Without water no one would exist on this marvelous planet.

Finally, by doing many of these things we would save our planet. Since it is the only one we have we have to think twice before damaging it. What we do now will save our planet for our children's future and if each one of us makes an effort, we'll achieve it. We should do it. Don't forget we have just one planet,

so let's all conserve it! Let's recycle, plant trees, and conserve electricity and water.

Norma Jimenez is a student in the GED Department at Indian River State College

Dissection of a Poem

Poetry, can everyone relate to it? I know that I can. Poetry has made a change in my ways and my life. Tupac Shakur wrote a book of poems and my favorite one is "The Rose that Grew from Concrete." The poem Tupac wrote goes like this, "Did you hear about the rose that grew from concrete? Proving nature laws was wrong. It learned to walk without having feet. Funny it seems but by keeping its dreams, it learned to breathe fresh air. Long live the rose that grew from concrete, when no one really cares."

I can relate to this poem. As I understand it, it seems like he is talking about himself as the rose. How strong he had to be to overcome the hard and negative times. He had to prove nature laws wrong, meaning that the rose needed soil in order to live. The rose walked without having feet, meant that it grew without soil and water. By keeping its dreams it breathed fresh air, meaning anything you put your mind to, you can do, even if nobody cares.

I feel like I am the rose that grew from concrete, because no one believes in me. I have to prove the nature laws wrong and I must start from group zero to rise to the top. I will then keep my dreams alive and accomplish them, even though people may no longer have faith in me.

David Johnson is a student in the Columbia County Adult Education program

My Thoughts

Mistakes aren't necessarily failures

They're more often experiences that show you weren't afraid to try.

You begin to accept your defeats with

Your head up and your eyes open.

You learn to build all your roads on today

Because tomorrow's ground is too uncertain for plans.

So my thoughts are to think only of the best,

To work only for the best, and to expect only the best.

To forget the mistakes of the past,

Life is a strange game people play.

Trying to win, but don't know the way.

Life seems a con game when you're took.

Only because I did not look.

My thoughts

Georgia Johnson is an ABE student at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Goals and Ambitions

I would like to get my G.E.D. and further my education by attending college. I would like to start my own business. I feel that I will become a better person. I will be there for my family.

Previously, before I came to prison, I tried to get my G.E.D. However, I got discouraged and just gave up. Now that I'm in prison, I feel like I can focus on myself and my G.E.D. I feel that

there's a reason for my being here and that I'm going to do something positive from this experience.

Upon my release, I will get my G.E.D. and then enroll in college. I would like to get a degree to be either a Home Health Aide or Vet Assistant. My education means a lot to me. It will help me buy a house and establish who I am. I would like to start either a small cleaning service or open my own vet office. I will finally be able to obtain my goals and be a success. I will be there for my family and be the woman I intend to be.

Michelle Johnson is in the GED program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Life As Me

Growing up as a mom was hard. I had my first child at the age of fifteen years old from a man that was older than me, and I had another baby at the age of sixteen. It was hard. I dropped out of school. I had my last son and now I have seven kids and I love them all. I talked to them and told them I was going back to school and they all said, "That's good, Mother! We love you for that." Now I'm in school to get my GED so I can open up my own business one day.

Janise Johnson is in the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Crystal River

New York - the Big Apple

I went to New York on August 30, 2008. I visited my family and friends. I went to a church. It was a big church. I prayed to God for my family and everybody. I prayed to God to help me talk English. I like New York, because it is a big city, full of people. I like that.

Antonine Joseph attends the Literacy Program of Leon County

Brighter Promise for a Better Future

My goals and ambition are very obvious. First, it is to learn English. Next is to get the GED diploma and find a better job. I would like to save my money to go to college later on. I notice that when one has a higher education he or she gets more respect and better jobs. This is why I'm here every day in class. Finally, I would like to help people everywhere and especially in my country by helping and encouraging them to get to the highest education that they could. I am very sure that their future will be brighter and their lives will be better. That's a promise.

Wilson Joseph is from Haiti and attends the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

Accepting the Change

We never know what is going to happen in our lives. We can only plan our future by striving to achieve our short and full term goals but we do not know exactly how it is going to turn out. This is the reason we all need to be prepared to face unexpected circumstances. Since the time I heard from my parents that I will live in United States to pursue my studies, I knew suddenly that my life would not be the same anymore. Until now there have been many changes in my life.

First, I have learned to live without my parents who were close to me. As a newcomer in United States, I began to feel sorrowful. Imagine that I had never been separated from my parents. That means a lot but after a few weeks I started to manage myself. Also, it took me quite some time to understand the culture. Each country is different from another. I paid attention to the way people speak, live, eat, dress and work in order to adapt myself to their environment. These things really opened my eyes and made me resourceful. Next, I am proud of myself because I can now express in English how I feel. A year ago, English was my biggest

problem. I remember when someone was trying to speak to me, I was afraid and shy to answer them back because of my accent. I was also frustrated because I could not explain what I really wanted to say. Now, I am anxious to speak up. Finally, I have decided to go to college. I am leaning toward Business Administration for my Bachelor's degree and later on moving towards my master in it.

United States is a country of great prospects. It only requires me to be focused and serious on what I want to be in the future. Life in this country teaches me a lot of things. I am very sure there are better things for my future life here. I am ready for the change. I accept it. I will soar with it.

Winie Justin is from Haiti and attends Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

My Experience Learning English

Learning English has been interesting for me. I come from South Korea. English is very important for work in Korea. Talking with my friend has helped me to learn English. I have studied in an ESOL class at Northwest Florida State College. Let me tell you my experience learning English.

Every Sunday I have studied English at the church with my friend. Her name is Lydia; she is the pastor's daughter. We talk about usual topics, such as shopping, food, movies and famous actors. She is very kind and smart. We have a good time, so I always enjoy my talking with Lydia. She helps me with everything, as well as teaching me English. When my husband and I moved to the United States, we had a hard time to establish ourselves here. She helped us to buy a car and a house.

I heard about Northwest Florida State College. There are free ESOL classes for students who have English as a second language.

It is a happy experience for me because I can learn English in the class. After I took a test, I enrolled in the class. We can learn English grammar, vocabulary, conversation and pronunciation in the class. My teacher is Mary Ann; she always makes me laugh and takes care of me. Last week I talked about Korea to the ESOL students. During the presentation, I felt very nervous, but the teacher and ESOL students listened closely from beginning to end. They encouraged me. I always feel happy attending the ESOL class. My English ability is not good now, but learning English makes me happy. I will try to improve my English ability.

Heeyeon Kim is from Korea and attends Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach

When I Came to the USA

Ooh la la! I came to the USA! It is for me a dream that I hope I never wake up from. Let me tell you how humble a young girl feels to be in a completely different world. It is a big turning point in my life. Follow me please; it is going to be an exciting developing story.

By chance, I met an American fisherman at my father's tourist camp who took this humble young girl without much education to this beautiful country. In summary, today I can tell you this man is my faithful friend, my guide, my companion and my husband. I can tell you that I am the luckiest girl in the world!

I was working in my husband's dental office. It was for me another incredible opportunity in my life. I was working with nice and professional people who have a lot of love for me. This time also was so beautiful for me too, working with kind patients. I was working there almost two years, and then I decided to go back to school to continue studying English.

I have a beautiful daughter with my first and present husband, her name is Caroline. When I first came to the USA, I came only with my husband to learn how my life would be. I had to wait for some papers in my country for my daughter. After six months I went back to my country to get my daughter. This was such a happy time for me. My life changed a lot when I learned to drive. It is amazing how safe this country is compared to the country I came from.

Is there another girl more blessed than me? I don't think so!

Aneli Kimbrough is a student with the Pinellas County Even Start Program

My Favorite Place

Let me take you to a place that is special to me.
Let me take you to a place where I want to be.
It's a place so quiet, and a place so clean.
It's a place so real, and no one is mean.

When I walk through the trail to this place of mine,
I leave all my tears and worries behind.
There are beautiful flowers and grass so green,
And tall strong trees to stop for a lean.

This place I speak of is special to me.
This place I speak of I am free.
I go there often to sing a song,
I go there especially when I want to be alone.

There is this place, that is special to me.
This place I know is in my dreams.

In my dreams is where I be,
In my dreams I'm so free.
In my dreams no tears I shed,

In my dreams it's just me.

So there it is, my favorite place.

So just open your mind and make some space,

Like I did in my favorite place.

Mary King is in the ABE program at the Gadsden Correctional

Why I Vote

Why do I vote? Well, let me answer that question for you. I vote because it's a very good thing to do. I vote because I want my voice to be heard. Voting is an honor to have and if you mess up, you can easily lose it. I vote because I want a change. I was one of the millions of people on Election Day who stood in lines for hours to vote for one person I wanted to be my president. After I voted I felt so proud of myself because my voice was heard.

Now, on this very day, three months after Election Day, we have a brand new President of the United States of America. His name is Barack Obama. Barack Obama is very good and on that special day, history was made. We have the very first African American president.

To close it all up, the reason I vote is because I believe in changing, and our new President Barack Obama is willing to make a change in everything. So that is the very reason why I vote. So people when you want to know why, just ask yourself. Say, "Why do I vote?"

Patrick King is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton

My Role Model

If I had to choose one person in the world to be my role model, it would be Mr. Bob. Why would I choose Mr. Bob? He understands me for me. He listens to me and what I have to say. He has a great heart and he is a great person who cares about everyone. No matter what he does, he is always there to help out. It may be by lending a listening ear, a hug, or just a friendly hello and a smile. He loves my daughters and they love him. I enjoy his stories and how he encourages me and lifts me up when I'm sad or if I am feeling lonely.

Mr. Bob takes time out of his busy day and makes my girls smile and laugh. One thing I have learned from him is that when you are having a rough day or you're trying to be a super parent to your children is to remain strong and work hard for what you want in life. He says it is all right to stop and just spend time with your children and be a kid again.

He has so much knowledge to share and is very wise in all that he does. He's a pediatric doctor and a great friend to know. He has taught me to go for what I want in life and there may be some hard times, but there are wonderful friends who are there to offer help and support.

I thank God everyday for the wonderful friendship that my girls and I have with Mr. Bob. I experienced some tough times recently and Mr. Bob helped me out by listening to me and advising me through my tough times. Someone once told me that God puts special people in one's life to help strengthen one during struggles. I feel that Mr. Bob is my special person and that is why I chose him as my role model.

Lisa Kinney is a GED student at the Even Start Family Literacy program in Columbia County

Turning Points

Although most people would think that twenty-nine years is not long for someone to have lived, there have been four turning points in my life. Some have been good and some bad. Those turning points are: my marriage, having my kids, my divorce, and meeting my fiancé. Through all of the twists and turns I believe that I am a better person today.

I got married when I was sixteen years old. My husband was twenty-nine. I soon found out that I went from one father to another. What does a sixteen year old know about love and being married? I thought it would be great. I would have my own house, my own rules, and nobody to answer to. Oh, was I wrong! I had his house, his rules, and answered to him.

As for the second turning point, my kids were born. I do not regret having them. I love them with all of my heart. I was only eighteen when I gave birth to my son. Some kids (like me) think that when things are bad, maybe a baby will make things better. They don't make a relationship better, they make it harder. It took the birth of my daughter when I was twenty years old to wake me up. I asked myself would I want a man to emotionally abuse and sometimes physically abuse my daughter. The answer was definitely no.

The third and the hardest turning point was my divorce. It was emotionally draining and disappointing, to say the least. I went into the divorce thinking I was going to come out smelling like a rose. After all, we owned businesses, a house, three vehicles, and there was no doubt in my mind who would get the kids. Well, I was wrong about everything. He got all of the businesses (and money), the house, two of the three vehicles, and what broke my heart the most, he got custody of the kids. It would have probably been easier for me to accept him getting custody of the kids if I had done something wrong, but I didn't. I was found immorally unfit and unstable because I was living with my boyfriend.

Last, but not least, my fiancé was a turning point. I met him not long after my marriage had ended. During my divorce he was my rock. When I lost custody of my kids, he kept pushing me to do better so I can fight for them later. He is the reason I am continuing my education now. Seven months ago, we had a baby girl. She also keeps me on my toes. So I guess its good advice, “When life gives you lemons, make lemonade.”

My life has been full of learning experiences. At only twenty-nine years old, I know I have to be independent and take it one day at a time, looking forward to the future when I have my kids back.

Tracy Kuswandy is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton

SOS

In a tug boat searching for my inner escape raft,
My veins are made out of driftwood,
And my organs were molded,
By the hands of deserted survivors.
My spine is personalized segments of hope,
Stacked with precision.
My heart is a beating message,
Stuffed in a bottle waiting to be understood.
We spent so many years pulling and fighting the current,
But never leaving the shore.
I remember what it was like,
To be tossed into the water for the first time.
Unable to float or stay together,
But full of freedom and possibility.

Leslee Labaris a student in the Lealman Adult Program in St. Petersburg

My Favorite Place

Many years ago in 1997, my daughter who was then five years old (she's now 18 and still remembers this trip) and I went to visit my father in Budapest, Hungary for two weeks. What a wonderful experience! It started with a 13-hour flight to a 13-hour time difference, and a very busy airport. Then there was the drive to his house across the most beautiful bridge, the city streets were small and busy. The house he rented while he was there on business was a three family home. The heat came up through the floor, which was very interesting.

Budapest is a very poor country. Families grow larger and still live in the same house together. Everyone there has a dog, mostly large dogs, so there is constant barking. There are wonderful shops to walk to the bread market, meat, fruits and vegetable shops but no large grocery stores. Everything is sold separately and there are wonderful cafes everywhere that serve cappuccino and espresso.

My stepmother dropped us off in town one day and said she'd pick us up at the Hilton. I had no idea where it was and we got so lost but the shops and the people were wonderful. I eventually found my way to the Hilton. I also attended the ballet while I was there. It was breathtaking, especially the unbelievable art of the building itself. All of Budapest was beautiful, the detail and the artwork done in tiny tiles. I think I walked around looking up the whole time. The wonderful cultural things the people go out and do were fascinating. I went to listen to a concert at a church but I couldn't see the band. I just sat in the church and listened to the beautiful music around me, in the most beautiful church. As we left, there was a homeless lady on the stairs. My father stopped and gave her money. There are many homeless people there, a lot of daughters sent to the orphanage because they were not sons.

It is a very interesting culture. I happened to visit over there at Easter holiday. How beautiful Easter Sunday was! Then there

was Easter Monday, which is courting day. It was the most romantic gestures I have ever seen. Men with flowers and wine were standing under a lady's balcony everywhere. Something I have never seen here in the states. I could go on and on about my visit there and all I learned about the country of Budapest and its culture and all the people I met but I believe I've gone on long enough already. It is an opportunity my father gave me and an experience I'll never forget.

Jennifer Leiter is in the ABE program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Gambling and Tithes

I once used to play the Lotto, but now I changed my mind. I decided to give tithes for offering at church. A long time ago, when I was eighteen, gambling my money was a bad habit. I'd spend twenty dollars, just to wake up on another day to find out I lost. I tried many types of Lotto's for example; Cash 3 is one you can pick three numbers. You can tell the cashier that you either want the numbers boxed or straight. Boxed means if you pick three numbers, like 543, it should win in that order. There are also other ways to choose winning three numbers by choosing Quick Pick, the machine randomly picks the numbers for you. I have spent over fourteen hundred dollars on the Lotto and didn't win a penny.

One day I stopped gambling my money and started giving tithes at The Sea Gate Baptist Church for Christians. By coincidence, the pastor, Dr. Odom, told everyone sitting in the pews, "Playing and gambling your money is not safe, it's a fantasy that takes and never gives". He also said, "Rejoice and give to the Lord and his son, Jesus Christ". I received and believe in God every day ever since. The pastor teaches me everything I need to know about the Bible. I

also sing in choir I take Sunday school lessons and pick up children for Children Bible Studies on a bus route. I rejoiced and gave unto God. Amen.

Nestor Lobo is from Honduras and is a student in the Adult and Community Education program in Naples

What Education Means to Me

Education means a better paying job, more self-respect and confidence in myself. I dropped out in the 7th grade, so I know what it feels like not to have an education. I never thought about going back until I began to understand more about life, and what it was going to take to achieve my goals. I want to better myself, because I got by having courage and just saying what I learned from others. I tried to get it together when I went to jail. I got into a program to learn more, so that I would be able to be who I really wanted to be.

Now, I know that if I have an education I can change my life. I am currently enrolled in an adult education program here at Gadsden Correctional Facility. I put my all into my education because it is something that everyone needs to live a better life. One thing for sure, I feel proud of myself when passing a spelling test, or just hearing my teacher Mrs. Johnson say that I have done a good job. Thank the Lord for making this happen for me to better myself while incarcerated in prison.

Mariba Long is a student in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Education is Key

Education is an important element in my life. For I know if someone is not educated it is not going to be easy for the rest of his life. This is why I keep coming to class whenever I can. I have a

dream to be realized. I want to pass my GED test, then go to the college to learn to be a doctor. I know that it is hard but I keep praying to God about that every day. I am sure He is going to help me out . Education is a key according Bob Marley. He says, “When you are educated you don’t have any locked doors.” So I want to get this special key so that any where I go I will be able to get in.

I encourage everybody who has a chance to educate yourself. Yes, it is going to take a lot of your time, but in the end your life will be easy. As for me I want to be educated because in this world we are living if you are not educated you are like the left over crumbs. Even if you know people who can help and put you in place, I don’t just rely on them. They are sometimes fickle minded and difficult to trust. It is best if you have education as your foundation and use people as your doors and windows.

Jean Rolby is in the Adult Education and Career Program in Key West

Who I Admire

I admire my grandmother who is now in a much better place. She was a beautiful person inside and out. She also had a beautiful spirit. Another reason I admire my grandmother is because she was a very strong person. I really miss my grandmother; she raised me ever since I came home from the hospital. She did her best at being the parent I didn’t have for a long time in my life.

My grandmother also went through a lot with my grandfather who was a very selfish, abusive, and angry individual. Not so much as physical abuse, but mental abuse; but that never once stopped her from being the sweetest person you would ever want to meet. My grandmother taught me how to be respectful, especially to my elders. She was the type of grandmother who anyone could come to if they were tired or hungry. She would never turn you away, no matter what. My grandmother also kept

our family members together best she could, taught each of us that blood is thicker than water no matter what. This is why I admire my grandmother, and wish one day, I could be just as strong as she once was.

Lakeasha Love is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

English, You Can't Live Without It.

At this point of time that we are living in it is very important to have high education in order to be successful in life. Also, if you can speak more than one language, it will be in your favor. English is the most popular and global language. For that reason it is one of the most spoken languages in the world.

Personally, I discovered that knowing English would benefit everyone. It is impossible to speak all the languages but if you know English you can meet new people and make new friends faster in a new place. In my country, a non-English speaking student must pass the TOEFL test before he/she can graduate from college. A score of 80% is the requirement. Furthermore, small and big companies, stores, and other businesses are making it a necessity that all job applicants and employees speak and write fluently in English. As a result, I conclude that it has now become a duty for each person to speak, write, read, and understand English.

Andrea Lugo is in the Adult Education Program at the Key West High School

Language is Power

My name is Oksana. I was born in the Ukraine. I speak Russian because during that time it was the main language for the people, school, and colleges. Today, it has changed. Young people

now learn and speak Ukraine. I learned how to speak Spanish while I was in Argentina. Sometimes it is funny to see a Ukraine person speaks Spanish but it is all good. I have a lot of Argentinean friends and I miss the place very much. Currently, I am learning English. I am very happy when I come to class. Personally, it is very important for me to know more English because I have a 5 year old daughter. She speaks English, understands Spanish and Russian, too. My ambition is to own a beauty salon business because I am good with hair cutting and styling. Just like everybody else, I am here to take advantage of this place using my precious time, gifted talent, and turning it into a treasure for me, my family, and people around me.

Oksana Lyashenko is in the Adult Education Program at Key West High School

My School

Winter Park Tech is the best. I loved it the first day I came. I have met a lot of new friends. They are warm and nice. They come from different countries and speak different languages. I learn a lot about different cultures. Although we are different in many ways, we help each other. I learn a lot of new English words. We try to communicate only in English. We work together. I have a lot of opportunities. I will always have good memories of my experience at Winter Park Tech.

Cing Man is in the ESOL Program at Winter Park Tech

Learning to Read

Learning to read means so much to me. Reading is so very important. You can express yourself in any way you desire. If and when you do not agree with something or someone, and you cannot see them in person, you can always write to them. If you

need to apply for a job, you can do it for yourself. In fact, without reading skills, no one will hire you.

When you are away from your family, you can write to them. For example, I write to my family every week. Over the years I have had several opportunities to write to a lot of people I hadn't even met. Why? I wrote those letters for other people for different reasons because they could not read or write. It felt good to be of help to someone who needed me. I would recommend that anyone who cannot read or write should return to school and ask for help.

Jean Marin is from Belize and attends ABE and Citizenship classes at Pensacola Junior College

Life is Wonderful!

Hello, my name is Anna. I am from Puerto Rico. I came to Orlando on December 10, 2008. I love to stay here. I have two daughters; one is fourteen years old and the other is six years old. I love my daughters so much, they are my life. In November 2005 I was diagnosed with breast cancer. When that happened, I felt like my world was falling apart, but I told myself 'you need to live because of your daughters'. My doctor told me that I have to start with chemotherapy because it was huge. Well, I started my chemotherapy. When I took my 5th therapy my doctor told me I was going to need surgery. I had a mastectomy. I took my last 2 therapies and I went to the radiologist. They gave me 26 therapies. It's not easy, to tell the truth, but I thank God that I did it. Now I know how sick people feel. I am a better person; I am happy for my life and I can say I am a survivor of breast cancer.

Anna Marquez is an ESOL Student with the Adult Literacy League in Orlando

My Experience is Different, but that's OK Everyone has their own History!

My name is Iris Marquez and when I was growing up I saw many things that were not fair, so I learned to see life a little differently. When I studied Social Science at the University I began to understand many things about other people's lives and also began to understand different personalities and this interested me to learn more. I studied Human Development and I worked with women who survived domestic violence and afterwards I worked with children with disabilities and I learned something from every child. In general I learned that everyone is born with value in their life and they have a lot that they can do. A good attitude makes the difference in life!

Iris Marquez is an ESOL student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando

OH FATHER!

Oh Father, of these cold and lonely prison walls
yes, I did have another great fall
now I feel so very small
until you came beside me and stood tall...
Oh Father, I am so very tired
Oh Father, to you whom I desire
I ache from head to heart
I need the pain to stop
Because it has torn my world apart
Oh Father, please just tell me
that it's gonna be "okay"
Hopefully I didn't ruin it in one day
You said that this place is only a temporary stay
Oh Father, please come save me now
Can you hear my silent cry?
I am sorry for the pain I have caused
What I did Father: I just don't know 'why'

Oh Father, now I close my eyes
Given into the dark of night
Without you Father, nothing would be right
With all of my love and respect for you
Father, Lord, "Goodnight"!

Angie Martin is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

The Turning Point

Have you ever had a turning point in your life? I have. My turning point was when I moved to Lake City with my Aunt Tracy and Uncle Kevin. I moved up here a year and eight months ago to finish school, get a job and start a new and better life. I quit school while I was in the tenth grade and had been struggling the last two years. One of my problems was that I didn't ask for help or ask questions. Now I am enrolled in a wonderful program called Columbia County Adult Education and am awaiting my GED test scores. Another reason that I moved to Lake City, was to find a job, and that I did. I am employed at Sunshine True Value Hardware and have been working there a year and a half. It has been a great experience working with the public and I have learned a lot of things. I now can mix paint, fill propane and cut keys.

I also wanted to have a new and better life in Lake City. The life I had in my former town held no future for me. Since I have been living in Lake City, I have begun seeing the light at the end of the tunnel. It has been very hard not being able to run back home. Sometimes you just have to turn around and face the world as it comes. Moving to Lake City was a definite turning point in my life. I hope to earn my GED this semester and have really enjoyed working and earning a living for myself. I am very happy

with my choice to move to Lake City to better my life. Sometimes when we find ourselves in the middle of poor choices, the best thing we can do is walk away and make a new start.

Josh Martinez attended Columbia County's Adult Education Program

Seth

It may sound a little odd, but the person I admire the most is my ex-husband. Although our marriage didn't work out and we're no longer together, I still think of him as the most intelligent and clever person I have ever known in my life. He is generous and kind, and he respects his friends and honors his family. He can really accomplish everything. He's capable to resolve any kind of problem without hesitation. He tried to teach me how to do that, and he never got mad when I just could not do it like him. He's always the best at what he does in life and at work.

Generosity and honesty are his best qualities. He helps people with what he has. He has on a few occasions sheltered friends who had lost their homes or their loved ones. He always said the right words to them, changing a tear into a smile. He tries to do the right thing, and sometimes he found himself lying because it was the right thing to do. He never lies to deceive people. Family is his priority in life. He loved my family like it was his, while I was always angry at his family for not doing this or that. That's why I admire him. He always tries to see the good in people.

However, of course nobody on this earth is perfect, and he has his "moments" from time to time. But he has taught me how to be more compassionate and a little less angry in life. I admire

him for that, and he will always be an example for me to look up to. I can't help but think that the word "noble" is the best word to describe this man. Noble in heart, he really changed mine.

Venera Maugeri is from Italy and attends the Santa Rosa Adult School

The House

The house holds many things inside. It could be chaotic or full of happiness. It familiarized itself with technology with its cell phone, satellite, TV's remotes, and computer. It familiarizes itself with laughter and tears, hopes and fears. It holds many secrets. Did you ever hear the saying if only these walls could talk what a tale they could tell? The house can be very demanding it needs to be cleaned just like our body and souls it needs up keep like a nice paint job, new furniture, rugs. Just like we need our hair fixed, new suit or dress. It has a door you can lock to keep humans out. A door that opens leads you to another place that God made which is called outside.

Around nature a place where you can collect your thoughts and leave all your trouble behind where the sky is painted by God. Where birds fly and flower grows. When you come here there is no trouble inside the house. You become enthralled as you watch a bird in flight with a twig in her mouth building a nest for her young. You are amazed how this all comes about and when the nest is finished how the male sits and guards the nest from predators. Then you watch this tiny ant dragging this big bug into her home now, the sun is going down and the night is nearing and birds have gone to roost, and we nourished our souls and minds. The house beckons to us to come back in to its warmth, love, chaos and what it unfolds for us.

Rosemarie Maxwell is a student at the Country Oaks Learning Center in Chipley

What Education Means to Me

When I was young growing up in Korea, my mother had cancer and was very ill. At that time, my grandmother lived with us. She and I had to take care of my mother, so I had to quit school. My grandmother could not take care of my mother by herself. My grandmother was sick, too, so I had to help in the house.

I do not have much education, but most of the time I do not mind at all because I only had one mother. In my mind I always thought, if I have the opportunity, I am going to go to school to get an education. It does not matter when I have the opportunity. I can go to school.

I have enjoyed coming to ESOL classes. I meet students from different countries. Learning a second language is not easy. It is very difficult for me, but I love to come to school every day. It seems to me that I did not have much education, but it is never too late. That is what I love about the United States. If I make the effort, I can do it. Now I would rather go to school than anything.

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

The Turning Point in My Life

The turning point in my life began February 19, 2005; I was involved in a single car accident with three children in the vehicle with me. As a result of the accident, one of the children passed away and I was charged with DUI Manslaughter. I am now serving ten years in the state prison for DUI and child neglect. That was the worst day of my life and coming to Broward Correctional Institution was the second worst.

Since my incarceration on January 24, 2007, I have done quite a few things to change my life. In November of 2007, I

enrolled and achieved a goal I never thought I would-obtained my GED. In 2008, I enrolled in a vocational course at the prison called Commercial Arts, where I received a state certification as a Design Technician. Currently, I am a teacher's aide for the GED class. I have really enjoyed the opportunities and challenges I have gone through thus far. This experience has taught me a great deal about myself. I never realized earlier in my life that I am a person of good character and a strong mind. I do not need any medication to make it through this time I am serving. I have learned to love myself as never before. I have a closer, loving relationship with my husband, children and the rest of my family. They have all seen the quality of the change in me.

Currently, I am in the process of legal actions to have my charges and sentence reduced. If it is meant for me, I will go home a changed woman and take with me the knowledge I have acquired. I will incorporate my experiences into my every day life and teach others what I have learned. The only thing that will not change is the remembrance of that fatal night; concerning that, I have learned to forgive myself and released guilt I had inside. I've been told things happen for a reason. I'm not sure what this was, but I do know I am happier and have a new outlook on life. Being in that fatal car accident and coming to prison was the turning point in my life.

Sherry McClelland is an academic aide at the Broward Correctional Institution

My Favorite Place

I have to say that my favorite place is my kitchen. Cooking is something that I love to do and I do it well. There is nothing like getting a good meal in the oven and then sitting down at my table with a good cup of coffee and some good music while food is cooking. The kitchen to me is the heart of a home. There is nothing like a family gathering around the kitchen table to enjoy a home cooked meal. It is real sad to me that nowadays people no

longer have the desire or the time to enjoy cooking and eating home cooked meals.

Mary McGhee is in the ABE program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Stand Your Ground

Brown sugar, toffee, chocolate, and honey glaze. These are the
many shades of a beautiful black woman.

Strong, smart, and distinguished. We've come a long way.

No more being abused or misused.

Stand tall be firm you are a leader from birth.

Let no man walk over you.

Always be true to your word.

Mocha, dark chocolate, butter pecan and red. These are more
Shades of beautiful black women.

Never be afraid to say what's on your mind.

Teach your kids how to read and write.

They can shine.

Obama has set the mark.

Don't be left behind.

You are a beautiful black woman.

Stand your ground.

We are made from the image of the most high.

Take your crown.

You are the Queen in my eyes.

Stand your ground.

Lerousha McKelvy is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Mind Tools

According to Mind Tools, goal setting is a powerful process for thinking about my ideal future and motivating me to turn my vision into reality. Furthermore my goals and ambitions are to finish school, to open up my own salon, and to adopt my kid sister. I am working hard to achieve these objectives.

The first thing I must do to proceed with my goals is to finish my G.E.D. I can do this by coming to class, doing my work, and most importantly, practicing on things I may not understand or know. For example, I am not so good at math, therefore I ask for help all the time on problems I struggle with.

My next goal is to open up my salon. I would like to have the salon in three sections one for the barbers, one for the nail technicians and one for the hair stylists. With this in mind, I have to build up clientele and have some really good employees. I can't get that done if I don't have enough education and confidence.

My final goal is to adopt my kid sister. Our mom passed away at a young age so I would like to guide her in the right direction. I will not be able to do that if I am not physically, emotionally, and financially ready. For instance, I would not be a great parent/guardian if I didn't think this through and have accomplished so many goals already.

In conclusion, I think it is best to have long term and short term goals. Having goals makes me a smarter and better person. With that all said my goals are to finish school, to open up my own salon, and most important is to adopt my kid sister.

Sharday McNeil is a student in the GED Program at the Indian River State College, St. Lucie West Campus

SCHOOL OF HARD KNOCKS

Welcome to the “School of Hard Knocks”, where it seems the clock has stopped, trapped in a prison industrial complex the size of city blocks.

Guns cocked in gun towers, ever so slowly passes years, days, months, hours.

Time devours all - TEMPUS EDAX RERUM - and here I live in this correctional slum.

Never been dumb – but I’ve done dumb things – so now I’m educating myself with limited means, but this doesn’t mean I have limited dreams.

And as long as I’m alive I strive, and here sometimes striving means simply surviving.

You know I could have gone to Penn State, but instead I’m in the State Pen, surrounded by 1200 people, but not one friend.

I sent a letter to my family, but it seems that they’re mad at me, because they only seem to respond, well, semi-annually.

But, I still have a strategy to increase intellectually, they may have my body, but they don’t have the best of me.

I’m 29 now I’ll be released at 41, in the futuristic year of 2021. So here is math. The sum total of my incarcerated years will be 20, but the total of the tears of me and my family is too many, plenty places, all over the state they have sent me, tortured me occasionally with chemical agents and electricity.

Life moves pretty fast, if you don’t stop and look around every once in awhile, you’ll miss it.

So now, I'm teaching, reaching out to others, I feel the whole world needs to help one another, and brother, if you break it down statistically, you'll realize we have to do our own part individually.

And realistically, I can see, if I don't improvise, educationally, in FI DOC, I'll never go any further than GED.

So, to resist stagnation, I'm patiently striving and searching, reaching and seeking, trying to gain more knowledge, give my life more meaning.

In this "correctional" demeaning existence, to improve yourself, takes, a lot of persistence.

So, I got this job as a prison tutor, we have three rooms with books, one with computers.

So, you see, I want to help my fellow convicts get their GED's, get out, get right, and don't come back to see me.

Damien McTeague is a tutor in the Education Department at the Jefferson Correction Institution in Monticello

You Are What You Choose

When I was young I had many goals. As time went by and I got older my goals and ambitions have changed. First, when I was just a little girl one of my goals was to some day join the armed forces but not anymore. Now, I want to go to college and be someone important in this world. My other goal in life is to be successful in my future career so that I can accomplish all of my goals and my ambitions. My future career goal is to become a registered nurse so that I can help others and also accomplish my one ambition for myself and also for my parents. My one and only ambition is to work hard in my career and one day be able to buy a house for my parents and myself because that is something I

always wanted to do. It is my desire to help my family with everything that I could.

I am 20 years old. I have lived in Key West for 14 years. So far, it has been a good living here even though I rather be living in Maryland because it is much nicer there and a lot bigger than Key West. I hope to move to Maryland in the future.

Johana Medrano-Solis attends the Adult Education and Career Program at Key West High School

It Is Perfect For Me

My name is Liliana Mejia. I am married to Robert Mejia for 11 lovely years. We both were born in Colombia. When I arrived in United States with my son, it was very difficult because I don't know anybody and I couldn't speak English. I am thankful that I started to work sooner than I expected. It is now six years that I am working with the company. Meanwhile, I am rejoicing because I am studying English and I plan to complete it without any complaint. I am very happy to live here in Key West because we love the water and also we love the party. It is a perfect place to relax. People in Key West are in no hurry and neither am I.

Liliana Mejia attends the Adult Program at Key West High School

What Education Means to Me

It's a freedom we should all share
A shield that protects us when we need defense.
It's a beauty that makes us to shine from within.
It's a privilege not everyone gets.
We need to recognize it's worth,
it gives us wonderful self-esteem.
The appreciation is far too extreme.

It's a treasure we need to hold dear to us.
It's a security like a Mother's touch.
To keep us safe from danger.

Jennifer Melancon is in the ABE Program at Gadsden

A Turning Point in My Life

My life changed when I came to the United States. My country is Venezuela. When I was nine years old, I went to live in the capital, Caracas. There I lived until I grew up. I studied and got married. I lived in Maracay, a little city next to Caracas, and I lived there for thirty-six years. Six years ago, my husband and I traveled by plane to Florida. We dreamed of being close to our daughters and grandchildren. We stayed in U.S.

I have been married forty-five years. My husband's name is Cesar. We had three daughters; Astrid, Tamara, and Luisa Fernanda. We have four grandchildren; Monique, Jonathan, Jessica and Jacob. We love them and they are our happiness. My daughters have lived in the USA for many years; Astrid for twenty years and Luisa Fernanda for seventeen years. Tamara is in Heaven. From there she sees when the sun comes out in the morning and the moon with the stars in the night. Tamara is a star. She is happy and smiles at everyone.

I am a teacher. I have dedicated my life to work with children for thirty years. In Maracay I was in charge of a beautiful house where the children went to learn and to have fun. It is called Casa de Los Arcos.

When I came to the U.S., I began to study English to get my certification to work as a teacher in this country. One day I went to look for a job. I began to work with the three-year-old children. The American education system is different from my country's system. Also it has been difficult learning English. This has been

a barrier for performing my profession. However, I have been able to work with the children of this beautiful country, teaching and giving them love and joy. Currently, I continue to learn English to overcome this obstacle. Living in this country has changed my life!

Raisa Mendez attends the English Cafe at Southwest Regional Library in Pembroke Pines.

My Experience in Adult Education

Hey! Do you have good experiences in your life? I do, let me tell you about them. I have gained a lot of knowledge but I've had embarrassing moments too. I have had many difficult situations in my life. When I came to live in the USA, I never thought how sad and strange it would make me feel. When my little one talked to me in English, I didn't understand anything. Because of that, I decided to go to school. It was not easy.

To go to my children's activities years ago, it was impossible if my husband wasn't with me, or if someone who could translate wasn't there. I felt horrible. I remember when I had to go to a meeting with my kind's teachers, they were talking and talking and I just smiled and nodded. When I can back home I was embarrassed. Going to the restaurant was hard, my husband had to read the menu to me and translate it for me or I would just say that I wanted the same thing that he was having.

To get involved in English Adult Education was the best decision I have made in my life. My husband always supported me. I started ESOL classes and step by step, I am learning. I received a tutorial in the public library for a while and I was trying the best I could.

Last year I participated in a Literacy Ambassador Program and gave a speech. It was an amazing experience to be able to hear people's life stories about why they were there. Before I shared my

story in front of the audience, in English, I didn't think I was going to be able to do it. When it was my turn, I stood up and did a great job. I am not afraid or embarrassed when I speak English now. I understand now and am very thankful for that!

Noemy Mericle is a student in the Pinellas County Even Start Program

This Earth Is Not My Home

In this world, there is not a safe place. Sometimes when you go some where, it is worth it, another time it is not. I recall a day that I was in a very bad mood and I did not know what to do and where to go. My soul was empty because of the result of a bad decision. After a while this is what I did. I turned on the radio to religious post and I heard a talk that soothed my soul. From that day I realized that there is no place on earth I can feel secure, safe, and satisfied. This place called earth is not my home.

Jean Moise Michel attends the Adult Program at the Key West High School

Three Things I Can Do to Help the Environment

There are a lot of ways to help the environment, but I will only discuss three of them. The first way is to stop filling our waterways with all the different kinds of poisons. The second way is to find a better way to get rid of our trash. The third way is to stop dumping plastic all over the place.

The first way we can help our environment is to give more attention to our waters. I feel if we could find a way to stop these big ships and barges from leaking all of their oil in our rivers and oceans, we would be helping the environment in a very big way. If we do this, it would help save the fish and preserve the water that we drink. The second way we can help is to find an alternative

method to get rid of our garbage. Currently, we are burning a lot of our garbage. By burning our garbage, we are polluting the air so badly that we can hardly breathe. The third way to help the environment is to help with all of the plastic that is around us. We might try converting plastic into energy. Such energy sources may include gas and electricity.

Well, these are only some of the ways that we can help the environment, believe me, there are many other ways that we as a society can help. The ways I have discussed are only a few. Everyone must find their own ways to help the environment, and please don't be a litter bug.

Samuel Miller is a student in the GED Department at Indian River State College

Life's Different in the United States

I'm an Iranian woman who lived in Germany for twenty years before coming to the United States. There are some differences between these two countries. The German people are more serious than Americans. They are hardworking. They don't laugh often. They want everything to be correct. They are not used to asking others how they feel. Sometimes if you ask a friend how he is doing, he will reply, "Why do you ask, I'm not sick." Unless they really mean it, they don't give many compliments. There are other differences in the education system, traditions, food, etc. Therefore the world is an interesting place to live.

Heidi Moeinzadeh is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

Run The Race to First Place

My name is Yarendis Molina. I was born in Cuba. I come to United States with great hopes to fulfill my goal.

My ambition is to be a dentist. When I was small, I was afraid to go to the dentist. As time went by I got over it and enjoyed my visit there. I believe that each one of us has a predetermined destiny. My conscience tells me this is what I should do. Sometimes we don't know that a terrible day could turn out to be charming. I believe that everything is within our reach if we endure and persevere through the challenges and obstacles to get it. Just like a good athlete strives to do his best to reach first place. Likewise, we must fight against all odds in our lives to arrive at our destination.

Yarendis Molina attends the Adult Center at Key West High School

My Experiences in ESOL Classes

My experience at Winter Park Tech has been very good. I received warm attention the first time I came to ask for information. When I came back to register, everyone was very helpful. I am getting a free opportunity to improve my English skills. I can share with many people from all over the world. I have excellent teachers who share their knowledge, culture, and humanity with me. I am happy here.

Tatiana Montoya is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

What Education Means to Me

Education is very important to my life. When I was growing up in Thailand, I did not have many chances to get a good education. When I moved to the United States of America, I felt like the doors opened for my opportunity to go back to school. The reasons why I want to go back to school are I want to improve my English, and I have a personal goal to get my GED diploma.

My first reason is that I want to improve my English by learning how to read, write and communicate with people. I also want to go back to school so I can help my son with his school work. Sometimes it is too difficult for me to teach my son because I do not know much English.

My second reason is that I am setting a personal goal to get my GED diploma. It does not matter how long it takes me. Then, hopefully when I get my GED, I wish to attend a business college. Ultimately, I wish to graduate and get a great career.

This is what education means to me. I can communicate with people and clearly understand what they mean, and I can help my son with his homework with no problems or misunderstanding. I will get my GED diploma, and I will get a business college degree. In the future, I will have a good job and make good money. This is what education means to me.

Piyanart Moore is from Thailand and attends the ESOL class at Northwest Florida State College

When I was Younger

When I was seven years old and living in Mexico I had to go to school but also I had to go to work. I had to work because my mother and father were not able to make enough money for the family to live. My father was always on us, he was very stern. He did not let us play much with our friends and always wanted to make us work hard. He didn't care much about our school or if we got good grades. My father drank a lot and would get into fights with our mother and that made me sad. He never listened to my mother and always thought he was right.

When I finished elementary school I wanted to go to high school so I could get a better job. But I never got the opportunity because my father wanted me to continue working. I worked hard planting

tomatoes, we had a large farm and there were many tomatoes to plant. I remember the year we made good money but he spent a lot of the money on himself without consulting with my mother. He didn't worry about me or my siblings, didn't know if we needed things like shoes. I think he spent the money unwisely at the bars.

I finally made the decision to come to the United States to try and have a better life and find a better job so I could help my family.

Although my father did some things I didn't like, I loved him and respected him very much. He showed me how to work hard and be disciplined. He never listened to us about his drinking or to his doctor. He became very ill and passed away on July 3, 2008; he was only 54 years old.

Evilio Mora is a student at the Adult Literacy League in Orlando

A Turning Point in My Life

I have had a good life! God has let me live life to the fullest. I have five grown kids. They went to college, but I want to live long enough to read a book to my grandkids and see them go to college too!

I am an outdoor kind of person. I love to hunt, trap, fish, swim, and ride horses. Cooking comes natural too because you had to know how to fix boar hog, gophers (the turtle-king you can't eat no more), deer, coons and fish. I used a clean t-shirt twisted, packed with cool whip and squeezed to decorate cakes for their birthdays. I bake cornbread, biscuits, fried chicken - no jiffy mix - pies, cobblers and cookies for my kids.

I worked all kinds of jobs. I picked cucumbers and tomatoes from Florida to Delaware. I have been a short order cook, garbage collector, worked construction and pulled the night shift at the Pink Shell over on the beach. I keep up my car myself. In my last job, I was a foreman with forty guys. We laid linoleum and carpet in all

the schools from Naples to Port Charlotte, even Health Park Hospital until we got laid off. I was always ashamed not to know how to read and I didn't want anybody to know. Seems like all my life I'd take a step forward to get help, then get embarrassed, figure out another way...I don't know...my parents couldn't read either.

It's like I grew up with a compass in my head. I didn't get lost much. It was a blessing I could read a map, a blue print, cook from scratch and remember things - directions and numbers - like exits and recipes. When I was foreman I memorized the first letter of my crew member's names. I had symbols and numbers to count hours, breaks and other particulars I reported to the boss man.

I am my own man. I know the right thing to do. I never in my life told anybody what to do, even my work crew. I asked them, man to man, to do their jobs. I'd tell them that I needed to take care of this right now or before break. If the job wasn't done right or on time, we talked to the boss man or I sent them home. I don't have friends when I have a job to do. It is tricky!

God saved me from a bad car crash going to LaBelle. When a sandbank gave way on a gator pond I just knew I was gator bait. Once I fell out of a boat and just swam around in the Gulf when my friend speeded up to chase the mullet I had spotted. Instead he caught a big shark! He came on back eventually and picked me up. I was lucky.

Then my wife died. I lost my job and got a DUI. The lady in the DUI class told me about the Literacy Resource Center. She said I should check it out. So I met Kristen P. She fixed me up! Here I am, studying at the library twice a week. I practice and practice! I am going to read a whole book to my grandkids one of these days!

James Moreland is a student at Literacy Volunteers of Lee County

My Life's Story

I live ten seconds at a time. When I said I live ten seconds at a time, what I meant was that life is short and I'm not going to live forever. When God tells me it's time for me to go, it's time. Sometimes I wonder what I have going for me. I wish that I had made the right choices in life so that I wouldn't have to worry about the problems that I have created. I need to make the right decisions in life! Now, since I'm not worried and want to make better decisions, I can start to focus on the things that are important in life, such as school, kids, family and more importantly, me.

I was born in the Bronx in New York, on January 14, 1989. I then moved to Florida in 1995 and have been here ever since. I'm 20 years old and I'm attending school to get my GED so that I can go to college to be a mechanic or work in the medical field. I particularly want to work in the mental health field.

In my life, I have had my downfalls, good days, and bad days. I have had times when I didn't know where I could stand, but most of the time there has been someone to help me out. It might have been a nurse, counselor, family member, or just a friend. No matter what career I end up in, I want to be able to help others who may find themselves in need of care.

Chris Morris attends Columbia County's Adult Education Program

Where Am I Going?

As each day comes to an end, I wonder where am I going. One thing I do know for certain is that I'm not where I was yesterday. If I quit today I'll never reach the place where I could have been tomorrow. So, as long as I keep trudging on I'll be one more day closer to where I'm going.

At this present time, I'm not where I want to be. But, because I continued to wade on I'm where I'm supposed to be today. Until I get to where I am going, I'll be content with where I am at this moment. As I move forward today one thing I can count on is a better day.

When I get to the place where I am going, wherever that may be I know that place will be far better than the place where I was when I first started trudging along. When the time comes that I finally reach my destination I know that I will not be the same person that I was when I started my journey. So, no matter what obstacles I may encounter on the way to where I am going or how perplexing they may seem, I must go around them and continue to wade on if I want to get to where I am going. Although I may be in the same spot tomorrow as I am today, I'll still be one more day closer to where I'm going. And when I finally arrive to the place where I am going, I know I'll never be in the place that I once was.

Teddy Morvant is a student at the Jefferson Correctional Institution

A Hot Day

I am a student of Volusia Literacy Council. I would like to tell you about my day. I was working outside in the garden between the roses and the herbs. Everything smelled wonderful especially if I touched them. The sun was very hot. It may even have been 100 degrees outside. Because it was so hot in the garden, I drank water often to refresh myself. I also wore my hat and bandana. Even with what I did to stay cool, I was still sweating buckets! It was good for me. I think sweating is healthy. But it made me change my clothes three times; luckily I carry extra in case I need them. Working outside in the hot sun is why I want to get my GED. I want to go to college to study something easier to do.

Maria Munoz is a student at the Volusia Literacy Council

Love Never Fails

Love is a noble feeling that is born from the heart. When you put love in all the things that you do, your life will be easy. Showing love to each other will help the soul to be in peace with God and yourselves. We can show our love any time and any where in different forms. For instance, we can show our love by doing something for others if they need help, as well as with people who are not nice to us. Of course! Absolutely! Love should be the most important feeling in our life. Personally, loving my family, my friends, my job, and other people has helped and will continue to help me to realize my dreams. I think when the world is ruled with love, there will be no more wars.

Alison Narvaez attends the Adult Education Center at Key West High School

Where Our Steps Are Going

With a positive mind
And faith in our Creator
Forward our steps will go

Steps...
Interesting word to decipher
Step by step, slowly
So are our first steps
Insecure and cheerful
For being the beginning
Through this world
And to be the cause
Of a great smile
In our mother's face

Our steps many footprints will leave
We will fight to become
Solid and pleasing to remember

Road, way, path, there are many
Also there are steps
For us to choose the best
So we never will have to exclaim:
“If I would respect those signals”

Let us open the road
With a great step anywhere
To our own satisfaction and our family
This is the better heredity
That we will leave
When we have to go away.

Nieves Nouel is a student at the Boca Raton Public Library Literacy Program

Across the Bridge

Across the bridge where time elapsed,
My future from my past...

Time weaves together in a tapestry of pleasure and pain.
Tears to be cried, anger raging inside, whispering...
Give back the shame.

Gratitude that seeps to the core of my being...
Walking a new path, through different eyes I'm seeing.

When once all I saw was through a blurry vision...
Turning it over, serenity becomes my mission.

All the memories flowing in and through out my mind,
Seeing the pictures, going back through time...

In the faces of the child I use to be,
I see the faces of generations before me.

And gazing upon the faces of yesterday,
I see the faces of generations today.

My brothers and sisters, my nephews and nieces...
Collectively and separately we all possess similar pieces...

Running from the past, hiding from the weather...
The distance that separates us is not greater
Than the link that binds us together.

Had I ever been granted the chance to turn back the hands of time,
Perhaps I would not have seen the beauty of God's reason &
rhyme.

Jeannean O'Connell is in the GED Program at Manatee Community College

She is the Stigmata

Starlight, illuminating a void of infinite time.
The essence and stimulating aroma of wild pine.
She is all of this including more.
A hero, Victorian, or a savior of source
So kind that the weight of her heart could trigger a force.
Ending world anguish, settling life back on course.

She is comfort, she is peace.
She is the stigmata, she is the release.
She is the tears of guilt.
The dying cry for help.

Soak the blood from your wound.
She outshines the light of the moon.
You cannot hear her voice, but you know she's in the room.
She is the night and she is the day.
You would say she is perfect in everyway.
An undeniable being she could remain,

And without your faith she'll fade away.

It's her electricity, her never ending glow, and if you breathe in
deeply, you could feel her kiss as the wind blows.
With just one touch, she could make blind men see.
An angel in disguise, she sounds familiar,
Even though you did not realize a thing.

David O'Connor attends GED classes at Manatee Community College

Education is a #1 Priority

First and foremost, education means to have a good development and understanding of any subject area that you can learn something from it. As for me, school is not the only place to get an education. Education is everywhere. Even when you are taking a walk, doing your exercise, shopping at a mall, driving your car, eating at a restaurant, or cleaning your house, there is always something that you can learn along the way. Of course, in order to get a good job, if you have a school transcript together with some experience and a well rounded knowledge, you can get the job easier.

With such a good education you can help earn a descent wage to pay your bills, help your family to get into college, and help you with all aspects of your life. I think education is very important because if you have an education, you can become a doctor, a president, an astronaut, a police man, and so on. So, what I am trying to say is the more education you have, you can become anything you want to be. Amazing as it seems that's what education means to me

Lecene Odney is a student at the Adult Center at the Key West High School

My Perfect Vacation

I come from Costa Rica. I have not been to my country for three years. For my next vacation I will be going to Costa Rica to visit my family and friends. I want to go because I miss Costa Rica's people, food, and parties.

The people in Costa Rica are very nice. They are always looking after each others. My mom lives in Ciudad Quesada. Her name is Ligia. She is 43 years old. She is a good cook and she cooks my favorite foods. She is always busy looking for something to do or cook. I also want to meet my new nephew and visit my grandmother.

My grandmother is very nice with me and my brothers. I love my grandmother's tortillas and her soup. I would eat these every morning before I came to this country. Then for lunch I would eat rice and beans, and beef with onions. They call this food casado. Usually with meals, I would drink natural juices like mango, orange, or piña. I love my country's food. It is the best of the best.

For me, the parties in Costa Rica are traditional. The people like to party every weekend with drinking, dancing, and games. My friends and I always go to parties on Saturday and Sunday. We often play poker or pool. Sometimes we go to someone's house to watch a movie. In Costa Rica we can drink alcohol when we are 18 years old, but my friends and I never drink alcohol. We just enjoy looking for parties to socialize. This is what I want to do in Costa Rica when I visit again. I am going to have fun. I am going to be with my friends and my family. It will be a perfect vacation. Pura vida!!

Brian Otarola is in the ESOL Program at Miami Dade College

The Light

You see the smiling child with a face so bright,
His eyes are gleaming like a breezy summer night,
His spirit is fresh, like the crisp in the air,
But no one sees the heartbreak that is scarred everywhere.

He was made a promise, told to never forget,
That he would never be alone or even feel regret.
No one sees his pain within, the tears he cries,
or the effect on him.

He hides it so well; he forgets it is there,
like a child with candy, who does not want to share.

He was at the point; he could not take any more,
When he turned and looked up- he saw through the door.
There he was, so familiar and so real, but the man who broke his
heart, Yet who promised to stay near.

He couldn't believe his sight or what happened that night,
As he looked into his father's eyes to see a dim light.

He was saddened to see that HIS dad was not there,
For he was away too long, like a breath without air.
His eyes were empty, his soul was bare.
He was not the same father; the boy could compare.

The child came to realize, HE WILL BE ALRIGHT,
For he has a loving family there – morning, noon, and night.

Today, he is grown without his father to see,
The unique-handsome young man he has grown to be.
He looks to his mom with a smile to see and says.
“Thank you mom, for never giving up on me.”

Tracey Pagan is a student at the GGALC in Collier County

My Special Place is in Me - Through Faith

Through faith I am whole. When I look back on my life, I would have to say that faith brought me through the tough times. From being raised up as a young boy in Sunland Hospital for about 7 years not knowing who my real mother and father are or were. I often wondered how come I have never seen them before. I can also remember when I was growing up as a young boy; I used to get upset because of being born with a disability. When I was a young boy, I didn't like myself nor did I value my existence on the earth.

I would have to say that faith brought me through the tough times in my life. When I was growing up there must have been a lot of people praying for me. I was a young boy who could have lost his life due to his birth (I was born with spinal-bifida); I was told when I was at Sunland Hospital in the 1960's through the 1970's that my mother didn't love me and that was the reason that she left me at Sunland. It was faith that brought me through the years in Sunland. Being told a lot of lies, one begins to wonder what is true and what is a lie --- not trusting anybody's words. It was faith that allowed me to trust again.

Furthermore I can remember getting upset because of being born with a disability and not being able to do what other kids my age could do. I wanted so bad to be able to play baseball and basketball and run around like everybody else could. But someone talked to me and told me that the Lord loves me as I am. It was faith that brought me through and showed me how to love myself. My foster mother, through faith, showed me how to pray before meals and before I went to bed. My foster mother taught me how to have faith in the Lord and also in myself.

I had to learn that I wasn't alone on this planet, but to put my faith in the Lord. I would have to say thank you to my foster mother Mrs. Easter Shear who has gone home to be with the Lord. Also through faith I have stayed in the church where my faith got even stronger and my light shines brighter for others to see the

work that the Lord is doing through me. In addition a scripture that comes to mind is Hebrews 11:1. It reads like this: Now faith is the substance of things hope for, the evidence of things not seen.

In conclusion, faith is what got me through the tough times as well as the good times. I would truly have to say that my special place is in me through faith.

Craig Page is a student in Adult & Community Education at the Lively Technical Center in Tallahassee

Serendipity

I saw a glimpse of December through my very eyes
Looking through rose colored windows with contemplative sighs.
And in my cozy dining room, I felt coldness from the glass.
Then I cry out for joy, "Snow has fallen, it falls at last!"

Winter appears like a child with her coat of innocence.
She sparkles and she sings with the sweetest countenance.
We wave and greet one another, becoming best of friends.
But little did I know that our journey soon would end.

Going forth our separate ways, we decided to depart.
And I tell you it was the farewell that nearly broke my heart.
But still she left all the more with pleasantness and grace.
Then, Spring walked in with optimism and came to take her place.

Charmaine Panfil is a student in the Adult & Community Education Program at the GGALC in Naples

My Holidays

I celebrated my holidays with my family and friends. I went to my best friend's house for Christmas. I had to work on Christmas morning, but I was able to eat dinner with my friend.

On December, 29th, I went to Venezuela to visit my family and to celebrate the New Year at my grandmother's house with all my family. We enjoyed a wonderful dinner and time together.

My holidays were filled with really good moments because I spent them with family and friends.

Adriana Parisi is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

One World

My name is Hae-young and I came to the United States from South Korea in late September 2008. I came here with my husband when he got transferred from his work in Korea. This is my second time to live overseas, including living in Vancouver for four months when I was in my late 20s. I was excited and worried about living here. The thing I worried about most was my English. As soon as I arrived I asked people about English classes for foreigners as a second language. Now I attend English for Speakers of Other Languages at Northwest Florida State College and I have made some friends in my class.

As you know, America is a huge country. So I told my husband that I really would like to travel as much as I can while staying here. I want to experience something new and different from my country. This is a story about my recent visit to Walt Disney World in Orlando.

My family drove down to Orlando the morning after New Year's Day. We were going to spend 2 nights and 3 days there. My husband and I took turns driving for the 7 hour ride. My first impression of Disney World was that it was enormous. There were several hundred hotels and condos there. After checking into our condo, we headed straight to the Magic Kingdom. We watched a big parade consisting of costumed performers. The fantastic thing about Magic Kingdom was the lighting of the castle and the fireworks at night. It was an unforgettable experience.

On the third day we went to Epcot. I wasn't really interested in taking rides, so while my husband and his daughter went on the rides I went to a gift shop to buy something for my younger sister in Korea. I looked around and picked out 2 pairs of earrings for her. I walked to a female clerk to pay for them, but the man at the counter rudely told me to go another place to pay. He and the female clerk weren't very busy, and as I walked away I noticed that he was checking out a lady that was actually behind me in line. I was upset and sad that the guy didn't treat me as an equal to other Americans in the store. I overheard him complaining about why he was working there as a part-time worker. He said he moved to the area because he couldn't find a job in his hometown. I thought he couldn't find a job in his area because of his narrow mind and cold heart. I don't want to judge any person based on one experience, but now that we can go any place in the world within 24 hours, I think the world is truly one. We are all the same. It shouldn't matter what language we speak or what the color our skin is. I just want people to have an open mind and treat others as they would like to be treated.

Hae-Young Park is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College

Story About My Life

My name is Jasmine Jana's Patterson, and this is my story. I was born November 15, 1989, in Tallahassee the capital of Florida. I thought that I was a very beautiful chocolate baby. I am a Christian. I love to go to church on Sundays and pay attention to the word that's being spoken. When I get around new people I am kind of shy, but then I loosen up and become friends with them. I love hanging out with friends, reading, going out to clubs, staying to myself, and listening to music.

I have lived in Tallahassee ever since I was born. I have a brother and a sister both from different parents. We are not that close, but we talk a little. I used to work at McDonald's, but I don't work there anymore. I worked there for a year and four months. I am a very nice person to get along with. My best friend's name is Ariel Jones. We have been friends every since my ninth grade. I miss my younger and care free days.

I have been wearing glasses since I was 16. I was in middle school and one day I had to move up front of the class so that I could see. I used to attend Leon High School. Well I didn't graduate because of the situation that I was in. My problem was that I didn't have anyone there to help me out when I needed help. I also was having problems with family. One day in January '09 I decided that I wanted to get my high school diploma. This seemed the best thing for me to do as I wanted to go to college to be a pediatrician.

Right now I'm 19 years old and I'm getting ready for the real world. I don't stay home with my parents right now, but it's ok. I'm attending a GED Program and when I graduate I have plans to attend TCC. I have been dating now for four months and I am enjoying every bit of it. I think that it's changing me to become the woman that I want to be and preparing me for the real life.

I thank God for everything that he has done for me and what he brought me through. He is keeping me focused on achieving my

goals. I want to reach out to all the people that need help and need god. The reason I'm telling my story is so that it can show people in the streets or world how god is real. As long as you believe in him, you will be o.k. He is my only hope right now.

Jasmine Patterson is a GED student at Lively in Tallahassee

My Experience In Adult Education

My experience in Adult Education has been a challenge. I don't like school much and this makes it more difficult. I constantly tell myself that education is necessary in order for me to reach my goal of a G.E.D. I'm learning, and its fun for me to have new ideas. When it gets rough, I sometimes want to give up, but I ask for help, and it is a lot easier. I have to study, and for me to study requires self discipline. I know that anything worth having is worth the hard work. I will be rewarded with my G.E.D. Adult education has been an experience for me. It taught me to focus on future goals. Before adult education, I would quit or avoid classes. Having experienced adult education, I look forward to all I can accomplish in my life and for my life.

Jamilla Payne is an ABE student at the Gadsden Correctional Facility

Never Stop

Always keep in mind that the skin wrinkles and hair becomes white. The days become years...

But the important things don't change;
Your strength and your conviction have no age.
Your spirit is the plume of any spider web.
Behind the line of arrival, a departure
Behind every success, there is a challenge.
While you are alive, feel alive

Feeling strange if you did, do it again
Don't live pictures of yellow
But still leave all expectations behind
Do not let yourself rust
Beam rather than hurt, you have respect
When you cannot run, jog
When you cannot jog, walk
When you cannot walk, use the stick
But never stop.

Cristina Perez is a student at the GROWS Family Literacy Council in Apopka

What Education Means to Me

I have never really sat and actually thought about what education means to me. Now that I take time to ponder that question, I realize it has a few meanings. I have realized that education is a way for me to help build myself a better life. I have to learn a career to ensure my future. So I can be an independent person in society. To me, education is a way for me to learn more about myself and the world around me so I can be open minded. I can get educated through experience, not to close doors that open for me because I am scared. To me, education means learning that sometimes I should be quiet and listen, or just walk away when I get angry. A short temper, and a quick tongue, doesn't look too educated on a lady. There are many different forms of education, I have learned that the more I try to get educated, the more doors open up. I do get scared I might fail but, then I get excited about the unknown, and usually, in the end, I always end up succeeding.

Laura Perez is in the ABE class at Gadsden Correctional Facility

A Turning Point in My Life

A turning point in my life was when I got pregnant at the very young age of 15. I feel this was the biggest turning point because I gained responsibility, a new sense of reaching my goals, and how to be a good role model to my child as a single mother.

Up until the turning point, my sense of responsibility was spent preparing for four years of high school, going to dances, and participating in social events. Then out of nowhere, I found out I was eight months pregnant with a baby girl. It was so late when I found out I was pregnant; I only had ten weeks to get ready. The responsibility was instant! Suddenly, I had to change diapers, do feedings, and, of course, kiss a good night's sleep goodbye.

Secondly, reaching my goals was now not as important, because Olivia's needs came first. As a young mother, I now realize that my drive to accomplish my goals has grown so much because I know it's important to teach her to better herself and accomplish her own goals. That is why being a good role model to my daughter is the key. A role model to me is someone who does the right things. I have not always known if I was doing the right things because I was so young when I had her, but now, I know I am on the right track.

In conclusion, the turning point in my life, being a single Mom, has been very hard, but it has changed my life for the better in many ways. Because of her birth, I am a stronger person in the long run. Learning to handle responsibility, setting and reaching goals, and trying to be a good role model has helped me to become a better person and mother.

Alexis Perry is in the Even Start Family Literacy Program in St. Petersburg

Achieving My Goal

I am a mother of three and I have been married for ten wonderful years. My husband received his GED around eight years ago. I have tried several times to achieve my GED and failed. I realized this year was my year. I want to achieve my GED to help better my life.

The company I work for is also standing behind me going to school. My company works with my class time. I come to school in the mornings and then I go straight to work everyday. Once I achieve my goal of receiving my GED, my boss wants to send me for college courses to help further my education.

My goal for myself is to achieve my GED before my oldest son graduates high school in June of 2009. I want my children to know how important it is to finish school. I want my children to be proud of me.

Misty Phillips attends the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton

A Turning Point in My Life

The biggest turning point in my life was when I had my son, Jacquez. He has brought me more happiness than I could have ever imagined. It's not always easy with his father not in his life. I find myself playing the role of both mother and father.

I have many more responsibilities now that I have my son. The number one thing is to set a good example for him. I feed him, spend time with him, nurture him, and teach him as he grows into a young man. I want him to know that no matter how hard life may be, I'll always love him and be there for him.

I enjoy being with my son. He is fun to be around and he has a very good sense of humor. He loves to make me laugh. He is also very loveable and he has a want to take care of me.

Jacquez was the ultimate turning point in my life because he has brought me more happiness than I thought I could ever have. He makes me want to be the best mother I can be. God has truly blessed me with Jacquez. He's the reason that I want to be all I can be and be a good role model!

Georgette Philpot is studying for her GED at Columbia County Adult Education.

A Worthwhile Experience

When I first came to United States, I saw many people around me speaking English. I wanted to understand what they were talking about, but I couldn't. That was the main reason why I came to Adult Education class. At the beginning I was very shy. I was afraid to meet the different people from various countries. It took me a while to fit myself and get used to everybody in the class. Step by step I am trying to adapt myself and get along with the students and especially the teacher who is in charge of the class.

Adult education is a great place to learn English. In class, Ms. Josephson posted a daily routine chart for everyone to see. First, we read a book for 15 minutes. After that, we record the book we have read. Then, we write in our journal. Just a few sentences because this is one way that Ms. Josephson can see whether we can write well. She will check our sentence structure, grammar, punctuation, and spelling. Every Tuesday, Mrs. Todd comes in to help us with our reading. On other days, Ms. Josephson assigns the higher level students to assist us. Then, we go to the computer to do our English lessons. Ms. Josephson makes time to teach us, talk to us, and speak on important subjects that affect our lives. She is very kind, stern, proper, and clear in

her teaching. We have public speaking homework every week. She expects us to complete our homework and be ready to speak to the class. Many times she tells us to try not to speak in our native languages. She wants us to speak English in class, but it is not easy for us. Somehow, each time when we want to speak, Creole and Spanish come out of our mouth. She is right. We need to start speaking English all the time because it will help us speak fluent English faster.

Guy Jory Pierrilus is a student in the Adult Education and Career Center at Key West High School

Dreams and Life

Have you ever wondered about your dreams and your life? People have dreams in life and some of them get what they dream about.

Dreams are like aspirations, something you want to achieve. But when you do not have the plan to make it real it just remains as a dream in your life.

Many people have different desires and realize that they have to be determined enough to become what they want in life.

Life is a journey and has many paths. You have to find the right direction that takes you where you want to be.

Your dreams required hard work to achieve what you want to be and make it real. My dream is to become a Journalist.

I have the direction and the perseverance to make it my life's journey. At the end of my journey I will feel proud of myself.

Maibel Pineda is an ESOL/ABE student at Miami Dade College

My Ideal Vacation

My ideal vacation would be going to St. Lucia because it's beautiful and full of color. There are few reasons why I wouldn't mind going back to St. Lucia for another vacation. First off, the weather is to die for. Second, are the beautiful beaches and coral reefs. Lastly, the sight and all the inexpensive things you can buy. I could go on and on but those are my top priorities.

First of all is the beautiful weather. It's not like only other place. It's different. The wind is a perfect speed, not too windy. It's right in the middle. I could stay outside all day in the nice clean air. All you see is the big yellow sun surrounded by blue all day long.

Secondly, you see the gorgeous beaches and beautiful coral reef. It's like a different world under the sea. The sand is soft and white. The water is clear, like drinking water. The coral is so big and lively. I love the way the colorful fish swim through the big reef. When I visit the beaches I make sure to stay all day long, and when I leave, I sure have a nice tan. Last, but not least, the sight of the town and all the inexpensive things you can buy. The sight of the town is incredible. It's so well kept even though it's many years old. The colors of the little buildings in the town are pastel. I also love to go around the shops. They have pretty things to buy for reasonable prices.

In conclusion, my ideal vacation would be going to St. Lucia. The few reasons why are: beautiful weather, the beaches and coral reef and lastly, the town and all the nice things to buy for a reasonable price. I recommend St. Lucia to anyone who is looking for a wonderful place to go on a vacation.

Danie Pressoir in the Adult & Community Education Program at GGALC

What is Success

Success is defined so many ways. To the one who is looking to be successful, it may be one-sided or defined only as one's desire for a righteous outcome. I looked up the word success in the dictionary and their definition was firm or black and white as could be. The dictionary defined success as, "Achievement, fame or prosperity and the extent of gain." I personally feel that each individual should have their own interpretation of success – I know I do.

My view on success puts a twist of things. My feelings about success center on comfort - that is being comfortable in everyday life. It means having a good job or work that runs smoothly and is steady. In the times in which we are living, just being able to pay everyday bills on time should be considered being successful. I have also felt success in doing other things such as excelling in my field of work, learning new trades, and even in sports activities.

To sum it up, success is to get things done in a way that can only be judged from your own point of view. To me it is to be responsible and respected while enjoying life and finding a way of being comfortable in your everyday life and work.

Devlon Querrard in the GED program at Manatee Community College

Without English I am Crippled

When I first came to America I didn't speak any English. So, my life was very difficult because I couldn't talk to people, I couldn't find a job, and I couldn't go out with friends. I was at home alone and jobless for a few weeks. I realized that I have to learn the language. My problem was that I didn't have any idea who was offering the class. One day a friend told me where to go.

Without wasting any time, I went to the school. I began to learn the language. I studied basic level English for a couple of months. Then I felt that I was ready to look for a job. I left the class for about 2 years because I needed to earn some money to support myself and my son. Also, I was very busy at my work place. Nobody told me life is not easy, but I want you to know that without English you will struggle in your life. Therefore, go and learn some English. It is good for you.

Jose Quezada is in the GED class at Key West High School

My Dreams are Getting Close

I have been living here since November 19, 2004. Since I came here I thought this is my opportunity to learn English, all my life I had wanted to learn it. Even in my country Colombia I took some courses, of course, it is not very good, because over there you cannot practice it. I think if you want to learn any foreign language, you have to go to the country where it is spoken.

I started to learn English in Pembroke Pines two years ago, it has been wonderful, there are excellent teachers, good methods and resources(books, DVD, PC, etc). I hope soon I will learn English. I am very grateful with this country, and also I advise everybody to take advantage of this opportunity.

Luz M. Ramirez attends ESOL at the English Cafe at the SW Regional Library

Someone I Admire

There is a special someone I admire and love. His name is Omer. He was born in a small city in El Salvador. He grew up in a poor family. When he was only seven years old, he and his brother had to work very hard doing different things to earn money. They sold

scarves or food on the street to help their mother. They also had to go to school and help their mother at home. He lived there at a time when there was a war in his country. This was bad for his family. When he was only fifteen years old, his mother decided to send him to the United States to protect him from the war. It was dangerous for a young boy to stay there.

He went to New York, started school and found a job to provide for him and also to help his family in El Salvador. When he was twenty one, he went to New York College to get his GED certificate. There he met a seventeen year old girl and fell in love. Two years later, he married her and had three beautiful children. He has been married for sixteen years.

He is a professional landscaper. He has been a very good landscaper for almost twenty years. He has worked for several companies. Now he has started his own landscaping business, and his company is growing fast because he does a good job for each customer. They admire him. To his wife and three children, he's a hero. He is his wife's best friend, her support, and her love. I admire him because he is a good son, brother, son-in-law, father, and husband.

(Anonymous)

Fernando's Story

Hi, my name is Fernando. I am a student of Literacy Volunteers Program. Here at Literacy Volunteers Program I learn a lot about pronunciation, a little bit about typing, and computer stuff, because I am very ignorant about computers. I feel very shameful when I say that but, I never used that kind of technology in my country. At the beginning my writing wasn't good but, it wasn't bad either. I wish I can say the same about my listening, but it was terrible. I thought about quitting studying English and I talked to my classmate about it and he told me learning something took time. He

told me that he was at Literacy Volunteers Program practicing conversation and pronunciation so, he took me there and I asked for an application about a tutor. I said I need help with my English in general, but especially with my listening.

Now I am not nervous anymore when I have to ask for something, or when I talk to someone. I am a little bit nervous, but I feel more confident with myself. I want to take this opportunity to say thank you very much to my tutor Emily Earp, because without her help I would not be able to write some of the words I use here in this writing.

Fernando Salvador Rangel is in the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL program

My Experiences in Adult Education

When I came to the U.S., I didn't have a social security card or green card. After seven months, I got my ID so I could come to school. I was very happy about this because I didn't go to an English-speaking school in my country.

On the first day of school, I was happy but also afraid. When I got to class and talked with other students with different languages, I relaxed. I was excited. I knew I was not alone. All the students and teachers at this school were kind and helpful.

I had studied English grammar and reading in my country, but my listening and speaking was not good. I understood a lot, however. My teacher thought I was a good student and often called on me to answer questions.

I would like to speak like the American people. When I'm not able to do this, it makes me angry. I hope someday to understand and speak English perfectly.

Masoumeh Ranjkesh is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

Living in the United States

In 1970, I left my country Egypt to live in the United States for good. It was such a confusing feeling: I felt sad to leave my country and my family and excited about the new life in a new place. There was a reason to leave my country; the life started to be worse. The Governors ruled the country with a stick. It was hard to raise your voice or any idea against the government. The life changed to be scary. The spies who worked for the government were everywhere: at school, shops, even in public places you saw them around. I felt I could not live in Egypt anymore. It was not good for my family or my son. It was a scary life. Therefore, we decided to move to live in the United States for good. Soon I arrived in New York airport; I met many people from different countries in the Middle East. Most of them had immigrated to the United States. What that meant was most of the people were not satisfied about the laws in their countries.

Soon, I felt I fell in love with my new country. My life turned to smooth. My husband and I found good jobs. My son did very well at school and made many good friends. America is the best place to live for a better life, to be secure and to enjoy freedom.

Sofia Razeq is from Egypt and is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College

Behind Every Face There Is a Smile

Behind every face there is a smile and behind every smile there is a tear. My name is Lola Reed. I have been going to literacy class for two years. I work at Shands in housekeeping. I work from 6 pm to 2:30 am and go to class at 9 am and sometimes at 10:30 am. And it is hard. I was thinking about giving up on going to class. But in 2008, I attended the Florida Literacy Ambassador training. And all the stories we shared and the tears I saw gave me hope! I know no matter how hard it is I can't give up on my dream of going to college to become a health care worker. I also want to tutor and teach others to read. Like me, there are others who do not know how to read. If I share my story with others, it will give them hope and a better life. I must accomplish my goal. I know with God's help and hard work I can someday be a health care worker and literacy tutor.

Lola Reed is an ABE student at Learn to Read Jacksonville

My goal: My Family

Why? Very simply, they are more important in my life than anything else. Many would say, of course!

But today, I have seen that women's priorities have changed. Today the first thing is to be professional, regardless of who has children in middle. This is not to say that being a professional is bad, but should have well-defined priorities since one is child; because when we got to the teen run through life as if we were away. And, that's the point wanting to be the best career woman and not to be outdone we sacrifice what really matters. The home where are the people who need us most, as our children and our own partner. Today women live unsatisfied by all the things that we see everywhere, and if we add to that as we involve the media is an endless list, tell us, that each day is better than other women, do not left behind.

Let's face it, we do not have super powers. We try to do many things at once, but the most important things are our own children. Today we give our children everything possible materially, to have the latest fashion and thus make them the happiest people on Earth. But the reality is many of them would change everything for attention, time, affection and love.

There are many moms who have no choice because they have two jobs to be moms and dads; my respects. Many have the opportunity to be with our children, we should take. Sometimes it is not easy, but God gives you strength and wisdom. God put a treasure in your hands, you depend on the end this treasure.

It is different when a woman knows exactly what she wants and starts first with her personal achievement and later becomes a mom. Many have done this, but too few women who decide to devote herself full-time to her family, then again comes the agony of losing what they have achieved by working. The truth that to be a mom full time requires hard work, sacrifice, but above all, much love, because when there is 100% love, it does not matter if we are not in fashion or do not we have the world's gold.

Devoting time to our children makes them more self-sufficient and better human beings, and prevents family disintegration and social problems. So for me the most important thing is my family. Sometimes, I have no patience and I would run away, but my kids come and hug me, kiss me and tell me they love me. So I know what my personal goals are.

With special dedication to my son and daughter, thank you for your love. I hope not to disappoint you. Love, Mom. (P.S. Lord, show me the correct way.)

Leticia Reyes is from Mexico City and attends ESL classes at the Center for Adult Learning at the Southeast Branch of the Jacksonville Public Library

New York Here I Come

I wish to go to many places when I am able to speak English well. One of my favorite places is New York. I love New York because it is a city where most people hardly go to sleep. The buildings are gigantic and they reflect the magnificent achievement of humanity. When I am in New York, I want to visit all the museums and put flowers on the Zone Zero. I want to go to the top of the Empire State Building to see the whole city and the Statue of Liberty. I also want to visit the Broadway House, the Rockefeller Center, Manhattan Time Square, ride on a boat on Hudson River, and go to the library. Everyone should visit New York. I bet you will have one of the most wonderful times in your life.

Victor Reyes is from Nicaragua and attends the Adult Education and Career Program at Key West High School

Adventures in Getting a Passport

My name is Ana Ricardo. I needed a Florida I.D. for identification. I found out that first I needed a social security card, which I didn't have and before I got my Social Security card, I needed a passport. I lost my passport so my friend and I went to Coral Square Passport office. When my friend, Belle and I arrived at the Passport office, the officer that took care of my case was pretty nasty. The officer said, "We can't take your application because you don't have any identification. It makes no sense even to try to get a passport."

I told her I had a paper from the Palm Beach passport Office that said if you don't have any identification, you may bring a relative or a friend, who will sign an affidavit, which proves your identity and then you will have your passport. The officer told us to come back later because the lady in charge was not here. Belle asked her what time she will be back. She said, "About 12 noon." We left

and came back at 12 noon, bringing my daughter, Karla also. Everyone looked and stared at us. They wondered why we even bothered to come back. We finally talked to the lady in charge, whose name was Norma. She said to let your friend Belle sign the affidavit. Then a man took my pictures and Norma mailed my application along with the affidavit to the main office. The big surprise for me was when I received my U.S. Passport by October 22 after only 3 weeks. What a miracle!

My next problem was getting my social security number and card. So the next week, we went to the social security office to get a card. I used my passport for identification and gave the man my ID cards. In ten days, I received my new social security card.

Now, I was ready for my Florida I.D. card. First, I went to the Florida Driver's License Bureau. The receptionist asked me if I had my Passport and my Social Security card. I told her I had them. She checked the cards and told me to go to the officer. When the officer checked my cards she told me according to her computer, they were not correct. I should go back to the Social Security office because something was wrong. I called the Social Security office and explained my problem with the Florida I.D. office. They said that nothing was wrong with my Social Security Card and number.

I went the second time to the Florida License Bureau and they told me I could not get my I.D. because the same problem existed with my Social Security numbers. "Check with the Social Security office, again," she said. My friend, Belle, and I went back to the Social Security office again to correct any problem, but the lady there said everything was o.k.

By this time, I was very tired and upset. But I went back again for the third time to the Florida Driver's license Bureau and that time, I met a nice officer. Then, after he checked my passport and Social Security card, he told me the Social Security computer had a problem. However, he had the authority to fix the problem and issue me a new Florida I. D. Thanks to God, I kept on trying.

I would like to encourage any person who has a dream to keep on pursuing your goals. Never give up if you believe.

Niurika Ricardo is a student of the Broward County Learning Services at the African American Research Library in Ft. Lauderdale

Patience

When you woke up this morning, I observed you and waited for you to talk to me; even just a few words. Questioning my opinion or thanking me for something good that happened to you yesterday. But I saw that you were occupied, looking for clothes appropriate to wear and go to work. I kept waiting again, while you were running around the house getting ready. I knew that there were a few minutes for you to stop and say, “Hello,” but you were much occupied.

That is why I lit the sky for you and I filled it with colors and sweet singing of birds; to see if you would listen to me. But you didn’t even recognize it. I observed you while you went to work and waited patiently all day. With all the activities I supposed that you were too occupied to tell me anything. When you came back I saw you were very tired and I wanted to spray you with some water for your stress. I thought to be pleasing, so you could think of me, but angrily you offended my name. I wished that you would talk to me. Then you turned on the TV, I waited patiently while you watched TV and ate your dinner but again you forgot to speak to me. I saw you were tired and understood your silence, so then I put out the splendor of the sky.

But I didn’t leave you in the dark. I changed it for bright stars; it really was beautiful, but you were not interested in seeing it. At sleeping time I thought that you were tired. After saying good night to your family, you fell on your bed and immediately fell asleep, accompanied by music. In your dreams, my night animals

show off. There is no problem because maybe you don't realize that I'm always there for you.

I have more patience than you imagine. I would want to teach you how to be patient with others. I love you so much that I always wait for a prayer. The paradise that I make is only for you. Well, now you are waking up again and again I'll wait for you with love for you hoping that today you'll give me a little bit of your time. Have a good day. Your friend, "God."

Rosa Maria Rico attends classes at the GROWS Family Literacy Council in Apopka

A Memory

The day of my baptism changed my life forever. I was a twenty three-year old, born and raised in the Catholic religion. My parents, especially my mom, were very devout in this religion, which in Puerto Rico is known as the traditional church. It was in 1993 that for personal reasons (things that sometimes we don't understand) I decided to visit a temple called the Christian Church Defender of the Faith. When I entered the church, I was pleased with the marvelous smell that was redolent throughout the whole church. The smell was also extraordinary in that it brought with it an inner peace. The power that I felt at that instant was so immense that it made me begin to cry uncontrollably from feelings of joyfulness and happiness. The peace that I felt that moment was larger than anything of this world. Simultaneously, I knew in my heart that I was in the right place. I stayed there the whole night.

In 1994 I made my decision to be baptized. This step represented a reaffirmation of the commitment I have made with God and myself: I live for him. It was Friday night, and I full of happy anxiety because had been longing to be one with God in my heart. Before our being submerged in water, my Bible class teacher asked everyone who was going to be baptized to form a circle. We were

around twenty persons, and at that time, I was seven months pregnant. After the teacher started praying, I witnessed that every person he touched swooned to the floor instantaneously, so I silently started praying to myself, "God don't let him put his hands on me because I'm not going to fall down." Finishing these words I felt someone standing in front of me. Of course, it was my teacher saying: "The Lord asked me to pray for you and your baby inside of you. I'm not going to put my hands on you; I just want you to put your hands up in the air. Okay?" Seconds later, people were helping me stand up. It seems that before I could even finish raising my hands up, I fell straight onto the floor.

It was the most incredible thing that has ever happened to me. Words fail me when I attempt to describe what happened to me in that moment. As you can imagine from that day forward, I have never questioned the power of my Lord again. Since then, I have never regretted accepting Jesus as my savior. In the last fifteen years of my life, he has been my constant shield and strength.

Luz Rivera is a student at the Brewster Technical Center

Maria's Story

I feel nervous about getting on the plane. I have never flown on one before and my friends told me different stories. I shiver and try to tuck my head into my jacket because it is freezing outside. Hopefully, where I am going won't be so cold. As I stuff my hands into my pockets, the only thing I know is that this trip is important. My destination means more to me than my fear of flying. All of a sudden, they call our number and open the doors. I begin boarding my plane to San Juan, Puerto Rico for a family reunion.

I am excited! This year we have two new members in our family. My two older sons got married, and now we have Sonia and Angeline, two beautiful young ladies. Sonia and Angeline are going to meet our families for the first time. Sonia is Angel David's

wife. She was born in Texas, but her parents are from Mexico. Sonia likes Puerto Rican food. She is a very lovely and caring person.

Daniel is my second son and he is married to Angeline. Angeline is a beautiful girl and a lovely person. She was born here in the United States. Her father is American and her mother is from Vietnam. Angeline is learning Spanish because when they have babies she wants to teach them both languages, English and Spanish and later on Vietnamese. She wants to learn more about our culture, even though we have similar things in common like cooking. I think it is important for families to keep in touch and share our families' values with each other. I want my three sons to teach their children that God and the family is the foundation of a good life and a good future. I want them to be caring and loving with their families, no matter what nationality or distance.

That is why this trip is so important for me. I know everything is going to be fine with a happy ending. They call my number again; I better get inside before they close the door. I'll see you in my little, beautiful and warm island, Puerto Rico.

Maria E. Rivera is a student at the Volusia Literacy Council

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is inside my head, far beyond the seas. No matter where I am or whom I'm with, I can be where I want to be. I can be in a room full of movie stars, shaking their rich, glamorous hands or standing at the White House talking to the President, the most important man in the world. I can be a famous engineer designing the latest car, or an astronaut like Neil Armstrong, reaching for the stars. I can be a Russian spy stationed somewhere in China, or a private investigator all over the United States. If you're lost, I'll find you.

Maybe I'll be smiling, standing on my own island, leading and teaching people how to fly because now I'm the head pilot. No matter what time of the day it is, I can go. I don't need a ticket. I don't need an invitation either. I can just come and visit. I popped in on Stephen King while he was making a horror movie. He read the lead, saw my face, and handed the part straight to me after that. I played golf with Tiger and it was really fun. Unlike him, I'm not that good; I've never made a hole in one. I had better luck playing ball with Shaq. He dunked on me a couple of times but I was way too fast. He couldn't keep up and I killed him at the free throw line. Now I'm tired from all that traveling and I haven't even left my bed. Not the Bahamas or Jamaica, my favorite place is inside my head.

Leanna Roberts is in the ABE program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Finding Success

Everyone who cares and loves himself dreams about being successful. Some people don't have the benefit of having their parents or other relatives teach them about living a successful life. But even then as they grow up and come to know different people, they naturally start to develop the dreams that could lead to defining a successful life.

To succeed in life each individual has to learn view themselves and their life in simple, honest, and loving terms. They must have knowledge of what is important to them and how what they are doing fits those views.

A good education is very important to both feeling you are successful and to building a successful life in the future. Dream big and invest in it no matter what you are facing. Giving your best is a big part of actual accomplishment of your goals. Difficult times will come around, but there is always a solution for every problem.

The secret of a successful life is: trusting in God, believing in yourself, and being happy in any situation. Use your knowledge and understanding to make the best of every circumstance and keep it going. NEVER GIVE UP!

Elenilda Figueiredo Robinson is in the GED Program at Manatee Community College

Why I Came to the United States

I came to the United States for a boy who is now my husband. We knew each other from high school where he was one grade ahead of me. His father is an American citizen and a war veteran. His mother is Venezuelan. For many years they traveled to Miami on school vacations. Finally his father finished his work in Venezuela and got a job in Florida with a big company. The family decided to move to Florida and begin a new life together.

It was a terrible moment for me because I thought I would never see him again. He was my first boyfriend, my best friend with whom I enjoyed spending my time. After school we had fun and enjoyed having many friends. When he left, we had a good-bye party for him at my house with many friends and family. I felt very sad about never seeing him again. However, he promised to come back for me. I knew I would never have another boyfriend.

For six years he came to Venezuela once a year. I felt very happy when he came to my country and very sad when he left. We both studied at college and worked. I never thought to move to the U.S. because I had my family and my job in my country. Sometimes I thought he forgot his promise to me and preferred to stay in Miami.

One day he called me and let me know that he had petitioned to bring me over as his fiancé. I started to do things for my visa and

prepared my travel. He came back for me as he had promised. I arrived in the U.S. eight months ago with him, my parents, and a suitcase full of dreams, expectancy, hopes and nervousness. I had never been here before. Two days later we were married and went to Orlando with my parents and his family. Now we live in a beautiful townhouse with a small dog. He is a pilot and works for a big company. I am studying English and learn every day something about this country.

Sometimes I feel alone because I don't have any family here. I don't have many friends, I don't work, and the English language is very difficult for me. However, I remember everything that he does for me and thank God for giving me an excellent person and a new experience. We learn everyday about living together and having a beautiful family.

Fairene Rodriquez is from Venezuela and attends the English Cafe at the Southwest Regional Library in Pembroke Pines

Life in My Home Country

I was born in a small city called Puebla in Mexico. I've had the opportunity to grow up in Mexico and America and compare the difference in foods, holidays and homes. A major difference I feel between these two countries is the food. Food in Mexico has more zest and spice to it. Also, there is a whole variety of ways to cook beef, pork, fish, and vegetables. On the other hand, Americans like their food more plain. Also, most American foods are made faster than Mexican foods. Mexican foods can take up to three days to cook! Another difference is the holidays. In Mexico, everyone celebrates the Day of the Kid. On the Day of the Kid, all the children go out to ask for money or candy. Another Mexican holiday is the Day of the Dead. On this holiday, everyone who knows someone who has passed away goes to their grave and places some food items on the grave. Sometimes people gather up and make a parade in memory and honor of the Dead. There is also the

Virgin Mary's Day. On this day, all the Mexicans sing, pray, and thank her for all the blessings they've gotten.

Due to the different demands of weather, homes are built differently. Homes in Mexico are made of concrete or red bricks and can reach up to five stories high. Some homes have a decorative wall made out of stones or rocks on the inside of the home. Mexican homes don't need air conditioning in the home because there are many big windows. Also, in Mexico it is legal for the people to live in their small business. Usually, it's connected to a home. In Mexico, most families are large. This makes homes have up to twelve rooms per house. In America, most homes are made with a wooden frame and covered with a material called dry wall. They also have a central conditioning system. Most homes in the U.S. average from a one bedroom home to a five bedroom home. These homes can include a yard and a pool. Even though Mexico and America are close to each other, there are a lot of differences and similarities between these two great countries.

Karla B. Arronte Rojas is in the GED Program in Port St. Lucie

Volunteering

My friend where I live told me about helping at the Salvation Army last December. I said I would go with her, and her husband took me. I went there and everyone was sorting the toys. They had lots of toys, bikes, food and other gifts. The presents were for kids whose parents couldn't afford gifts for them. There were also things for the grownups, like scarves, hats and food.

They gave us little bells like the ones they ring at the grocery stores. We were also treated to a lunch. I like helping people, and I felt good about doing this. People need to help each other. I will do it again next year.

Kelly Ropel is a student at the Literacy Council of St. Petersburg

About my Mom

I never wrote a letter for her, in the time I've been living in the US. I speak with her every week, and always have something to tell her or ask that I forget. I miss her so much; I miss her hugs. I never appreciated her company, but the distance has made me appreciate her. I noticed that I let the time pass without giving any hugs when I was there close to her and never let her know how much I love her. Now I've been here for almost 14 years. Every Christmas the same thought comes to my mind: If my family would come to spend this holiday with me my happiness will be complete. To see my kids growing without their Granny makes me feel so sad, living far from the person who can spoil them. I feel guilty because it was my decision to have a family here, far from my family alone.

My mom was the person who was my best friend; no secrets between me and her, she has my respect and trust. Now everything's changed. I can't tell her everything; I don't want her worried about me. She knows a lot about how our lives change here, how we live, the things that happen here and not all the time she likes what she hears. Every time when I was at the hospital, when my kids were born, the sadness was worse, to see the other mothers with their mothers around them giving support. I know it is hard for her too. I'm sure she would want to be with me at those moments.

With this letter I want to let her know how much I need her and how much I love her. It's hard to finish a call from her. I feel happy to think she is all right and healthy. It is a comfort to know she is ok. Sometimes I wonder why I left my family. But then I look around and I start counting all the blessings I do have, my children, my husband, the opportunity to come to this country and meet all the kinds of people, and visit some wonderful places. I just have to say thank God for everything he gave me.

Mom thank you for being there when I call you and for giving me advice. You are an example to me. Your absence hurts a lot, but I have a hope that one day we can enjoy your company. Always remember that I love you. God bless you, Mom!

Maria Rostro attends the GROWS Family Literacy Council in Apopka

Fathers, Think about Your Kids

Hi, my name is Dulce. I have 4 kids. I want to tell you when I lost my father. That was when I was 5 years old. My father left my mother and we suffered. I have one special moment in my mind about him. I remember when he played guitar and sang for me and my sister while we were sitting and looking at him with love. We were happy and smiled. This is a beautiful memory, but I have one terrible memory that I will never, never forget. And that is when my father hit my mother. The day I remember most is when my mother begged him on her knees not to hit her.

I remember the day that he left without us, he had picked us up in his arms, but my mother cried so much because he brought us back to leave us with her. Since that day my mother struggled to put me and my brother and sister first; she had to leave us with our grandparents go that she could work. She went to Mexico City and we were so sad. I saw my siblings so small and suffering. My sister cried because she always wanted her Daddy. My little brother cried for hunger and pain because he was sick, and I cried because I couldn't get used to living without my parents and because I wanted milk but my grandparents couldn't afford to buy it for us.

There was so much poverty that my grandmother gave fresh cow's milk to my baby brother so that he would grow. And like that, we grew, and I always wanted a hug and a kiss and advice from my father; to be able to count on him. I just wanted to

know what it feels like to have a father on your side that loves you and tells you how much he loves you. Maybe my life would be different; I don't know! But yes, father, you don't know how I miss you. It hurts me to know that all your life, you haven't come. At times I'm frozen with anger and I don't want to think about you anymore, but I can't avoid it. You come to me in my dreams and I want to call to you know if you're well. Do you know that I love you?

God bless you and my mother for having given me life. I love you both very much and I ask God to make me a good mother for my children; my Dany, my Diana, my Gaby, and my Nataly. That God fills me with light and blessings and that my children have a happy family life because I don't want my children to suffer the way one does at losing one's father. I want my daughters to grow with their father, that they receive kisses, hugs, and many "I love yous" from their father. And even though someday I'll fail my child, I ask pardon and that God will illuminate my husband that he will always love the child. Because, yes, if a parent is missing, always, even if they think they don't matter, they do. I say to fathers, think always of your children.

Dulce Maria Ruiz attends the GROWS Family Literacy Council in Apopka

My Life in the U.S.A.

I came to the United States three year ago I made the decision because my son come to live with his father and I felt very alone. I was thinking that coming to United States is good opportunity to study English and change my life. Fortunately, I made the decision to come because I met my new husband and I got married again and I can start a new life also I'm close to my son.

This Country has a lot of opportunities to progress, and it offers that peace and safety to live comfortably. I hope to obtain a good

job or to be my own boss this year. I'm thinking of obtaining a General Contractors License and starting my own business.

Ana Milena Salazar Attends the English Cafe at the SW Regional Library

I Thought

I thought you were my comforter
Someone to wipe away my tears
I thought you were my supporter
The one to help rid me of my fears
I thought you were so bright
Seen the radiance shining from your core
I thought you were a beautiful sight
To look at and adore
I thought you were so special
My definition of cool and fly
I guess I got to be more careful
Because all you were was a lie
The entire time you were just a mistake
Someone I will always love to hate.

Guerta Salomon is in the GED Program at Gadsden Correctional Institute

Education Removes Self Doubt and Fear

Education means a major part of who I am because without an education I can't accomplish anything. With a good education I can have a job I enjoy doing. At the same time I am able to help others in need in my community. As a parent, it is very important to be educated enough to be able to help my child with his homework and other assignments. I am also able to answer questions of his everyday life experiences by clarifying his doubts and thoughts and to lead him through the right path. I consider

myself lucky that my aunt was an educator. I got to learn a lot from her. She is now deceased but her legacy is alive with me and many others.

I joined the continued education program to obtain a U.S. high school diploma since my high school diploma from my county of origin is not valid in the U.S. I am proud of the education I received because it goes everywhere with me, from the moment I become an adult, the moment I come to this country for the first time, and this moment I become a parent. Therefore, education is important on every aspect of my life because it is the key that can open doors and the tool that can make me discover positive new experiences without fear or doubts in the U.S. and any part of the world.

Aidee Sanchez attends the Adult Program at Key West High School

A Turning Point

We have all come to a turning point in our lives. A place where we have looked back over our lives and decisions we have made. It can be a place where we can choose to change or remain the same. I would like to share a turning point in my life with you. In late 2001, I was enrolled in the ABE program at PJC. I was on the correct path of getting my GED. I met a young man while at a party. We began to date and get serious. I would miss some classes here and there. Then I started missing on a regular basis, until eventually I dropped out completely. I thought I did not need an education because I had a man who loved me and promised to take care of me. We moved away from Florida in 2002 and were married in 2003.

Here I am 23 years old, married, no education, and working a job I had to lie and say I had an education to get. We were living life as any newlywed couple would: making memories, enjoying being with each other, building a life, and meeting life's

adventures head on. Little did I know what the future would hold! As any normal married couple, we had issues. I don't know about you but when I married, I was not given a "how to" manual. With all of life's everyday stress of lack of money, the falling economy, and bills that were multiplying faster than we could pay them, our marriage began to suffer. Eventually in early 2008 we realized that our marriage was not going anywhere, and we had grown apart. We were separated in mid 2008. This is where my life would take a drastic turn. A turning point that I would never forget!

I remember it like it was yesterday. I was sitting in my home in North Carolina, where we resided the last five years of our marriage. He had already moved out. I was alone. I didn't have any friends to call, I was jobless, and I had rent that was due that weekend. I was at the lowest point in my life, and I was seriously considering suicide. I am not sure what made me decide to do this, but like a flash I packed my things, called my mother, and moved back to Florida. I got here and went through a depression that no one should ever have to endure. My mom was there to encourage me, but it was something that I had to through on my own. I asked God for his strength to overcome, and peace was given to me. I knew it was going to be ok.

I decided at that point I was going back to school and make something of my life no matter what! I am currently enrolled in the ABE program at PJC. I am only a few months away from obtaining my GED, and I see a brighter tomorrow and the possibilities that I can choose from. This is a turning point that I am using for the best!

Rebecca Sanchez is in the ABE Program at Pensacola Junior College

My Life

My name is Valentina, and I was born in Mexico, Oax, in a small town call Mixtecpec. I have two brothers and two sisters. Since I remember my father coming to the United States of America, me my brothers & sisters stayed with my mom always. We really had a difficult time. I remember those days when my mom got sick for a year and that time there were no doctors, no water in/outside the house. My sisters and I had to go to the river to get water to drink or use for showering. Before mom would got sick, we used to go to the river to take shower and wash clothes and waited for it until get dry at the sun.

When we grew up, Mom did not have money to buy our shoes, clothes or candy. When one of us in the family got a hole in the back pocket or knees, Mom would cut out old clothes to put back on hole, jean or sweaters. Our shoes were always plastic. She would hold on to the old shoes to fix the new ones. We only ate regular beans, dry beans and soup. We only ate eggs, chicken once in a while or only when somebody in the family got sick then that person was allowed to eat one egg. When I went to school, I looked at some of the kids who drank, soda, had candies and snacks on their hands, and I wanted a drink, I would wish to get something from them because I didn't have any money. One time I saw gum on the floor. I looked everywhere. If no one was watching me, I bent down, picked up and put it in my mouth. This is something that I can't forget, when I remember I feel very sad.

This time when my mom was sick, my sister, Maria, was like our second mom. Mom will tell us when Maria used to get up every morning to make tortilla. Her fire wouldn't start up, the only thing we would see is smoke coming out underneath her pan. Her tortilla will come out very hard, burnt and she get very upset. Mom says that Maria will put salt on the tortilla, and a green pepper in my big brother bookbags. My brother was embarrassed. Instead of going to school, he would go to the river and swing. That's why he did not pass high school and got a nick name Pato (means duck in Spanish). After this, mom got better and decided to come with

Juan, my big brother el Pato to the USA. Four of us stayed and left home to go to grandma's house until Mom came back. After that, my two older brothers and sister didn't like being with Grandma. They left home where we grew up and came back once in a while each to see us. That time we really missed each other, specially my Mom. When I remember Mom, I used to hide and cry, wishing she would be back soon. After all that one year, I didn't get to talk to my mom either on the phone, or knowing when she would be back. My second brother, Higinio came back home to Grandma and told us to leave and go back home with him. We packed some clothes and left with him in the afternoon. I remember I was so, so excited to go home. I missed my home. I couldn't wait to get there!

Grandma knew we have left. She could see us walking up in the hills. That day we came home to Mom and uncle's house, and we said to each other let's go, get water from a puddle, and bring some home so uncle won't be upset to see us back without Grandma's permission. We are just coming back with the water, when we saw my uncle driving his van like a crazy person will do! We ran and hid with fear until Uncle had left that night. After hiding, we just went back home, spent the night there, and left very early the next day. We walked almost two hours to Grandma again. We knew we were in big trouble, especially, my brother. We got home, one by one were call out to see my uncle. First was my youngest sister, then was my turn, I was shaking, my heart was shaking, and he says to me, if you ever do this again, I will beat you up and will take blood over you back with belt. Since this time, I never escaped again until Mom came back home. That time I was up in the hills watching Grandma sheep, when I saw Mom coming back, I was the happiest person in the world! I ran screaming, Mom's back home, Mom's back home! Then I asked my Mom to please never leave me and my brothers again.

Valentina Santiago is a student at GGALC in Naples

IT

The sounds of voices that are carried by the wind say little
whispers of hope.

The past hasn't ever been this free, being caged as a bird willing to
obey its master.

There's so much that it has taken for granted, and hours and
minutes in a clock on the wall.

Bottle to its lips, tearing it to pieces, how did it get this far out of
control?

Spaces that gap the universe that always seems to fight violently in
the mind, which seems to make it hard to cope.

It starts to take a stick and beats its life down. Sad, that it learned
plenty of life's most valuable skills from its parents.

It has been rejected, thrown away, and not cared about. Its parents
are finally replaced.

It had to fight to stay alive from suffocating water and heavy rocks
pulling it down.

Angela Savage is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

Smoking

Smoking issues is somewhat of a hard subject for me. I don't agree
on what they're doing, the stipulations they are putting on smokers.

First of all, why all of a sudden do they want to ban smoking from
restaurants, bars and some other outdoor public places. With all
the pollution and filth we breathe in every day from industries and

industrial companies, do you really think smoking is going to make a difference? Drinking kills many people every day and they don't stop that. So what's the difference, I ask.

I understand that some people don't like smoke. But that's why they should have certain sections for smokers and non-smokers. What happened to the smoker's rights? I don't understand why someone can drink in a bar and get in his or her car and hurt somebody, but you can't light a cigarette up. You tell me what the difference is.

Margaret Schermerhorn is in the ABE Program at Gadsden

The Person I Admire the Most

The person I admire the most, without a doubt, is my dad. He is my whole life. My Dad has been my strength. He has been through some rough times in his life and he has never given up.

My Dad came from Italy. He came here with his mom, his dad, and five sisters. They couldn't speak, read, or write English. My Grandfather was a very strict man. I really don't know the real truth but he had my father locked up for some time. When my father got out, he never went back to school, and he would take any job he could get. He still could not read or write but he could memorize things. He couldn't even sign his own name. He never gave up even though he hated most of his jobs. He did what he had to do.

When he was around fifty years of age, he got someone to tutor him. He was taught to read and write. He could not read large words but he could read books like Sam I Am and Cat in the Hat. I could not have been more proud of my father.

Now my dad is 73 years old and he lives in Las Vegas. Yes, he is still struggling, but he never gave up. He just goes and

goes. He has to be one of the strongest people I know. My dad gives me the power to deal with things that go on in my life. He always makes me feel like I can do no wrong, I can only make things right.

I am in prison now, at the age of 43, and I know I have broken my father's heart. He is still right there for me, and he is helping me make it through this. He knows I'm scared but he keeps telling me that it's o.k. He keeps reminding me that my day will come when they will say to me "pack it up".

My biggest fear is that something will happen to him in the next three years. I don't know how I would handle it. My dad promises me that even if he gets sick, he will fight it until I get out, so that I can see him before he leaves me. I believe him, too, because my dad has never lied to me. I am Daddy's little girl.

Jeanne Scire-Tully is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Experience

My home visit with Miss Mia was wonderful. Miss Mia met my daughter Angelica and me at her daycare. We greeted each other outside and then proceeded into the daycare. Miss Mia and I sat with Angelica and looked over a book that I had chosen. We then asked Angelica to look for certain pictures in the book on each page and she was able to point them out to us.

I thought it went really well once Angelica was comfortable with Miss Mia. Then we did her assessment and she was in range for her age. I was happy about that! Angelica has really started talking a lot more than she did before she began daycare. She enjoys going to daycare every day.

My first Family Event experience was this past Friday on September 26th, 2008. I brought my daughter with me and at first it

was scary for her, until she adjusted to the situation. It was a really great night! We had a blast joining in with the others. And she enjoyed making things and playing with the other children. I would love to attend another Family Event.

My classroom experience has been great so far. I am working toward getting my GED and Mrs. Cheryl is there to assist me whenever I need help. It is also helpful to know that Mrs. Cheryl or Miss Mia is there to assist me when I need someone to talk to about personal situations.

They have given me advice and support with a number of situations and I really appreciate that. So, I would to thank Mrs. Cheryl and Miss Mia for all the support they have given me.

Melanie Shuemaker attends the Even Start Family Literacy Program in Clearwater

This Is My Best Life I've Ever Known

On February 21, 1989 at 8:00 am, I was born in Valley, Alabama. I have two older half sisters, Mindy and Kelly. In 1995, I was 4 years old and I had to take a hearing test. Normal hearing is 20db but mine dropped down almost to the deaf line. I was told it was bad and that my speech would be affected too. It's hard for me to hear some sounds so it is hard for me to sound out words. I had to get hearing aids. Every 2 years I have to get a hearing test again. It's getting a little better or maybe I am just learning to live with it.

My Mom decided to have my eyes checked before I went to kindergarten. The Doctor said I had cataracts and that he wanted me to see another eye Doctor. I had a lazy left eye and had to wear a patch on my right eye. I hate that!! In May 1998, I had eye surgery on my left eye to remove the cataracts. After that my right eye kept getting worse, so I had surgery on it in May 1999. I still have to wear glasses but I can see well.

I was 12 years old and I went to middle school. I played the trumpet in band. But I don't know how to read music. So I listened to the music and played it by ear. After the school year ended, we had band camp. I learned how to play and read music in band. In 7th and 8th grade, I played solos and got a superior—which is the highest rank in band. I was so happy! Well, I can't tell you how I can play music. I guess I can feel the vibration. In 2002, I played my trumpet very good—I can play high notes and play 7 scales. I played 1st or 2nd in music.

In 2004 I was 15 years old. I got my learner permit. I went to band camp for marching band to learn new steps. We had to memorize the music. On August 28, 2004, it's my first time in the football stadium. It was so loud! We played a song by Journey.

My youngest sister had a baby. Her name is Madison. I was a first-time uncle in 2001! My 1st sister has a baby; her name is Isabella. She was so cute. I am an uncle for the second time. In October 4, 2004, at 4:55 pm, my young nephew was not so good because his heart is not right. We went to see him. His name is Abram Green.

On February 2, 2005, we went back to see Abram in Birmingham, Alabama. We stayed a week. On Friday, we went to the hospital all day and night. I was worried Abram was ok. Abram was 4 months old and had a heart operation. I was crying so hard. We went to the waiting room. On the 11th of February 2005, Abram had died. I was crying and it was bad. It's hard for me. My mom and my dad also cried. We went to Columbus, GA. We spent the night of February 14, 2005, Valentine's Day. Abram was buried in the cemetery. I cried again. I won't forget that day.

On April 2006, I passed the driving test. So happy about that! I got a driver's license!

On June 6th 2008, I graduated high school. Right now I'm trying to go to college for a better job. I'm going to study music because I love to play music. That is my life.

I got a job at Publix. I'm a bagger. I make a little money. The job I really want is to be a trumpet player. I'm lucky to be me. My life is great!! This is a true story.

The end!

David Shumate attends Learn to Read Jacksonville

My Life

Growing up hasn't been easy for me. I grew up in an abusive household with two parents and a brother. My mom tried to give me the best life possible. My dad did also, but he had his alcohol problems which made him very violent. This is not to say that I don't love my dad because I love my dad unconditionally, and I know now that the alcohol made him do crazy things. I don't hate him. I dropped out of high school in my senior year because of the chaotic life I was living. I regret that decision everyday, but I have to live with it. Now I'm going back to school to receive my diploma and someday hope to have my college degree.

Lissette Sivals attends the ABE Program at Seminole Community College

Growing Up in the Bahamas

The Bahamas Islands lie just to the east and south east of the Florida peninsula. There are about seven hundred of them. Most of the larger ones are very populated, and some of the smaller ones called Cays, are privately owned. Flying over these Islands the view is magnificent with aquamarine, crystal clear waters, shimmering beneath us. As we get closer to the Islands, they are like dark green emeralds, sitting atop white sandy beaches which remind me of crushed pearls. The surrounding waters so

clear, just a hint of green sparkles in the sunlight. Getting closer you can actually see some of the coral reefs that lie off shore.

I was born on one of these jewels, the beautiful Cat Island. I grew up with my Grandmother and one of my Aunts, who was so strict, it was unreal. She would make sure that we were always busy, doing something or the other. Chores were endless. Saturdays were called work day, a day we as kids dreaded. There was laundry first thing in the morning, floors to scrub and fire wood to be brought in from the fields, all before sunset. We did not have stoves back then; we cooked in an outside kitchen. We did laundry in two tin tubs and had to hang them on the clothes line to dry. Sunday there would be church, sometimes twice, morning and evening. We had to go even if we did not want to. Other than holidays and picnics once or twice a month, there was never much playtime for us children. Our school house was a stone's throw from the beach. This was great, because we got to play on the beach more often than we should, everyone loved that. Living here was rough sometimes, especially since there was no kind of entertainment for us kids, I found myself daydreaming a lot. I'd dream of traveling to some place other than here, where there would be new faces, less work, lots of fun, and a television.

I have been away from Cat Island for a very long time, I'm sure that it has changed tremendously. But life on the Island has taught me a lot about being responsible, caring, strong and compassionate. With these values I think I can make it anywhere.

Arnett Smith is in the Adult Ed Program at GGALC in Naples

From Her Little Fishy

To be the one she calls sweetie. Be it a name we are all called in our lives.

To be hers is a different matter. I am hers, her one, her only, her true love.

I know this because she is mine.

The gap of words we had in our days long past were everything against what we wanted.

We wanted to be close, we wanted to hold each other, and we wanted to kiss each other's sweet lips.

But alas, we were not speaking to each other.

As the months dragged on for the longest time, we put ourselves with others to fill the void of love.

But the false hope and unrelenting love was not what they asked for.

So with one's shy self and another's shameful being, they found a wanting need to be with each other.

From sea to sea, voice to voice all again we start the noise of each others sweet sounds.

Brandon Smith attends the Santa Rosa Adult School

Roughing It – by Donald Smith

I've had a hard time staying here in Florida, and I really need to work hard to come out of this depressing state I'm in. Shelter has been a problem since the first day I got here. Loneliness has been kicking my backside, to the point where I can't sit down. I need a job, and it doesn't take a rocket scientist to figure that out.

I know this is just a phase I'm going through. And it won't always be this way, if I continue going to school and get my GED. That's going to take time, but I'm willing to work hard and push forward. Besides, sitting on the grass and looking at the lake becomes pretty boring after a few weeks.

Being the anti-social type that I am, I've allowed depression to come in and vex my spirit. Spending my days and nights in solitary places, I would bounce all kinds of thoughts in my head. A long time in this condition was starting to cause mental stress; that's when I decided to open up a little bit. And when I met someone I felt I could trust, I started to communicate more often.

All this adversity plays an important role to better prepare me for my future job, working in the United States Navy! When I get my GED, that's where I'm going. And I think it's going to be smooth sailing from there. But I need not forget that I need to do a lot of communicating. So I've already started practicing communication skills, and I can notice the improvements.

In conclusion, knowing that it's going to be a rough road ahead, with its ups and downs, I have a pretty big challenge. I'm sure things will get better and better, because I believe that I've already been on the roughest road, and just about at the end. So when adversity arises, it will find that it has lost its sting. There's no reason for me to stop now, because there's smooth sailing after the storm.

Donald Smith attends the Tomlinson Adult Learning Center in St. Petersburg

Who I Admire

Let me tell you about someone I admire. He is the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. He is without a doubt the most visible icon of the civil rights movement. Dr. King attended Morehouse College and

received his Bachelor's Degree in sociology in 1948 at the age of 19. He then attended Crozier Theological Seminary in Pennsylvania and Boston University. In 1953 Dr. King married Coretta Scott. They had four children. The following year he became the pastor at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama and in 1955 he received his PhD in Theology from Boston University. Dr. King first gained national prominence in 1955 during the Montgomery bus boycott. He was elected as the president of the newly formed Montgomery Improvement Association.

I admire him as the greatest leader of my time because he set the examples of what a true leader is by the things he did and believed in and he gave his life for what he believed in. I admire his attribute that he was hard as steel against injustice but was gentle as a lamb the way he achieved it.

Douglas Smith attends Learn to Read Jacksonville

“V”

I would like to tell you about someone I admire; his name is “V.” I admire him because he’s smart, funny, gorgeous, and respected by all who meet him. I met “V” through my friends Beth and Wrath in the summer two years ago. He had on his Red Sox cap, pulled down low. I couldn’t stop staring at him. He was just so resplendently beautiful. I also found out that day he had great personal hygiene. “V” is a six foot eight, black-haired, fair-eyed, world wonder. I’m grinning just writing about him.

That man isn’t just fun to look at, he’s so smart! He works on the computer and security system for the Army. He’s a respected soldier/computer tech. He gets a little rowdy sometimes, but not too bad, though when he’s with his five brothers, he has a smart mouth. It’s cute though.

“V” has every bit of all the attributes I want in a man, however, he smokes. That’s a problem. Anyway, in case you’re drooling over “V”, I have to tell you something. “V” is not real. He and his five brothers are characters in a book series named, Black Dagger Brotherhood.

Faye Smith attends the Santa Rosa Adult School

Why I Came to the United States

When I was 16 years old, my mother married an American man. Then he started to complete the paperwork for Mom and me to come to America, but I didn’t know it. When I was a little kid, my dream was to come to America to study and work. I knew I would have a better life over there.

Two years later, the lawyer sent the mail for me to get my visa. When I got that visa I was so happy! The name of the visa was called K4. K4 means a child will come with parents. Finally, I was on my way to America.

After I moved to America, I studied and worked hard everyday. I am still working and going to school. Someday I will have a great job and have a lot of money. Then I will go back to Thailand to visit my family and tell my grandma, “I did it!”

Shitnapha Somboonmee is in the ABE Dept.at PJC in Pensacola

To My Children With Love

When I first laid eyes upon you,
I know you were my dream come true,
You were a gift from above,
Beautiful children for me to love,

I watched as you all began to grow,
And taught you all things you needed to know,
I never thought there would come a day,
When mom had to go away,
I never meant to cause you all shame,
But I made mistakes and I'm to blame,
I know it hurt that we're apart,
Just keep me with you in all of your hearts,
I realize you all might even be mad,
You need to know mom is okay,
And that I'll be coming home some day very soon,
I'm asking you all to be real strong,
Mom won't be gone for very long,
When I finally do come home,
I promise that I'll never roam,
I'll try my best to never hurt you again,
If things go wrong, I won't desert you,
So be patient as you can be,
I'll be back, just wait and see,
I want to know about you all day,
When you eat and where you play,
even though I wasn't there,
I would like you to know how much I love and care,
Please don't feel like you all are alone,
I'll write and call you all on the phone,
I pray each night God will guide you all,
Just trust in God and have no fear,
My love for you all will never disappear,
Even though we're not together,
You'll be apart of me forever

Carla Spearman is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Goals, My Future

My life is very important to me. Therefore, I need to prepare for my future. Having a good education, a good job and being a good person mean a lot to me. Although many theories are being taught to us, they are nothing if they are not put into actions. Before applying anything of these things that we have learned, knowing whether they match our purpose is essential. In other words, setting personal goals is a necessity, but if I do not know the ways to accomplish them it is useless.

Jeremy Stafford attends Adult Education at the Key West High School

My Life

My name is Erin Stiles and I am 18 years old. My life hasn't been so great up to this point. When I was in school, I never wanted to do my work. I failed a lot of my classes because I didn't care about the important things. I got pregnant when I was 16, just before turning 17. I continued to go to school and realized that I needed to better my education not only for me but for my son.

One problem that I encountered was child care. I had no one to watch him after he was born so I dropped out of school and I came to the Adult Education Center and enrolled in the Even Start program. The Even Start program helped me not only pay for daycare but also helped me through a lot of difficulties in my life.

They have been there to help me grow up and become a better parent and all around person. I am hoping to continue my education and get my GED and go to college. I am leaving Adult Education and Even Start now, but I hope my story has inspired others and they will enroll in the program to learn and grow as I did. I LOVE my Adult Education and Even Start Family.

Erin Stiles attends the Columbia County Adult Education Program

An Unresolved Emptiness

That phrase, “when you fall, you’re supposed to pick up the pieces and move on,” but what if you leave the pieces there and walk off? You live with no feelings, no remorse, no emotions, no right from wrong, no hurt. You live for that next thrill in life, looking for a way to make things whole, to fill the hole. And the one thing you have been trying to fill the hole with is the feeling you’ve been missing: LOVE.

Matthew Moorman attends Each One Teach One at the Broward County Library in Ft. Lauderdale

A Turning Point In My Life

Little did I know that a fall would be a major turning point in my life. In 1997 I fell injuring my right knee. Following the fall I had to have a total knee replacement. I tend to believe this injury caused ensuing chronic pain that lead to two back surgeries five months apart. Both surgeries were a failure. I have a final diagnosis of “failed back surgery syndrome”.

I developed persistence and disabling symptoms after surgery and have suffered chronic back pain for years. I have been through the gamut of orthopedic, neurological and radiological opinions followed by physiotherapy and occupational therapy.

From this experience I learned that poor health makes it harder to enjoy life. I had to learn how to handle this situation, and I did this by setting my mind to cope with it. To learn to do what you have to do with a different attitude and a different pace. You can catch a disease, but you can’t catch health.

Alberta Sumlar attends the Women's Center of Jacksonville

It Changed My Mind

He is running to the airport thinking, it is too late, he is going to miss the flight, just like he missed everything in his life. He checks the flight status screen - flight 1549 to Charlotte, N.C. - closed. He goes to the counter and begs the counter attendant to allow him to board, she calls the gate and they let him get on board, but he has to run again. Finally, he got on the plane, he looks for his seat - 24A, window, just right above the left wing. How he sits and starts to think about how miserable his life is, how miserable he is.

He is going to his father's funeral. They haven't talked to each other for eight years, no calls on birthdays, no hugs at Christmas, nothing. His job was always more important than everything. He feels guilty; he regrets not having talked to him. It is now that he starts to miss his dad.

He got divorced two years ago and his wife Ana, moved to Europe with his only son Bennie. At first he suffered too much, but he found refuge in his work and hid his pain in it. He works too hard to get tired every day just to go home and sleep. He doesn't even want to dream. He doesn't want to remember.

The guy that he thought was his best friend, Robert, told him two months ago to invest in an incredible business. He trusted him; he gave Robert all of his money, and even more. He signed some papers without reading them. He trusted his best friend. He lost all his money, he almost went to jail. He lost his beautiful house in front of Central Park, New York, and obviously, he lost his best friend as well. He didn't see Robert any more.

While sitting in the airplane, he thinks that his life has no reason to be. God took away everything from him, nobody cares about him, nobody needs him, and there is no one waiting at home for him.

Finally, the airplane starts moving. He buckles up and asks for a pillow. It is going to be a long trip and he wants to sleep. He

doesn't want to think. He doesn't want to analyze his life. He doesn't want to admit it, but internally, deeply in his soul, all he wants is to disappear. In fact, he thinks that no one will miss him, not even God has plans for him. And then, he realizes that he wants to die.

The airplane is flying and suddenly he hears an explosion, a loud bang and he smells smoke. He hears the voice of the Capitan saying that apparently the airplane has been struck by birds upon take off from New York La Guardia Airport, and everybody has to get ready for emergency landing in the Hudson River.

Many people start praying. He doesn't. He thinks God doesn't hear him anymore. He expects the plane to break apart, but it does not. He knows they are going down and into the water. They land, and somehow the plane stays afloat.

It is just incredible that everyone lives. He thinks it is just incredible that he is alive. Maybe God will give him a second chance. He stands up and starts to help others. He is the last passenger to get out before the Capitan. It is a miracle, he knows. God has taught him a big lesson. Later in the ambulance, he thinks he has to be very careful next time he wishes something. It might come true.

Marianela Gutierrez Tahan is from Argentina. She attends the English Café at Southwest Regional Library in Pembroke Pines

Beautiful Day

Sometimes, I wonder is this just one bad dream
That you can just wake up from.
Everyday of your life wondering what the future brings,
Versus right or wrong
The smell, you breathe the air
The laughter, you see and hear

The pictures of the wedding day, and
One beautiful baby you've dreamed about so badly
You want to grow up in this one, big world, and
As you picture that one beautiful day
Nice, sunny day
Laughing, playing and just one happy family, and
When you begin to wake up,
Then you realize, Oh my God,
It was only a dream.

Alexis Taylor attends the Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton

Home

Home is where I would run,
If I could get out of these walls.

I would run home where I'm loved,
And where I'm cared about.

Run where no one could find me in my home.
I would run so fast I would make every moment last.

I wouldn't lose at this race of life,
Because home I'll be with the ones who love me.

Patricia Taylor is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional

Thanks!

I want to take advantage of the opportunity to have this space for gratitude for my teachers at GROWS, for all the patience and tolerance that day by day they give us.

Your job as a teacher is so big and important for you. What doesn't stop you? Global warming, or feeling a little sick, here you are day after day to give everything to your teaching.

You make a big effort every day, from what we can understand. Day by day, little by little, you teach me so many things.

Thanks for passing on this ability God has given you. Thank you for everything; for your time, patience, intelligence, and sharing your learning.

Hilda Teno attend the GROWS Family Literacy Council in Apopka

A Successful Life

I think that one of the most successful people that I know is myself, because I have become more mature as a result of coming from a difficult life. I have also been successful at directing my children towards a successful future, as well as taking the next step toward a higher education for myself which will allow me to become more successful. As an Even state graduate, I am currently attending St. Petersburg College.

First of all, I believe I have overcome a lot of obstacles in my life, such as coming from a hard life of depression, despair, and people telling me I couldn't do anything in life. I have grown to become more mature, to work for a better future from my children and myself. I believe that was the first step I have to take to become successful

Secondly, I regarding my children, I feel that on a daily basis, I am successful because I do things with my children everyday that teaches them how to be successful and that makes me proud. I am their number one teacher and when I see them progress in life I know that's because of me and my success in spending time with them reading.

Thirdly, coming from being a stay at home mom, that didn't graduate and making the decision to work towards a higher education is very powerful to me. It is a step that I have taken that will change me and my children's life in a very positive way. This will make me ever more successful then I consider myself now.

In conclusion, I have progressed to be a more mature adult. I have been able to raise my children in a more appropriate way. I am moving towards an education that will make me more successful in life and ultimately in the long run. I am proud of myself for making that first step that has allowed me to star a life towards success for me and my children.

Mellissa Terantino is a Pinellas Even Start Graduate living in Clearwater, FL.

A Dream That Brought A Change

I was born in 1956 in Virginia. My mother died when I was two years old. My daddy, sister and I moved to Florida. We grew up in the South. It was hard during that time. Blacks couldn't go to the movie theaters and schools together with whites. It was segregated during that time. I remember when blacks didn't sit together with whites. They had to sit in the balcony of the theatres. We couldn't sit downstairs. If you were caught, it was a big fight or you go to jail. At that time Dr. King became famous. He started marches and speeches along the Civil Rights movement. I saw things change. He wanted blacks and white to come together. It took a long time for the Dream to come to pass. I remember we had integrated schools in the '70s. We learn to live together. Things changed in our learning. Now the Dream has come true. It took fifty years for a change to come. We have our first black president. He is asking

American people to make a change. We as people have to make change for our children, because they are our Future. Learning is the key to succeed.

Aaron Thaxton attends Learn to Read Jacksonville

My Goals and Ambitions

At the beginning of my life, when I was six years old, every time I went to the doctor's office, with my aunt, it made me feel ambitious. When I looked at the nurses, they looked happy, respectful and caring. They always had a smile on their face. They enjoyed what they were doing; they made me think about myself, what I wanted to be when I grew up.

In 1983, I was eight years old. I was smart and ambitious. One day, when I was at school in Haiti, my teacher asked everyone in my class room one by one, "What is your goal?" She called me first, and she said, "Nadege, what is your goal and ambition?" My answer was, "My goal is first, to be well educated because education is my power to open doors, and my education is the key to make my life successful in so many ways. I know I'm eight years old now, but I will grow up with my ambition to become a powerful nurse in the United States."

Before I came to the United States, I had already gotten my high school diploma. I was waiting for one thing, a green card from my mom, so that I could study hard to accomplish my goal. It arrived.

Coming to America to live with my parents wasn't that easy because my parents had to go to work. They had to follow their activities, and one day I got to thinking that I should ask my sister to drive me to register at Crystal Lake Middle School. I wasn't sure what she would say. She said "Yes". She drove me there and I registered for English classes. When I got back home, I could not

wait for the day to be over, because I was excited to go to school to learn a new language.

I walked in the classroom to my seat. Everybody in the class introduced themselves to me. They gave me their name and I gave mine. Then the teacher started to teach us some words and gave us the definitions of the words. I was so happy, because I was learning a new language. After school, I was thinking of my goal to become a nurse. I have to take all those courses and I need to speak English.

Since then, school has been very hard. Why? Because I had nobody to take me to school or to take me home every day. I am hoping and praying to get a job because the first thing I am going to do is to buy a car. One day I was outside at my parent's home. I saw my neighbor, I said "Hello, how are you doing? My name is Nadege, Bernadette's daughter." I asked her if she could give me a ride to school. She said "Yes". I went back inside my parent's home. I got my notebook, pen and pencil. I closed the door, and she drove me to school. I thanked her. After school, it was very hard for me to get home. I called my sister, she took me home. The next day I tried to make a friend. I knew if I could make a friend, I would be able to find someone to take me home. Finally I got a friend named Maria. She drove me to school and back home. After school, I was so happy because I no longer had to walk.

It has been ten years since my first English Class. Until my English improved, I was employed as a newspaper packaging person for a large newspaper in town. I am now employed as a Medical Assistant and am currently taking classes so that I can get my Licensed Practical Nursing Degree. If I had not taken that first English class, many years ago, my dreams would not be coming true.

Nadege Theodore attends the Atlantic Technical School in Coconut Creek

My Experience

On Thursday, last week, about 3 o'clock in the afternoon, I was on my way home from school, when I met an old woman. She came to me and said, "Hey boy, did you see a little dog walk over here?" I said, "No, I didn't." And she said, "I am looking for my little dog everywhere. I can not find him." "When did you last see him?" I said. She answered, "About three days ago," and she started crying. I asked, "Why are you crying like that?" She explained to me, "I lost my husband. I don't have any children. My little dog was everything to me." I said to her, "Can I look for your little dog for you? She said, "Oh yes, please. I promise if you find him, I will pay you for that." I said, "OK, trust me." I continued on my way home and the woman continued looking for her dog.

When I got home, I thought about what she said. In my heart I did not know how I could find that dog. Why did I say this to her? How can I find that dog? The next morning, when I went to the store with my little sister, I heard something make a noise. We stayed very quiet to hear that sound again. After a few moments, I saw a little dog. He came to me. My sister and I took him to the lady. Oh, she was very happy. For that she gave us fifty dollars and said, "Thank you my son." I said, "Thank you too" and we went home. That was a very good experience and a happy day in my life.

Jameson Thervilus attends the ABE/ESOL Program at Miami Dade College

Inside Me

Inside me, my favorite place, where heart and mind are stored away.

Inside of me where my soul lay away, awaiting, not knowing the time, hour or day.

Inside of me, what no man can take; piece of mind, choice, will to love, live, and pray.

Through bondage, untainted sheltered in the eye of a storm, my temple bruised, my inner sanctuary unharmed.

If only you could see into me, I am so much bigger than you know; a prayer, a blessing, a bundle of hope.

Inside of me, where I'm black, nor grey, neither red nor white, but a haloed spirit draped in radiant light.

Inside me, where only I know because no one on earth has that type of visionary scrutiny.

Inside of me, my favorite place.

Chris Thomas attends Adult Education at Northwest Florida State

Love

Love is like a sea,
For its waves roll inside of me.

They always roll, never ending.
Is there a message they may be sending?

There's something about these waves, that trigger my mind.
Is it something deep, hard to find?

Should I keep listening to these waves never ending,
And find the message they may be sending?

Or let them roll inside,
And never find, what I want to hide.

Lore Thomas attends GED classes at the Even Start Literacy Program in St. Petersburg

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is New York. New York is a place for sight seeing and tourists to travel and see, because you have a lot of pretty mountains and water falls. New York City is another part of New York that I like. In the city, you have plenty of beautiful lights in the city of New York. New York also has a lot of fine places to go, like to the movies, the Fantasy night club, and pleasant restaurants to have a nice lunch or dinner. New York is also a popular place where movie stars live. New York also has a lot of nice boutiques where the movie stars go and buy all their nice wardrobes and fine jewelry, etc.

Cynthia Thompson is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

My Favorite Place

There are a million people or more that have a favorite place. Do you have a favorite place? My favorite place is North Carolina because it's my hometown. North Carolina has beautiful beaches and my best friends live there.

North Carolina is my favorite place to be no matter what. I was born in a place called Asheville, right along side of the mountains. I moved here to Florida when I was three, but in 2007, I went back home because I realized Florida really wasn't and still isn't for me. On a different note, I enjoy every minute spent in North Carolina and I love all of the surroundings.

The beaches in North Carolina are beautiful. The state is known for its beaches. It is by far one of the cleanest beaches I've been to. It's relaxing just to sit on the shore all day and watch other people fishing off the pier or view the boats out in the ocean. I used to go every weekend and my friends and I would get together and go to Carolina Beach.

My best friends, who live in North Carolina, help me through everything. They were in Florida for about 3 years and moved back to Fayetteville, North Carolina where they are from. We've been separated for 7 years, but we keep in contact every day. In 2007, I went to North Carolina to visit them and even though I didn't get to spend much time with them, we took over 100 pictures and had a blast. All in all, North Carolina is my favorite place because it's my hometown, I love the beaches, and my best friends live there.

Kristen Thompson is a student at Columbia County Adult Education

My Little Life Story

I still remember December 14, 2004 when I came to the United States. It was very difficult for me to come because my whole family couldn't come with me. I was going to a place that I didn't know anything about. I had never been out of my city. I was very scared of strange people.

The first time I came to America, everything was very different. I didn't see anybody driving motorcycles. Almost everyone drove a car. When we bought something we could return it if there was a problem. Everyone was very nice to me. When I didn't understand what people were saying, they have never gotten mad or laughed.

A few months after I got here, I began to adjust to this country. I got a driver's license. I worked hard to learn about my new life.

Now I have lived here for four years. I can take care of myself. I'm going to school to learn English. I have new friends. I have gotten married. I can't believe I went through such a difficult time. I really want to thank my parents because they gave me such a beautiful life. I am so happy and excited to learn more and more about my new culture.

Tuyen is from Viet Nam. She is a student at Winter Park Tech

A Different Life

I was born in Viet Nam. I lived there until I got married. My husband lived in the United States, so I moved to be with him. I found life in America to be very different from my life in Viet Nam.

There I rode a motorbike. I spoke Vietnamese. I went to the supermarket every day. I cooked a lot. We ate meals at home with our families. We often talked together.

In the United States, people drive everywhere. They often eat in restaurants. Families don't always eat together. Life is easier here. Machines do a lot of work for people. Housework isn't as hard because we have washing machines, dryers, vacuum cleaners, and air conditioners. There's a lot of entertainment. Family income is higher than in my country. Things are very different.

Phuong Truong is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

My Experiences in ESOL

When I first came to the United States, I was very nervous because I knew nothing. I didn't have a car or driver's license. I couldn't speak English. I studied English at home. Three months

later, I bought a car and got a driver's license. I drove my car to school and enrolled in an English class. In July, 2008, I began my English classes at Winter Park Tech. I was a little afraid because I didn't know anyone. Now I have a lot of friends. I can talk to them because my English has improved. We study as a group and are very happy in our classes. I am excited about my learning English. My school is helpful and very friendly. We are like a family. If you need something, the school helps you. I love my school.

Truong Son Truong is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

The Secret

Each sunrise
Each awakening
Begins the birth
Of a new beginning

Each new day
Is a new opportunity
To do the best
And to come closer to the goal

What is there in your mind today?
How do you feed it? Educate it?
To pick up tomorrow
Everything that you plant

Plant good habits
With love and passion
Cultivate good thoughts
And you will improve your existence

Be a persistent person
Like this, you will reach your goals

And with obedience of the mind
Knock on the doors of success

Think positive
And you will be positive
Live positive
And you will attract positivity

Martha Usme is a student at Grows Family Literacy Council in Apopka

My Life

My name is Belkis Velazco, I am from Venezuela. I was born in the beautiful city of Merida. When I was young I moved to Caracas. It is the capital of Venezuela. I studied Business Administration and Marketing. After that I worked in Wella International as Grand Manager of Marketing. I got married and had two wonderful girls. Their names are Sarah and Marianna.

I moved to the United States because of the political and economic situation in my country. My husband and I were looking for a new opportunity in this country. My goals are to learn English, find a good job and find a good life for my daughters.

Belkis Velazco attends the English Cafe at the SW Regional Library

The Hill for Thinking

There is a hill in Belgrade, the capital city of my country that is the most beautiful place in the world. Maybe this is only true for me, but I think other people can also see the magic of this place. This is the place where one river meets another river. An old fortress is there on this hill. The view is beautiful. You can see the whole city and feel you have the city in your

hand. The magic of the old generations is there. You can hear the whisper of millions of people who have lived there. Every rock in the old fortress tells its own story. Many people died there to protect their families. This hill is the most peaceful place in my country.

When you are at the top of the hill, you can see the Sava River and the strong Danube River. The Sava River looks like it is trying to follow the Danube. The little river looks like a younger sister who wants to share the older sister's toys. When the composer Johan Strauss saw the Danube, he wrote music about it.

In old times when Belgrade was in the Ottoman Empire, the Turkish sultan names the fortress Kalemegdan. In Turkish it means "hill for thinking." Kalemegdan is the most beautiful place in Belgrade and for me. For me it is the most amazing place in the world.

When I have a problem or am sad, I go there. I like to watch the power of the rivers and listen to the sounds of nature. I sit on the bench and on grass. Bad things just go away. I still miss Kalemegdan and wish I could go back. Everything here is very nice, but nothing is like my perfect hill. I miss it and can't wait to see it again.

Mirjana Velimirovic is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

How My Life has Changed

I came to the United States from Viet Nam. I'm an ESOL student. I have been taking classes since August 2007

When I first came to the United States in March of 2002, I didn't know very much. I didn't know how to speak English. I had a hard time finding a job. Finally a friend helped me get a job. I learned

English from my friends. I wanted to go to school, but I didn't have time. I needed money to pay my bills. I worked very hard.

Life in the United States is very different from life in Viet Nam. In my country, I have a big family. We helped each other with everything. I never worried about insurance or bills. My life was very easy that way. Here, I worried a lot about these things.

Now I can go to school. I have made many friends from other countries. I have learned many new things. I feel happy because I have made a life for myself. I have become a U.S. citizen. Thanks to the United States, I have a new life. I appreciate everyone who has helped me make my new life.

Hong Vu is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

My Life

My name is Belkis Velazco, I am from Venezuela. I was born in Merida. It is a beautiful city. When I was young, I moved to Caracas. It is the capital of Venezuela and I studied Business Administration in Marketing. After that I worked in Wella International as Grand Manager of Marketing. I got married and I had two wonderful girls. Their names are Sarah and Marianna.

I moved to the United States because of the political and economic situation in my country. My husband and I were looking for a new opportunity in this country. My goals are; to learn English, to find a good job, and to find a good life for my daughters.

Belkis Velazco attends the English Cafe at the Southwestern Regional Library

Welcome to America

As you know, many people in other countries would love to come and live their lives here. I was one of them. I had heard a lot of good things about America. Now, I know, they were all true. First of all, this is the land of opportunity. Secondly, this is a land of great freedoms. Thirdly, this is a land of possibilities.

I had often dreamed about coming to America and in the year 2000, I moved from Thailand to start a new life. Coming here, many opportunities opened for me. My first job was working at McDonalds. I started from scratch not knowing anything, but I worked very hard and did the job as if it were my own business. In three months, I got a promotion to become one of their managers in training! America is full of fascinating opportunities if you work hard.

In America, freedom is everything; you can live your life the way you want. Some of the freedoms Americans enjoy include speech or speaking your mind. Another important freedom is the chance to raise your family and to become who you want to be. Lastly, America has the freedom of religion which many countries do not. In my country, we did not enjoy many freedoms like these. Because of this, life here is great.

Last but not least, I would like to discuss possibilities. In America, they are everywhere and for everyone. Starting from the day you are born, the government provides so many possibilities and opportunities to improve your life including food, shelter, medical care and a free education for all citizens.

I firmly believe that America is a great country because not only does America have a fascinating, rich culture, but in many ways this country gives everything to the people who live here. Even though Thailand is my home country and I love its people and

culture, I truly love and appreciate my new country, too, because it has given me opportunity, freedom, and possibilities. Thank you, America.

Prangwaree Wanuijit is a student in the Even Start Program in St. Petersburg

No Roadblocks to a Strong Focused Mind

There are goals and ambitions in life. They all start with decisions. You can choose to make the right decision or wrong one. Recently I have decided to sign up for a prep class for the General Education Diploma (GED). This decision is a life changing goal and it will give me a better future. Success starts with an education, so that is where I begin. I want to get my GED and go to college someday. The only person that can hold me back from by goals and ambition is me. With that being said, the best thing I can do is to live one day at a time. It is always possible that roadblocks could come my way but with a strong focused mind nothing can stop me.

Justin Wardrope is in the Adult Education Program at Key West High School

The Beach

When I wake, early in the morning, I like to walk on the beach before the sun rises. I love to see the sun starting to peek off the top of the ocean. When seeing that, I know that a new day is beginning; whatever happened yesterday is gone, and I am given another chance to get “it” right. So, when I start walking down the beach, and I see the waves rolling back and forth, I think of my problems, and I let them go out to sea with the ebb and pray they never return. I remember that God has made it all, and He has taken all problems away. As I walk, the sand feels so good to my feet - it’s as if I’m walking on wet, sinking ground. The longer I’m

there on the beach, walking, I start to feel my situation begin to change, and I feel peace! The closer I walk to the waves I recognize the sound, like music to my ears; the melody changes when I pass by. Each wave makes a new sound, and this is why I love the beach.

V. G. Watson attends the Center for Adult Learning Jacksonville Public Library

A Turning Point in My Life

The turning point in my life was when my boss told me he was closing doors permanently in two weeks. This was my second job that had closed doors. I said to myself, “It’s time to go back to school and get your GED and better yourself. These dead end jobs aren’t getting you anywhere.” So I did. I enrolled in a GED class and it’s been the best thing for me. I have more confidence in myself, and I’m a much happier person. My children are in high school and know that I have gone back to school. I can tell them, “I can help you with that,” (their schoolwork) and they let me. I’m more comfortable to be around people and not embarrassed.

I plan to go to college and get my degree in Forensic Science with my daughter when I graduate. It’s never too late to get your education. That is one thing I’ve learned this year.

Rene S. Whitfield is a student at the Santa Rosa Adult School

My Favorite Place

The beach is my favorite place. It can be any beach because I was born in a city near the sea. I always enjoy looking at the sea, sand, and birds. I like to feel the breeze. When I am worried or sad, I go to the beach because it makes me feel calm. I always remember all

the moments that I shared there with my family and friends. For these reasons, the beach is my favorite place.

Nelly Wilches is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

Dreams

Snow flakes falling, soft white grass, homemade snowmen with children running carelessly around throwing snowballs. A little girl flies down a hill on a sleigh with the brightest smile plastered on her face, it's priceless. Wintertime is magical in this place far away that I seldom see.

The ice has melted away, along with the cold Berlin Wall. It is a new day and the flowers are in bloom, the heat of the sun warms the air igniting energy. A girl riding her bike anxiously through acres of European land, hundreds of horses are around. The air is fresh with the fragrance of sweet ripe strawberries. She picks enough to fill her small pouch. Her mind runs away with her filled with exciting fun ideas.

Singing fills the Opera House with a foreign language a voice befitting of an angel. Everyone is dressed in his or her best garments. They stand in applause. The young girl quickly stands to her feet in appreciation as well, hoping that this dream will never end. A young woman remembers her childhood memories of old. She leans back in deep thought reminiscing of all the wonderful times She realizes now that it was a reality, but was the best childhood she could have ever dreamed. (There is no dream too big to be fulfilled.)

Lakeisha Williams is in the ABE Program at Gadsden Correctional Facility

A Turning Point in my Life

Life comes with ups and downs sometimes I don't know which way to turn. If I choose to go in the wrong direction it may cost me more than I bargained for, but if I choose the right way this could prove to be beneficial.

A turning point in my life was when I realized that I have a purpose, I have value and I have the power to control my life, and my future because I believe in me. Believing in yourself and having faith gives you the power to make it happen even if you can't see it.

I realized that I have a purpose, after not knowing who I was for so long having a feeling of lonesomeness. When I changed my thinking I was reborn. I got excited about life. It was like running in a race; on your mark, get set, go! My opponent was right next to me; my legs felt like rubber, my heart was beating so fast it felt like someone was hitting me with a two by four.

I told myself just one more lap to go, I must pick up my speed. I can't give up; I've trained for so long just to get here I'm almost there. Yes, I'm going to win"! I'm crossing the finish line! Yeah, I won!

Realizing that my life had value was an eye opener. For so long I thought very little of myself. I felt like a bag lady lost and out of touch with my world, a feeling of being homeless. Just a woman trying to survive on my own, remembering how nice it could be.

I would sit and stare at myself in the mirror and ask, "Why me?" There was so much pain in my face and eyes it was like I was looking though someone else's. But one day it become clear to me that I had a gift of helping people. It was wonderful. I took my mind off of me and concentrated on others. This gave me a feeling of being valued.

Using my gift of empowerment is what made me the person I am today. I love giving encouraging words and helping people in any way possible. This makes me feel like I'm on top of the world. Life has taught me that sometimes people can take your kindness as a sign of weakness. So that this does not happen to me, I will use my authority when it is needed.

I have been told that I can be hard sometimes, but I'm fair. I feel that I need to be at the peak of my game at all times. You see, I never know when I will be called upon to render my services. Having this feeling of power gives me control over my life and my future.

In conclusion, by reaching my turning point whether it was good or bad it all worked out in my favor. I decided to use my hardships to strengthen me and make me wiser. And by embracing my good times, "Oh Yes"! This helped me to be the woman that I am today. I am woman with value, power and purpose having key ingredients to a successful life.

Magdaline Williams is in the ABE Program at the Pensacola Junior College

A Turning Point in My Life

Coming from another country and speaking other languages and not well educated, it can be difficult living in the United States. Especially when I'm not well educated in my country. Though I speak other languages, getting my education and learning English is the most challenging for me. I begin my journey to the U.S. in 1996. I could barely speak any English and not aware of what was going on around me. Even though I didn't know what was going on, I worked my way. In 1998 I worked in the shipyard as a helper. During that time I was working very hard. That didn't stop me to be successful. One year later I became a welder for years. After a long 8 years I opened my own business. By watching T.V. and listening to others in conversation, my English started to improve. I

got frustrated living in a country when I'm not well educated and can barely speak the language. I signed up for ESOL class at FCCJ. I attended for at least one year. I didn't have good or bad results. I decided to take further action and I signed up for Learn to Read. Since then, my English began to improve and I will continue Learn to Read for better results and higher education. Maybe someday I will receive my high school diploma and go to college to be a paralegal.

Ensie Wilson is in the Learn to Read Jacksonville Program

I'm Trying My Best

Speaking English is difficult for me. My goal is to get a better job in the United States. When I try to speak English, I don't feel confident. My pronunciation is not good right now but I am trying to learn how speak proper English. I would like to communicate with other people in English. While speaking is hard, writing is even harder. I want to practice writing at a higher level. Because I am now working with the children in United States, I really need to know how to speak well. I love children. Back home, I was a life time volunteer for Caritas Organization. I took care of the very poor and under privileged children. Sometimes, I feel very powerless. Sometimes, I rejoice. I need to help these children to make sense in their lives. To me this is very important. We who are able should help those who are unable to help themselves.

Barbara Wolska attends the Adult Education Center at Key West High School

My Experience in Adult Education and Literacy

My name is Norman Woods. I have been living in Jacksonville all my life. I started coming to Learn to Read in October of 2007. It's been a good experience. I'm better in my reading and writing. It makes me feel better when I pick up and read a newspaper or the Holy Bible or mail or letters. It makes me feel like the world is an open book. My grammar teacher is a good teacher. She takes the time with her students and my tutor is a good listener. He helps me understand vowels better in a word. I am glad to be a part of the program at Learn to Read.

Norman Woods attends Learn to Read Jacksonville

My Favorite Place

My favorite place to visit is Biloxi, Mississippi. When visiting Biloxi, I like to go to the casinos, eat at fine dining restaurants, and visit my son who lives and works in Biloxi.

I love to go to the casinos to relax and to play video poker at the bar. Also, I like to gamble at the gaming tables. The restaurants have great seafood. I enjoy eating the best meals and deserts. This is a favorite part of my visit.

My son lives in Biloxi and works at the IP Casino. He has worked there for over three years, and he does not get to visit his father and I in Florida.

My favorite place to visit is Biloxi. Whenever I go, it gives me a chance to relax, to enjoy the entertainment of the casinos, and to visit my son. It is very enjoyable.

Yueh Worthen is an ESOL student at Northwest Florida State College in Ft. Walton Beach

Alien on Earth

Laughs A Lot is the planet from where I come. My planet is actually very tiny. We refer to Laughs A Lot as the tenth rock from the sun. It differs from life on Earth because everyone is a unique creature. There are no strangers, and we have our special traditions. Everyone is provided food, clothing, shelter, and health care. All basic needs are handled by the planet managers. As a result, the inhabitants can relax and enjoy themselves on a daily basis.

On my planet, there are unusual creatures. Laughing hyenas for instance are considered the quipsters. They always have something funny to say or perhaps something funny to do. They always have you on alert and on your toes which is why they are known to be the upper class of laughter. Next, are the dodoes, who are funnier than a barrel of monkeys. They are always trying to mess with the hyenas by posing like them or trying to succeed by playing one of their pranks on them, but always failing. For this reason, they are considered the second class of laughter. Last but not least, the lower class is given to the flock of cuckoos. They tend to prefer being by themselves, but once they are in the mood, there is no stopping or telling what kind of crazy things they will do. For example, messing up your face by quickly painting an extra eye or ear. Or when you start something, and you get up for two seconds, they take it and move it to another place, and watch you try to find it. It is known that whichever prank they are doing, lasts only for a couple of minutes.

Since everyone is playing tricks on each other, there are no strangers. Everyone was brought up together. Either by the parents knowing each other or just everyone playing pranks. This is a very good arrangement because there is no crime or any arguments. The downside to this, though, is there are no secrets. Everyone knows everything about each other. Everything is open to the public including getting married and trying to have a small wedding. Private weddings or other personal events never happen because

everyone enjoys participating. For most inhabitants there are never any bad days. Everyone is cooperative, and there is mutual respect. Traditions on Earth are very strange to us. First, when we greet someone on Earth we laugh a lot instead of shaking hands or saying hello, we either tell a joke or we tickle them. Next, Independence Day in the U.S. is on the Fourth of July and you watch or set off fireworks. On my planet Independence Day is on the sixth of January, and we throw pies at each other and do practical jokes. Last but not least, you sleep at night and wake up in the morning. For us it's the opposite. We sleep in the morning and wake up at night. That's the best time to laugh and play pranks or think of new jokes to tell.

In conclusion, living on this planet, or as you call it Earth, is very difficult. We transform our image to become a human form so you can't tell us apart from native people. Living everyday by the routines in which you are involved is still very new to us. We can't go up to the creatures, or as you call them animals, and joke around with them. And since your planet is much larger than ours, we can't use our traditional greeting by going up to a complete stranger and start telling them jokes or start tickling them (which we still have to try and overcome). This is how my home life differs from life on Earth, and I'm certain that many Earthlings would enjoy our culture and mode of behavior.

Jocelyn Wulf is a GED student at Indian River State College

My Experience at School

My experience at Winter Park Tech has been very good. When I first came to school, I knew a little English. Now I am learning more English and about the country. I learn the language and culture in many ways. I watch movies. I talk with my classmates. I

learn a lot from all these. I am very happy at my school I am getting a rich knowledge of the language and cultures from all over the world.

Maria Zarur is an ESOL student at Winter Park Tech

A Good Intuition Can Go Very Far

My name is Jane Zhao. I am Chinese by origin but now I am an American. My turning point was after I had graduated high school, I had to decide whether or not the rich man is a good choice for my life. It was a tough decision to make because I did not have much knowledge and experience about being with a man. My family is very traditional and they have high ethical values. Though we are not financially adequate, we are morally rich. I will never forget that New Year's day when good intuition played a very important factor in my decision making. I accepted this unknown man to be a part of my life. Today, he is my dearest husband. We have been married to 13 years and are blessed with 2 children. I am so happy that I made the right choice.

Jane Zhao is in the Adult Education Program at Key West High School

Libin visits St. Augustine

Many people dream of traveling across the world. They are eager to enjoy natural wonders, to experience diverse cultures, and to listen to old myths and legends by visiting places far from their hometown. It is likely for people to overlook the beauty of places nearby. St. Augustine, Florida, is one of such wonderful places which I used to ignore. In January 2009, I had a chance to visit this great city and I was impressed by it.

Before I went there, I did some research on the history of this town. St. Augustine is the oldest permanent settlement founded by the Spanish in 1565. In 1763, the British defeated the Spanish and became the owner of this land. Florida was under Spanish control again from 1784 to 1862. Since 1862, Florida and St. Augustine became part of the United States. It is clear that this is a city filled with historical stories.

I arrived at the old town in the morning. Fortunately, it was warm with a cool breeze. The first stop of my trip is the oldest fort in the photo. Due to the importance of its location (one of the few landings on the coast), this fort was serving as the military front against enemies coming from the ocean. Nowadays, the dark clouds of wars have faded away. People are flying kites beside the fort. However, this grand building was, is, and will stand there, reminding visitors of the unforgettable history of this land.

Departing from the fort, I walked along the streets in the old town. All kinds of bizarre or fanciful stores stand at two sides of these crowded streets. I also saw many grand churches in the town which were built with different architectural styles at different eras. They are major stops of sight seeing buses. If you like architecture, these fabulous buildings may bring you some intellectual sparkles. The building in the photo belongs to the Flagler College, which is the former Ponce de León Hotel. When I walked into this building, I felt I was standing in a movie scene showing the most luxurious hotel in the 19 century.

Besides, there are other impressive stuff which attracted me, such as the oldest wooden schoolhouse, homelike family inns, the palm trees along the coast, and others. Lasting, the food was pretty good. There are many different types of restaurants, including Italian, French, Mexican, and Columbian.

Libin Zhou attends the Literacy Volunteers of Leon County ESOL Program

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

We have only one earth, but so many different worlds. Do you think, that place where we were born and grew up has impact on our lives? I know this. After ten years in U.S., I still think about my first impressions when I landed in New York. Read carefully, because this will be interesting.

Wow, how big is America? Everything here compared to Europe is bigger. There are bigger cities, cars, houses, apartment, and even fridges. How many people from different countries we meet here? How many cultures? In Poland almost everything is Christian. I don't know how many religions are in U.S., but I can only imagine that every religion touches this country. It contributes to how amazing this country is.

When I was young in Eastern Europe was socialist. Life was difficult for people. We wanted to change this. Who doesn't want to be free? Who doesn't want to open to the word? And finally, I came here, where there is democracy. Everything is different, everybody is free. But now I know no government system is perfect, because people are not perfect.

My country, how you know, has old history. Over thousands of years Christianity has had an influence on all the aspects of life. It was generally believed that discipline, learning and respect were more important than free thinking, which is most important in the United States. Of course, the biggest difference between the two countries is language.

It's generally believed that the TV and the internet bring together all the nations in this country. We lift our roots, bring

them here and all share and practice our distinct cultures. Because of this I love United States, the country which United Nations and the same time allowed us to foster our culture. Do you think the way I do?

Violetta Zynski attends the Even Start Program in Pinellas County