

JOURNEYS IN LEARNING



A COLLECTION OF ESSAYS BY FLORIDA'S ADULT LEARNERS

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A Collection of Essays by Florida's Adult Learners

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Florida Literacy Coalition, Inc.

Established in 1985, the Florida Literacy Coalition (FLC) promotes, supports, and advocates for the effective delivery of quality adult and family literacy services in the state of Florida. As a statewide umbrella literacy organization and the host of Florida's Adult and Family Literacy Resource Center, FLC provides a range of services to support more than 250 adult education, literacy, and family literacy providers throughout Florida. Special emphasis is placed on assisting community-based literacy organizations with their training and program development needs.



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

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Preface

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

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

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My Experience in Adult Education

Becoming a Student Again

I was born in Bogotá, Colombia, 60 years ago, and I have studied almost all my life. For 20 years, I have been a professor of Philosophy and Theology, teaching in higher education institutions. Since 2023, I have lived in Miami because my mother, who is 93 years old, asked me to care for her.

My first experience in this city was discouraging because English is essential for communication and daily life. After a few months, I decided to watch TV in English, but my listening skills were poor, so I realized I needed to learn to speak English well. I had thought about it many times, but it was not easy to go back to school, enroll, and become a student again when I had spent my adult life as a professor.

I had many doubts: there would be younger students who spoke fluently, and the professors would be highly skilled. Perhaps I would even be told I was wasting my time. Nevertheless, once I made my decision, I enrolled at Miami Dade College. Becoming a student again has been a broad experience because it reminds me of when I first went to university and began my studies. I now believe that studying and teaching are lifelong processes, and no matter what your age, you can continue to learn—often developing your own study strategies through effort and persistence.

Once I started, I found the environment both diverse and fascinating. It was diverse because my classmates came from many countries and cultures, each with unique life experiences, yet we shared the same goal: to speak English fluently. It was fascinating because the professors are excellent, encouraging students to open their minds to new realities. Professors also have other objectives: students must understand grammatical structures to improve both listening and speaking skills.

My new life as a student is incredible. From Monday to Friday, I attend classes at Miami Dade College. Afterwards, I go to a public library, open my laptop, and access different applications,

websites, and platforms to practice listening and reading comprehension, or I listen to various podcasts. I believe this study technique will help me achieve my goal of speaking English fluently.

Returning to school was not easy due to the challenges mentioned above and others. However, if you have a dream or goal in life, it is possible to accomplish it. With effort, discipline, and dedication, you can achieve many things. Go back to school! Become a student again!

Cesar Almonacid learned the love for languages from his father; consequently, he can speak seven languages. He teaches philosophy and theology at a Colombian university. His English instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

My First Step Is to Improve My English

Before I came to the United States of America, I had an idea of how the educational system here worked. But when I came to live here, I saw that there were so many things I disregarded. I know when you have just come to a country that speaks a different language from your native language, one of the first things you have to do is go to school to learn the language of that country if you do not speak the language. One must do so to better integrate themselves into society. In my case, here is what I did.

So far it is one of the best experiences I have had, and I do not regret that decision that I made.

Adult education prepares you for academic and personal success. You will obtain the necessary skills required to pass many tests and continue your education. When you go to an adult school, there are several programs that provide you with an opportunity for learning whatever you want.

I am on my way, and I will never look back!

Sarabrune Augustin was born in Haiti. She is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is working to improve her skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of health science. In the future, she wants to become a registered nurse.

From Studying Alone to Studying Together

18 months. That is how long it took me to understand that I could not learn English by myself. After that, I decided to go to Clearview Adult Education Center (CAEC). Students from many different countries have the same problem — they don't know English well. This problem connects all of us, no matter our culture, religion, age, or background. Here, I have met many interesting people. Everyone has their own story — about coming to the United States, about the countries where they lived before, and about the challenges they faced in their first years here. We help each other, share places to visit, and spend time talking together. Without English, this wouldn't be possible.

Truly wonderful people work at CAEC. Since the first day, I have felt like a part of a family. Learning English is not easy for me because I have a technical way of thinking. However, the teachers use many different methods. Sometimes we learn through games; sometimes through jokes, videos, tables, and charts. The teachers also share advice from their own experience. This helps a lot. At CAEC, I do not only study the English language rules. I also learn about American culture, history, and traditions. During various holidays, this Education Center organizes events with contests and even sports games. The school helps students adapt to a new life without stress.

I am 37 years old, and I studied at school, college, and university in Belarus, but CAEC is special to me. I have been coming here with great pleasure. I moved to the United States three years ago. During the first half of that time, I studied the language on my own, and during the second half, I studied at CAEC, and I have seen real progress. My English is getting better, the language barrier is going away, and I feel much more confident in my daily life. I'm very thankful to everyone who works at CAEC. The only thing I regret is that I did not start studying English here earlier. It took me just 18 months. Better late than never!

Alex Bakhurynski is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Lessons Everywhere

I am in the Adult Education program because I want to continue my education and advance my knowledge level. I understood education is especially important for my future and for my development.

During my time in adult education, I learned many useful things. I improved my reading, writing, and math skills. It was the best advice that motivated me to continue my education through adult education. Even when I faced challenges like lack of time or responsibilities, I remembered this advice and stayed focused on my goals.

Life in my country is quite different from life in the United States in many ways, including lifestyle, opportunities, and daily activities. In my country, life is simpler and neighbors help each other.

Someone I admire is my mother. I admire her because she is strong, hardworking, and always puts her family first. She has faced many challenges in life, but she never gave up.

The American Dream means having the opportunity to build a better life through hard work, determination, and education. To me, it is not about becoming rich but about having stability, freedom, and hope for the future. This is the most valuable lesson I learned.

Juime Belony, who was born in Haiti, is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is working to improve his skills in English to later obtain certification in electrical engineering.

Taste and See: The Willingness to Be a Learning Adult

I didn't understand why I would freeze when speaking English or why I was so inefficient at reading and writing. It seemed like my brain would slow down or get foggy when I switched languages. That was until I realized the missing piece for my brain's gear was perfection. One Sunday, I was overwhelmed by the endless to-do list, unread and unanswered emails, unfinished reports,

and the dusty book on my nightstand. I suddenly remembered a lyric from a Mass song, inspired by Psalm 34: “Taste and See.”

As I reflected on this, I remembered words my husband always repeats at dinner to our kids: “If you never try it, how will you know if you like it?” How much may you lose if the risk is taken? Try it and then complain. In the end, it is better to do it than never try.

That afternoon, with this new perspective, I could finally see through the impostor syndrome that no longer served me. For so long, it had been telling stories that held me back, rejecting the curious part of me that brought me here in the first place. In that moment, I recognized myself and realized that this had prevented me from knocking on doors, as I just waited to feel ready.

I wondered how this adult learning identity is informing my journey. If I confess the breaking point of my paralysis, I was able to recognize the vulnerability in me, not as weakness, but as a path to courage. I tried to just take the lesson and move forward, close my eyes, and take that leap, despite the fear of facing imaginary walls of insecurity. I learned the hard way that trying to be perfect doesn't work in this adult learning stage. Life continues running; there's no pause to ask and wait.

Giving myself permission not to be perfect has been one of the most difficult tasks. At the same time, it is also the most empowering and liberating. This willingness has given me the strength to accept who I am and find my new identity in this language. As a result, I embrace my accent, my speed, my “good enough for now” progress, and can surrender in peace, knowing tomorrow is another day to continue the journey.

Recognizing the value of my own voice has fostered a sense of worthiness and conviction that my contribution matters. Rather than waiting for perfection, I now appreciate that everyone has something meaningful to share. Embracing adulthood means continuous learning and the courage to navigate real-world challenges. Ultimately, by accepting imperfections, I acknowledge my own uniqueness and capacity for growth. I am empowered to participate fully in the ongoing journey of discovery, created to taste and see how good the willingness is to be a learning adult.

Originally from Colombia, Martha Beltran is a student in Ms. Burke's class and a board member at the Adult Literacy League. As a literacy advocate and volunteer tutor, she is improving her English to become more confident.

My Journey Began Last Year

My experience in adult education is an experience that is different than what I expected in comparison to my educational experience as a child.

My encounter with adult education in the States is the first one I ever had trying to learn in a language that is not mine; it is not easy, especially for me. I try to do my best every day to see how I can improve my English, because I want to accomplish my goals.

I am 42 years old. I have been living in the United States of America for 9 months. My family gave me advice to attend school to learn English and, after that, to learn a career to earn money for my life. This is how my journey went; I started attending ESOL English classes in May 2025. When I started with English school, I was placed in level 3 with Mr. James; after a brief period, I moved to Miss Maggie. Weeks later I took the posttest, and I passed. After that I was placed in level 4 with Miss Ramos. I was feeling confident, and my English was improving as I went along on this journey.

Now I am studying with Ms. Johnson, who teaches level 5. This level is challenging, but I know I can also pass this level. I want to do my best to finish with ESOL and, after, do what I am supposed to do to have a better life.

I want to be an automotive mechanic, and eventually, I want to open my own garage. Additionally, I would like to open a garage in my country because I want to help my community. I know it will take time, but I will do my best to make it all happen in the future.

Sony Bruny is from Haiti. He is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is working every day to improve his skills in English to later obtain a certificate as an automotive technician.

A Rewarding Experience

It was a very lucky day! After moving to Florida about two years ago, last December, I met a Lebanese lady who advised me to join her at Clearview Adult Education Center. In fact, I needed to improve my English. On January 7, I took my first test in this school. I was quite confused because I couldn't speak English well, and then I asked myself, "How will I be able to talk with others?"

However, when I scored level three, I felt more comfortable and began learning with adult people who were kind and gentle. At school, I met students from different countries. During my first month, I tried to read and answer the teachers' questions. Since I have a rich vocabulary in French and because I have obtained a bachelor's degree in French literature, I was able to understand the learning process better and use my previous knowledge. I was making a great effort to develop my English skills. Two months later, I felt more confident.

Little by little I became encouraged to reach my goal—to speak English fluently. My teachers encouraged me to speak and express my opinions. They corrected my pronunciation and helped me to build sentences without mistakes. After a short time, I scored level five, then level six. I felt proud of myself. As a result of all that, I became happy because meeting adult people from everywhere contributes to enriching my culture. I learned about their habits, beliefs, and traditions.

However, the matter did not end there! I will never forget my nice teachers. They are professional; they use different strategies that help all students to understand. In addition, they make the lessons enjoyable with a variety of activities in the same class session. I realized that this experience was rewarding and delightful. Honestly, this school has become my favorite place, and this unique experience is etched in my memory forever!

Raja Dakik is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Keep Adult Education Open

My name is Vicky and today is a very special day for me because I want to share my experience in adult education. Adult education is a place where many young people and adults come to learn English and improve their lives. It is more than just a classroom; it is a space where teachers teach us respect, love, and how to support one another.

For me, adult education is also a place that demonstrates that with the right will and determination, anyone can learn to speak English. It welcomes people from different backgrounds who are willing to learn and grow. Our teacher is very skilled and experienced, and he truly cares about his students. He always encourages us, motivates us, and believes in our potential.

Because of adult education, I feel more confident in myself and my ability to communicate. It has helped me not only learn English but also believe that I can achieve my goals. I am grateful for this experience and for the support I receive every day.

Jean Vicky Dorce attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Not Giving Up

My name is Herns Etienne. I would like to share my experience with adult education.

Sometimes it is easy to learn and practice, but sometimes it is difficult also.

Sometimes, learning and practicing new things can be easy, but there are also moments when it is difficult. Adult education is especially challenging for me because I am learning a new language. There are times when I do not understand certain concepts, and it is hard for me to explain what I mean.

To make things easier, I stay positive and keep trying until I understand. Every day, I look for new methods and strategies that can help me learn and make my education more manageable.

Overall, this experience has taught me that success comes from never giving up. No matter how difficult things become, persistence is key to reaching my goals.

I am never giving up!

Herns Etienne, who was born in HAITI, is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is working to improve his skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of physical therapy.

Achieving Success - Removing Doubt

For me, success means becoming the person I know I can be, even when doubt shows up. I'm learning at Literacy for Adults in Brevard County, and some days the work feels really hard. Right now, I'm focused on improving my spelling, which takes patience and effort.

Sometimes I feel like quitting because the program is challenging. When that happens, I remind myself to slow down and try again. I listen to my teacher and use her advice to stay on track.

I've learned that setbacks don't mean failure; they are part of growing. Every small step I take, even when it is hard, brings me closer to the person I want to be. Success isn't about being perfect; it's about trying, learning, and never giving up. By removing doubt and focusing on each step, I'm building the person I want to become, one effort at a time.

Sherry Flowers is a learner at Literacy for Adults in Brevard. Her teacher is Kathleen Dyer. Sherry met her original goal of becoming comfortable with employment applications but continues to learn new skills, which brings her joy and a strong sense of pride.

I Am Ready!

It has been three years since I came to live in America. My husband and I talk a lot, and he is supportive and helps me to learn to live here. Now that I am eligible to apply, I told my husband I was ready to become a US citizen. So, I applied for

citizenship in the middle of August 2025. If you are married to an American citizen, you can apply for U.S. citizenship 90 days before your third year of permanent residency is complete, so this rule gave me the option to apply for American citizenship a little earlier.

Every day, I enjoy going to school to learn English at Clearview Adult Education Center. This school also offers a citizenship class, which gives me the opportunity to start learning about history and civics. Before I started studying in the citizenship class, I heard some people say that you can practice by yourself, memorize the answers to the questions, and then take the test to become a citizen, but that method was not for me.

Before I started the citizenship class, I did not know much about the naturalization test and the US government. I was worried about the test and didn't feel confident speaking and writing English. Sometimes you don't know how to remember the answers to the 100 questions. It was really difficult for me to remember American names because they are different from my language, which is Thai. I also had to pronounce them correctly. I practiced every day but still wasn't confident.

During the class, the teacher helps us and explains how the U.S. government system works. We learn about the three branches of government and how they work together to make the U.S. stronger. This program teaches us about important American history and how the United States gained independence. We are learning each topic clearly, step by step. We also practice speaking, reading, and writing English to get ready for the interview.

I have learned many important things at the Clearview Adult Education Center, and the citizenship program has taught me a lot. It has helped me understand how the U.S. system works and how important it is to be a good citizen. I feel proud to know this; I am confident and ready to take my next step forward to becoming an American citizen.

In conclusion, I am excited and waiting for my interview day. I promise to be a good American citizen. Thank you to my teachers and this school for opening the citizenship program, which gave me the knowledge and understanding that I need. I am going to tell people who want to learn that they should come to

this school.

Waraporn Gable is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Online Learning vs. Classroom Learning

Online learning and classroom learning are two primary methods of education, each offering distinct advantages and challenges. The effectiveness of each approach often depends on individual needs, learning styles, and the specific requirements of the course. While both methods can be successful when used right, they provide very different learning experiences.

Online learning offers flexibility and accessibility, allowing students to learn at their own pace and from any location with Wi-Fi. This can be especially helpful for students who prefer self-directed learning. Digital tools such as interactive simulations, videos, and online libraries can enhance understanding and keep learners engaged. However, these benefits may not work well for everyone.

Personally, I prefer classroom learning over online learning. Face-to-face interaction helps me understand the material more clearly, and being in a physical classroom provides more structured instructional time. I also find it easier to work on paper than on a computer. Writing notes by hand helps many people remember information better, while using a computer can be difficult for individuals who do not learn as easily in digital environments. In addition, classroom learning offers stronger opportunities for interaction with teachers and classmates, which can make learning more meaningful and enjoyable.

In addition, I started the GED program at Tallahassee State University in the fall of 2025. While a large amount of work is done on the computer, I personally enjoy our group reading and the math tutoring sessions. The group reading is my favorite; I get to read aloud. My teacher said the more I read, the better I will get. I have noticed that my reading has improved quite a bit. During our group reading sessions, we get to underline words we don't know or can pronounce by looking up the word on the computer. Peers that are more fluent in reading always help without

being judgmental. I prefer the classroom any day over online.

In conclusion, even though online learning provides flexibility and helpful digital tools, classroom learning is still the method I would choose, because it offers clearer communication, stronger support, and a more effective learning environment for many students.

My name is Michael C. Griffin. I'm a first-year GED student at Tallahassee State College, Tallahassee, Florida. Ms. Brenda G. Johnson is my GED instructor.

My Educational Journey

The education of my life did not begin with books but with determination and motivation. Choosing to continue my studies as an adult taught me important values such as discipline, patience, hope, and growth. With this new path, learning was no longer an obligation; it became the purpose—one I had previously denied myself.

Through education, I discovered both my voice and my purpose. Each challenge I faced helped to refine my character, and every success served as a reminder that it is never too late to learn. This journey not only strengthened my mind but also my spirit, proving that true learning has the power to transform the whole person.

Porlemsley Henrisonor lived in Haiti with his family. He is currently attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He attends school to improve his skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of health science.

The Second Time Around is Much Better

The first time I considered myself an adult learner was in my mid-twenties. Now, several years later, I find myself back in school with a new purpose: to improve my English and pursue my goal of becoming an entrepreneur. Currently, I am balancing my responsibilities as a part-time student with my job.

Reflecting on my earlier experience, the transition back to the classroom did not feel challenging. In fact, it reminded me of being in a high school environment. However, this return to education feels very different. I now have a clear sense of purpose and specific educational goals that are guiding me. These goals are helping me become more productive in my life skills. Overall, this second experience as an adult learner is proving to be much more rewarding than the first.

Josiane Jean, born in Haiti, is attending the Pre-College ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. Josiane is working to improve her skills and obtain certification in business management.

Patient Practice: How I Learned to Speak and Believe

My name is Lutch Douna Jeanjacques. I am from Haiti. I came to the USA with my family. I started this English class because I need to know more english and I want to get my driver's license, get a job, and go to college. When I'm at home, I babysit my little cousin, cook, and practice with Burlington English. I also like to talk to my family and friends in Haiti. I work on Wednesdays with my aunt in a house-cleaning job, and in the summer, I work with my aunt and my cousin in jobs like janitor work and babysitting.

English is very important for me because when I can speak English, I will be able to help my mom. At first, I couldn't pronounce the words properly. Now, I feel really comfortable in my pronunciation, and when the teacher speaks in class, I can understand everything he says! I like my class because I can talk with other people and make friends. I like my classmates because they are so friendly and caring for each other. My teacher helps me to be able to achieve my goals. I feel proud when I talk, since with experience, I have made good progress.

My goal is to go to college to study nursing and to serve in the military. For me, learning English is like a dream! My advice to anyone who is learning English is to give it time and have patience. Read and try to talk with other people. If you want something, you need to work hard for it. This class helped me learn that I can do it!

Lutch Douna Jeanjacques is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her instructor is Cary Hadley.

I Truly Improved My English

I started the English course in January 2025. On the first day, the teacher greeted us warmly. I sat next to my father, and we waited while the teacher took attendance. Then, the teacher explained English sounds and pronunciation. At the beginning, I understood the greetings and some words, and I felt confident because I could understand most of what he explained.

As the weeks passed, the teacher organized different activities to help us practice English, such as writing sentences and speaking in class. His class was fun and interesting. In the middle of the semester, heavy rain in Key West flooded the classroom. Because of the storm, we were moved to another location, and there was no internet. During that time, we learned how to make flashcards. After a few weeks, the classrooms were repaired, and we returned to class. At the end of the semester, all the students brought food from their home countries, and we shared it together.

In June, I registered for the summer course. I had a different teacher. During this course, I discovered new places, like the library, because the teacher sent us to get library cards. I had to practice my English when asking for the library card, which was difficult but a good experience. I also learned about a new resource called Mango Languages to practice English. The teacher was very strict, and everything had to be done exactly as she said for our own good. As the days passed, more students joined the class. Every day, the teacher shared new resources to help us learn English. I successfully finished the summer course.

When the new semester started in August of 2025, my mother enrolled in the same class as my father and me. After completing 72 hours of classes, I took the exam and moved from high beginner level to advanced. During this semester, I got to know my classmates better, and we practiced speaking together. Some students were afraid to speak, and at first, I felt the same way. However, I knew that speaking was necessary to improve my English. The teacher always encouraged me to study more,

even though some situations made learning difficult. I feel that I learned a lot this semester and started to understand people better when they spoke to me. We also gave many presentations, and the teacher helped us prepare for them. Near the end of the semester, I retook the exam, but I did not score high enough to exit the program yet. Even so, I believe I have learned and grown a lot. I feel that I truly improved my English.

Vanxel Leiva attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Creating a New Personal Reality

Moving from the old self to the new self requires a kind of neurological, biological, and emotional “death,” an uncomfortable process of overcoming in order to become. But choosing to do this work, pushing past the limits of the known, and surrendering to the unknown is where transformation begins.

Even though I am near my seventy-fourth birthday and have almost 5 decades of medical, clinical, and scientific experience that include a master’s degree in gastroenterology dedicated to hepatology and psychoneuroimmunendocrinology, a doctorate in medical sciences in Venezuela, and a certification as an integrative health coach in New York 6 years ago, I have dedicated my work and research to health longevity, with strategies to retard aging, treating inflammation or “inflammaging,” changing my daily habits and improving my self-confidence, and supporting all my back steps in science. Besides improving my diet to an anti-inflammatory style, I keep exercising at least three times a week (cardiovascular and resistance), trying to better manage my stress to avoid “burnout,” taking time to relax, and having a recreation space with nature.

Nowadays my English is not as fluent as needed, and that limits the opportunities I could have living in the United States. In the knowledge that studying to improve other languages improves the way I communicate my personal and professional experience, which could benefit people of languages other than Spanish. I believe I will continue; I believe I can do it. I am quite sure that is a challenge, but it is the best way to approach my life’s purpose at this moment of my life.

The first goal when you start living in a new country, the first objective, is to learn and dominate the language, because communicating in an effective manner is too important. I am always thankful to my English teachers, Ms. Lopez and Ms. Johnson; both have been my best experiences as an English learner. They are friendly and dedicated to the students. I love and enjoy their classes every day. Thank God it has been a privilege to study at Atlantic Technical College's Ashe Campus; all the staff have been truly kind and professional.

Finally, I would like to encourage you to never give up on becoming yourself. God has a plan for everyone. Live, love, enjoy, and thank you for living. To live is to be happy with what you are passionate about, be it a little or a lot.

Maribel Lizarzabal, born in Venezuela, is attending ESOL Level 6 with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. Working to improve her English skills.

Hard Work Gives Results

Hello, my name is Daniel. I'm from Uruguay. I have lived in the U.S. for two years.

Are you afraid to speak English? Do you need to improve your English? Do you think you're alone in that challenge? Let me tell you about my experience in adult education.

On the first day of school, you will understand very little. Don't be discouraged! The clash of languages is inevitable. But, as you come to class and you are consistent, little by little you will see you begin to understand more. But if you can't speak, don't worry! Then soon you will understand more, and you will dare to say short sentences that were impossible before.

Your colleagues will encourage you to make efforts, and you will be able to communicate with people who do not speak your language.

In conclusion, be consistent, do not stop trying, and celebrate your small achievements. Your hard work will give results, and you will be able to communicate fluently in this country!

Daniel Machado is an intermediate level ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. He inspires his classmates, teachers, and community. He brings joy and laughter to all and is consistent with his attendance and eagerness to learn English and is succeeding. His teacher is Angela Faiola.

Four Months, One Dream: Ana Maria’s Path to English Confidence

My name is Ana Maria. I’m from Santiago de Chile. I have been living in the USA for four months with my family. I started this class because it is important for me to learn English. I’m at home with my children, and I’m trying to help them with their homework. At home I usually practice English with different apps. I like reading books, and I love cooking.

The first few weeks were stressful; it was difficult to communicate and for people to understand me.

Learning English is important to me because English is the most widely spoken language in the world. At first, it was hard for me to speak with native English speakers because I was embarrassed. I felt comfortable when people spoke to me slowly. My classmates helped me all the time. For example, they helped me during breaks between classes. This class has helped me feel better and safer.

My teacher helps me all the time. His feedback is important to me. I feel proud when I can speak! My next goal is to speak more English and be able to read a book in English. My advice for learning English is “practice, practice, and more practice.” Don’t be afraid; you can do it!”

Ana Maria Margas is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her instructor is Cary Hadley.

The Best Choice

For me, this was the best choice I have made in 2025. I say this because this experience helped me meet new people and become more confident in myself. It was not only about learning English; it also helped me take risks in real life and believe in myself more.

Adult education did more than teach me how to speak English. It helped me discover opportunities and gave me the freedom to think about what I want to become after I graduate. It also taught me that I can learn anything I set my mind to. Every day, I work on improving myself. I make more effort to speak, not to be afraid of making mistakes, and to think faster when I speak English.

My first day of school was not easy. I struggled to adapt, and at one point, I told myself that I would not come back. But while I was on my way home, I thought about why I came—to learn and improve my life. I decided to keep going, to listen, and to learn, no matter how difficult it felt.

For me, Ms. Josephson is not only a teacher. She is a counselor and a mother figure to us. She supports us in everything we do and is always focused on helping us grow. She brings new lessons every day and encourages us to speak. If it were not for her, I might still be quiet in class. Thanks to her advice and support, I found my voice. That is why I truly believe this was the best choice I have made in 2025.

Dieuly Noel attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Sincere Thank You at the End of 2025

As we approach the end of 2025, I wish to take a moment to express my deepest gratitude to each and every one of you.

Thank you for the friendship, the camaraderie, the courtesies, and the immense patience you gave me during the months we have shared in the classroom. These shared moments have been invaluable, and I take with me a great lesson and an affectionate memory of everyone.

At the same time, I wholeheartedly ask for your forgiveness if I have ever offended, inconvenienced, or caused any harm to any one of you.

Regarding favors, if I did anything for you, please consider it a gift, and you owe me absolutely nothing. If anyone has caused

me any kind of harm this year, I forgive them with all my heart. Carrying these emotional burdens into the new year adds nothing positive. It is better to move forward with a free spirit.

To those who offered me help or support in any way, I reiterate my sincerest thanks. I will never forget it; you are and always will be a new family to me.

With great appreciation, I wish you all success and happiness in the new year of 2026.

Santiago Nunez is from the Dominican Republic and is now studying English at the Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

Steps Toward a Better Future: My Adult Education Story

My name is Yasmin Ortiz. I'm from Honduras, and I have lived in the U.S.A. for 2 years. I started this English class because I want to speak English very well and talk with my friends and coworkers. I also want to have more opportunities here and in my country. At home I usually cook and learn English in the afternoons. On the weekends, I have to clean the apartment. I work in a factory on weekdays.

Learning English is important to me so that I can have better jobs here or in my country, and I can talk with other people at my work or when I want to buy food. When I first started English classes, it was hard for me because I was thinking that maybe my classmates spoke more English than me or maybe I wouldn't understand. When my classmates or teacher helps me, I feel good. When I have doubts about the lesson or when I don't understand something, my teacher tries to explain better. He is a nice teacher.

I feel proud when I understand something difficult and when I speak and read well. My next goal is to speak and write English much better. My advice for learning English is to try to learn new things every day and practice every day to speak or write. The first days are the most difficult, but you can do it. This class has helped me to have more confidence when I have to speak, and

every day I want to learn new things.

Yasmin Ortiz is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her instructor is Cary Hadley.

Evening Classes, Lasting Confidence: Prapapan's Path to English

My name is Prapapan Pearcy. I am from Thailand. I have lived in the U.S.A. for 1 year. I started this English class (ESOL) for many reasons: to boost my career prospects, improve travel experiences, understand English media (YouTube music videos, movies), enhance my communication skills, and gain access to more information. I want to learn grammar and vocabulary so I can better express myself. I really enjoy connecting with the diverse cultures of the students in my class.

At home I usually cook, clean, and care for my family. I study English on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 5:30 to 8:30 pm every week.

Learning English is important to me because the English language allows me to communicate with and understand everyone. That's my purpose and goal! I must achieve it. At first, it was hard for me. I didn't understand anything about the English language, such as speaking, reading, writing, vocabulary, sentences, and grammar. It was all very difficult for me. My classmates helped me to feel comfortable reading, having conversations, listening, and speaking because we became friends. I'm happy when in class because everyone tries learning the English language. They have the same problems and goals as I have.

My teacher helped me read, listen, and practice conversations by explaining things and reviewing my homework. This made learning easier and boosted my confidence. I am grateful for his help with my English. My goal is to successfully complete my English language learning objectives. I would like to add more days of classes! This class has helped me to feel greatly excited, and I can't wait to go to class every time.

Prapapan Pearcy is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her instructor is Cary Hadley.

New Words, New Connections: My Story in Adult Education

My name is Carmen Perez. I'm from Peru. I have lived in the United States for five years. I started this English class because my husband is a citizen and his family too, so I want to improve my English. At home I usually cook, clean my house, and watch TV with my husband. I work with a company that operates a school cafeteria. Learning English is important to me because it's something I do for myself, and learning a new language is exciting for me.

At first, it was hard for me to speak with others and have good conversations. Later, though, people began to understand me, and I found nice people around me. My classmates helped me in many ways. They accepted my mistakes, and we helped each other. My teacher helped me to speak and read, and he always had a good ability to teach us. I felt proud when I could speak without fear; however, I know I need to learn more.

My next goal is to speak fluently in English and have longer conversations. My advice for learning English is to watch movies or videos with English subtitles. Change your devices' language settings to English. Talk to yourself. You can even talk in your mirror! This class has helped me feel like a part of a team. Our class is full of energy and has a good attitude. It's a positive class, and we all have the same idea: to speak, read, and write in English and to improve ourselves.

Carmen Perez is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her instructor is Cary Hadley.

My Personal Journey in Adult Education

My journey in adult education was a mix of nervousness, emotion, and fear of the English language. When I started studying English here, I felt very insecure because I was afraid to speak and make many errors. My main reason for joining adult education was because I am working on the validation of my foreign commercial pilot license to a U.S. commercial pilot license. For that, I need to master English. This program has given me hope, determination, support, and gratitude for the opportunity to learn.

One of the most difficult moments for me was trying to understand and speak well with people in English. Many times, I wanted to talk, but I was blocked because I could not find the appropriate vocabulary to express myself. For example, sometimes at the airport or in class, I would try to explain something but feel frustrated because I spoke with errors and thought nobody could understand me well. But even with those difficult moments, I continued studying and practicing because I wanted to improve and not give up.

Then something changed. One day, I realized that I was not doing as badly as I had thought. I started to understand much better, and I could follow conversations in English. I still have difficulties and make mistakes, but I see my progress, and that gives me motivation to continue. My teacher, Professor Whu, has been a great inspiration for me. Her ability to communicate with students and her teaching methods make the class interesting and motivate us to work harder. She believes in us, and that gives me the strength to keep going.

In conclusion, this experience in adult education has transformed my life and given me hope and confidence. As I mentioned in the introduction, I started with fear and insecurity, but now I feel confident, more positive, and determined to continue learning English. This journey has shown me that with discipline, support, and a good teacher, we can overcome obstacles and make our dreams come true. I am very grateful for this opportunity, and I will continue giving my best every day.

Oscar Rabeiro Bonome is a Cuban national holding French citizenship. He is an entrepreneur and commercial pilot who likes challenges. His English instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

Watching a Play at Artis—Naples

My advanced ESL class went to Artis—Naples to see a play. I was very excited because it was my first time going to a theater in the United States. The building was beautiful, and the stage looked amazing. I felt nervous at first, but I was ready to enjoy the performance.

During the play, I learned a lot about American culture and

how actors express emotions with their voices, faces, and movements. I also practiced my English by listening carefully to the dialogue and trying to understand the story. Some parts were difficult, especially when the actors spoke quickly, but I could understand the main ideas. I paid attention to the way they used humor and emotion, and I noticed how the characters changed during the play. I took notes on my favorite scenes, and after the show, I shared my thoughts and questions with my classmates. Talking about the play helped me use new English words and improve my speaking skills. I felt proud because I was able to understand much more than I expected, and I realized that watching plays is a fun way to practice English.

I also enjoyed being with my classmates outside the classroom. We talked about the play, shared our opinions, and helped each other understand difficult words. This experience taught me that learning English can be fun and exciting when I practice with others.

Overall, the trip to Artis—Naples was unforgettable. It helped me improve my listening skills, practice my English, and experience a new part of American culture. I hope to attend more plays and cultural events in the future because they help me grow as a student and as a person.

Robenson Raphael is originally from Haiti. He is a student in the Lorenzo Walker Technical College English program. His teacher is Ms. Lisa Wroble.

My Journey at MDC

My first experience at Miami-Dade College began one morning in May 2024, when I decided to bring my niece, Mile, to learn about the ESOL program. She had only been in the United States for a few months, and I told her that I, too, had to study English. Upon arriving at the office and listening to the explanation about the program, my niece and I took a test, registered, and were placed in ESOL 2 with Professor Rugel. I could hardly believe it; Mile and I were classmates! Analyzing the situation, I thought, “Well, what should I tell my boss?” Thankfully, it was not a problem since I was able to change my schedule to 11:00 AM to 8:00 pm.

The first day of class, I felt nervous when I heard the professor speak in English and say, “We do not speak Spanish here.” I thought to myself, “This is serious.” In the past, I had taken English courses and used what I had learned in high school—simply basic words. As the days went by, I bonded with my classmates, which made the class enjoyable, and everything went smoothly.

I had a group of five people with whom I communicated with the most. The day of the test we told each other that we needed to move on to Level 3, and so it happened. A new challenge began, and we found ourselves with Professor Lejardi, whose teaching style was different but highly effective. His clear lessons, with plenty of practice, helped us reach Level 4.

In this level, we met Professor Scherer, who had his own methodology and a genuine interest in teaching us. It was a whole distinct experience, very professional, full of energy, and packed with valuable advice. My group moved up to Level 5, while I remained in Level 4, but we continued to stay in touch.

Eventually, I reached Level 5. I finally found myself in Professor Whu’s class. I saw fresh faces, as well as some familiar ones sharing the same interest in learning and moving forward because nothing is impossible. I love Professor Whu’s class because she is always active, engages us with different activities, and provides informative lessons. She has answers for everything, and her intelligence and great memory make an impression. When she says, “See you tomorrow,” it means a lot to me because it creates a commitment to return the next day.

I have learned more than I could have ever imagined. This is a personal achievement. At 52 years old, I can confidently say that it is never too late to learn. Although I know I still have much to learn, I am on the right track. I want to continue being the best example for my daughter and now for my grandson as well.

Adriana Romero has been a student in Professor Carmen Whu’s ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus. She wants to improve her English to have better opportunities in her future.

Work, Family, and Fluency: My Life as an Adult Learner

My name is Karina Ross, and I am from Venezuela. I have lived in the U.S.A. for two years. I started this English class to be able to communicate more easily in my new country, the USA. It will also prepare me for U.S. citizenship. At home I usually relax with my family and my cats. I am a merchandise coordinator for a large franchise, and I also own a coffee company.

Learning English is important to me because I must be able to communicate with my family, friends, and work companions. I want to become an American citizen, and English is also required. I also want to communicate with people in my day-to-day life. At first, it was hard for me to get used to the beach in cold weather, as I am used to warm weather in Venezuela! It also took time to get used to the taste of American food, because I was used to South American food. Here, though in the USA, there are many options!

I feel comfortable when I have conversations with Spanish-speaking people and when Americans understand me. In two years, I have learned to speak a little English. My classmates helped me by encouraging me with their kind words and can-do spirit. My teacher is very nice and very intelligent, and he helps me to understand the English language by having confidence in me. I feel proud when I speak English to Americans and they understand me and reply in English that I can understand!

My next goal is to memorize many more words in English and become more secure and fluent in the English language. My advice for learning English is that it is necessary to listen and read and write more words in English and speak more English day by day without being afraid of making grammatical errors. It helps me to watch YouTube news and listen to music in English. It is also important to listen to different accents when Americans speak. This class has helped me to feel very comfortable with the English language. The dynamics of the classes helped me to feel that I can create a habit of learning!

Karina Ross is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her instructor is Cary Hadley.

My Experience in Adult Education

Hi, my name is Erineide Silva. I moved to Florida on April 14, 2020, but before that I lived in Connecticut for 15 years. All this time living here in the United States, I still don't know how to speak English very well, but in 2025 a key turned in my life—a desire, a dream, to speak English. Then a paper arrived in my mailbox talking about the Adult Community Education Program.

Soon I understood that it was my time to write in the program to start studying English. Now look at me today. I'm here writing about my experience. This was the best choice I made in 2025. I faced my fear and insecurities to achieve this dream.

Today I feel more confident because the teachers of this program are human people who are truly here to teach us with a lot of patience and love. I am very grateful for this program. Thank you first to God that today I am an American citizen.

The school helped me a lot because I am very ashamed of speaking, and when I came to school, it was a turning point. I'm still ashamed to speak, but I'm breaking that fear by faith thanks to this wonderful program.

Erineide Silva is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

Words, Wheels, and Wishes: An Adult Learner's Story

My name is Onanong Una, and I am from Thailand. I have lived in the United States for 1 year and 6 months. I started this English class because I want to be able to read, write, and communicate well.

At home, I usually clean and cook and watch TV. I'm a housewife now, but I want to work in the future. Learning English is important to me because I want to be able to speak and understand English well; I want a driver license. It's still hard for me now, but I need to do it.

I felt comfortable when I made a mistake, and the teacher

was kind. My classmates helped me by answering questions I don't know the answer to. My teacher taught me how to read and write, and he helped me with everything I couldn't do. My teacher is kind and excellent.

I feel proud when I can communicate more effectively. My next goal is to study more and pass the driving test. My advice for learning English is to practice reading and pronunciation every day. I feel like I can read and understand much better now. Thank you, my teacher.

Onanong Una is an ESOL student at Santa Rosa Adult School in Milton, FL. Her instructor is Cary Hadley.

A Turning Point In My Life

The Day My Life Changed Its Course

Life is full of moments that force us to make difficult decisions, situations that become true turning points and mark a before and after in our journey. In my case, that moment came when my family and I were forced to leave México to seek safety and new opportunities in the United States. What initially seemed like a leap filled with fear and uncertainty, transformed into an experience of learning, of resilience, and of personal growth that forever changed the way I see life.

In 2019, my life changed radically when I decided to move here with my husband and two children. This decision was marked by an event that transformed our reality: in 2018, my husband was the victim of an armed robbery in Guadalajara. Criminals grabbed my son, held a gun to his head, and stole his car and all his belongings. This event filled us with fear and led us to understand that our city wasn't a safe place to live. Dreadfully saddened to be leaving our family and our country behind, we applied for a work visa and started a new life in Tampa.

Settled with my family in Tampa, I never imagined the challenges we would face. Loneliness, cultural changes, and anxiety, which then intensified with the pandemic. This prevented us from traveling to reunite with our loved ones. In 2023, my daughter suffered depression, which represented a new family crisis. On a personal level, leaving my job in Mexico—where I had worked for more than twenty years as the head of IT at a high school—was a profound change. At the same time, I had resumed a postponed dream: pursuing a master's degree in systemic family therapy. However, upon arriving in the United States, I realized that my knowledge and experience would not be sufficient without English fluency.

The true turning point in my life has been recognizing that, despite the difficulties faced, each member of my family has found the means to adapt and move forward. This process has allowed us to strengthen communication, develop resilience in the face of adversity, and calmly accept all that is beyond our

control. We are working on our life plan, maintaining compassion for ourselves and others, and valuing what is essential: cohesion and mutual support within the family. Along the way, our friends have become a significant support network, with whom we share experiences, provide mutual support, and celebrate life.

Today, I understand that, although the decision to emigrate was born out of fear, it was also an opportunity for growth. What seemed like a loss became a source of strength and learning. This change taught us to value life from a different perspective and to face the future with hope and determination.

Claudia Aguirre is an Adult Ed ESOL Intermediate level student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

Starting a New Life

I have always heard people talk about the famous “comfort zone,” that invisible yet powerful place that, they say, we must leave if we genuinely want to achieve our goals. They spoke of it as if it were just a simple barrier that, once broken, would allow us to reach everything we dream of. However, I realized that it is not just about taking one step outside of it but about learning to live with uncertainty, fear, and the challenges that arise in unfamiliar territory. But the question is, is it worth leaving our comfort zone?

If I had to describe a turning point in my life, I would say it was the day I emigrated to a new country—the day I started a new life. Leaving my home for a completely unknown place was not easy, but the truly hard part was saying goodbye to everything I had: my family, my friends, my culture, and even my way of life, everything that made my country feel like home. At that moment, I could not yet understand how my life would change. Then I realized it was time to grow up.

Those changes brought many emotions that I could hardly manage. Sometimes they were joyful because I discovered what I was capable of achieving, and other times they were difficult because the fear of the unknown can be overwhelming. I understood that emigration is not just a physical journey; it is a

journey of the heart and mind. So, I decided to start appreciating my small victories and building the life I wanted to remember. I met new friends who I now call family, tried new foods that, even though they were different, somehow reminded me of my mother's cooking every afternoon, and visited places that gradually began to feel like home. Little by little, I began to enjoy every version of my new life.

I discovered that our dreams are not simply waiting on the other side for us to cross the line but are instead built with every step we take beyond what we know. We like to believe that a single act of courage can change everything, yet the truth is that growth is born from the quiet choices we make each day to keep moving forward, to keep becoming. Emigration may be difficult, but it is also an opportunity to reinvent yourself and start again. Today, looking back, I see that moment as the beginning of a new chapter, one in which I learned to believe in myself and realized that it is worth starting over.

Chabeli Benitez is a Cuban chemical engineer who has worked in oil refining. She moved to the US looking for self-improvement and new horizons, hoping to work in her field in the future. She is in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 at MDC-Kendall.

A Turning Point in My Life

Life is like a journey full of roads, choices, and turns you do not always expect. Some-times everything goes smoothly, but other times the road gets rough and full of doubts. For me, the biggest change—the one that really marked my life—was the day I decided to leave my country and start a new life in the United States. That moment divided my life in two: before and after.

Before that, I lived surrounded by my family, my friends, and everything that made me feel at home. My world was simple but full of love and traditions that gave me comfort. Still, deep down, I always felt that I wanted something more. Dreams cannot live locked up, and mine was to grow, have opportunities, and build a better future.

Leaving was not easy. The hardest part was not packing my suitcase, but realizing I was leaving behind the people I love the most. When the plane took off, I looked out the window and saw the lights of my city getting smaller and smaller. In that moment,

I felt an emptiness, like part of me was staying there. I only had one suitcase, but inside it I carried my fears, my dreams, and a promise to myself: not to give up, no matter how hard it got.

The first months here were tough. I did not understand the language well, I felt lonely, and everything was new. There were days when I wanted to go back, but something inside me kept saying that I had to keep going. Slowly, I started to understand more, meet new people, and realize that I could actually do it. Every challenge taught me something, and every tear made me stronger. I learned that starting over does not mean losing everything—it means giving yourself the chance to grow and find out who you really are.

Now, when I think about everything I have been through, I do not feel sad; I feel proud. Leaving my country was not running away; it was taking a brave step toward my dreams. I learned a new language, made new friends, and I am building a life that I once only imagined. Maybe my suitcase was small, but it was full of hope, and that was enough. Now I know that new beginnings can be scary, but they can also be beautiful—because when you dare to change, you give yourself the chance to be reborn.

Sandra Benitez Carballo is a student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Perez Lapeira.

The Illusion of Freedom

I started smoking when I was eight years old. Back then, it seemed harmless and even attractive. I made “cigarettes” out of crispy breadsticks and mint toothpaste. They looked surprisingly realistic, and to me it felt like a playful little game. I still remember sitting by the open window in my apartment on the ninth floor, pretending to smoke. I thought copying what my parents and my neighbors, who were doctors, did was cool, so grown-up.

When I was a teenager, I tried real cigarettes along with alcohol. It happened during a summer camp vacation in sunny Crimea. The outcome was awful: first I became drunk and then I got sick. Even the next day, I still felt the aftereffects of my “baptism by fire.”

By the time I was twenty-two, my days began and ended with cigarettes. I had become addicted to nicotine. Even though I already knew about the dangers of smoking, it did not stop me. How could it? The answer is painfully simple: I felt so lost after my boyfriend left me that I didn't care about living. It sounds foolish, but it is true. For those lonely seven years, cigarettes felt like my only friends.

As I grew older, I started thinking about having children, and that became a turning point for me. I knew that women who smoke during pregnancy risk having unhealthy babies. The thought terrified me, and I considered it taboo. I promised myself that I would quit smoking once I found a potential father for my future children. That promise became a guiding star, giving me strong personal motivation.

Then came the hardest part. Quitting smoking was incredibly difficult. I tried to quit twice. The first time, I failed. I had no idea how powerful this addiction could be. I tried to cut down on the number of cigarettes each day, but it did not help. On top of that, all my colleagues were smokers as well. It certainly didn't make things easier. A handsome cowboy who had once invited me to the marvelous Marlboro country and promised me freedom, in reality, stole it from me.

Despite all obstacles, step by step, I overcame this “wolf in sheep's clothing” and finally emerged from that dark, suffocating tunnel. Today, I am proud of myself, and I want to help save the seven million lives that are lost to tobacco every year.

Irina Bilyayeva, who was born in Ukraine, is attending the ESOL class with Ms N.Chase at Jacksonville Public Library.

A Turning Point in My Life

A major turning point in my life occurred in 2018, when I lost my mother in a tragic car accident. I was only a teenager, an only child, and I had lived with my mother and grandmother my entire life. When she passed, I felt like my world ended. I had just turned 21, and instead of feeling excited about adulthood, I felt completely lost. That is the stage in life where you need your parents the most — for guidance, support, and reassurance — and I

only had one. Losing her left a hole that nothing could fill.

My support system was very small. It was mainly my grandmother and my faith in God that kept me going. I learned quickly that when tragedy strikes, many people you expect to be there disappear after the first few months. That realization opened my eyes. I was grieving, stuck between jobs, trying to figure out school, and thinking about starting a career, but I felt helpless and unsure of my path. I didn't know who to lean on besides God and my grandmother, and that loneliness shaped me.

Fast forward seven years later, another difficult chapter began when the person responsible for my mother's death was finally found. Seeing the person who took my mother's life was something I never imagined I would experience. I was now facing a court case and trial—something completely unfamiliar and emotionally exhausting. At the same time, I was enrolled in nursing assistant school, determined to maintain good grades and protect my peace of mind while reliving one of the most painful experiences of my life. Balancing grief, responsibility, and ambition tested my strength in ways I never expected.

Despite everything, I accomplished my goals. I pushed forward, completed my schooling, and continued building a future for myself. However, the absence of my mother is still felt every single day. She will never see me walk across the stage to receive my diploma. She won't be there on my wedding day or to meet my first child. These moments that should be joyful will always carry a piece of sadness.

Losing my mother changed my life forever. It taught me resilience, faith, and independence. Though the journey has been painful, it shaped me into a stronger person who continues to push forward—for myself and for her.

My name is ShaQuria Bradley, and I am a determined and resilient young Black woman focused on building a successful future for myself. I am currently pursuing a career in healthcare, working toward my goals despite life's challenges. I am an only child raised by my mother and grandmother, and my experiences have shaped me into someone who values faith, perseverance, and personal growth. Every step I take is motivated by the desire to create a life of stability, purpose, and pride.

From One Chapter to Another

My name is Judelande Brutus. I was born in Gonaives, Haiti. When I came to the United States of America, at the age of 18 years, I attended and graduated from a local high school. After finishing high school, I was confused about my next steps. I had a lot of ambitions, but I did not know where to start. I was unsure what direction to go in. I decided to enroll in ESOL classes, figuring that would give me time to think clearly on my future goals.

At this moment, I am a student at Atlantic Technical College & Technical High School. I am enrolled in an ESOL Level 5 Intermediate class. With the help of my teacher, I am working to improve my English. My plans are to complete LPN training and eventually go to the university to become a medical lawyer. Being here, I feel closer to my dreams.

After receiving my degree as a licensed practical nurse, I am praying that I will make enough money to pay for my education to become a lawyer. Hopefully, I will be fortunate enough to receive some financial assistance.

When I lived in Haiti, life was exceedingly difficult. You need a lot of money just to survive; if you had relatives who lived in other countries with better opportunities, your life could be easier.

My ultimate dream is to buy a lovely home, travel the world, and experience life.

Then, I can have my own family.

Judelande Brutus, born in Haiti and currently attending ESOL Intermediate class at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus with Ms. F. Johnson. She is aspiring to become a licensed nurse practitioner.

A Turning Point in My Life

A turning point in my life was when my mom passed in 1983. My mom was not only my mom; she was my best friend. She would help me with things like cooking my dinner. When I would get off from work, she would have done my laundry. And

sometimes she would go and buy me something for work. Before she passed away, she told me to stay saved. I miss the encouraging words she would give me. We used to fish together, and we worked in the fields together when I was young. We would go out to eat. She liked wrestling, so we would go to wrestling matches. She loved “Gunsmoke” and could watch it for hours. Losing her was a turning point in my life.

Johnnie Mae Caddell has been studying with the Literacy Alliance towards obtaining her GED in her seventh decade.

A Turning Point Made Me Better

I asked my classmates what the meaning of that phrase for them is. They said what they wrote was an important success in their life, like something that changed their life. For me that phrase is a very important reality in my life because it made me think differently about life.

Something happened in my life that changed me to be a better person. One of the most important things in my life was when my dad almost died because he was very sick, and that’s why he had heart surgery. When he was young, he felt that something was not right with his body, but he didn’t know it yet. Since that day he has been very sick. About 10 years ago he got so sick to the point he almost died. I saw him and my heart broke... my daddy was dying and I couldn’t do anything. Those moments left me thinking about how to help my family, because our economy was falling because of the price of medicines. I started to work when I was a teenager to help my family.

In the hospital in my town there was no technology needed to operate on my dad, and they told him that he could die. He kept fighting; he wanted to recover his health for us, his family. Several months passed and he was still sick. He worked a little, but one day he got very sick, and he went urgently to a hospital far away from my city.

I thought that he could die, but as a miracle, they told us that they could operate on him. They operated on him three times, and he gradually recovered his health. That situation made me mature at a very young age. And from that moment on, I valued

more the time that I spent with my family and the little things that happened to me.

Many bad things have happened to all of us, but that shouldn't stop us. They become a turning point.

Blanca Estela Can Pop is a student at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Lisa Wroble.

Comfortable in a New Place

I am Cuban and 62 years old. I arrived in the United States on May 9, 2024, and I have now been here for almost two years. Living in this great country has been a completely new experience for me.

Since arriving, I have realized that this country has many positive qualities, but it also requires people to live by many rules and to maintain discipline to achieve a good life. One thing I truly admire is the respect neighbors show for each other's property. However, one of the hardest challenges for me has been finding a good job.

I have studied English throughout my life because I enjoy communicating with people from different countries, and English is an international language. After arriving here, I realized my English was not as strong as I thought. That is why I enrolled in adult education classes to improve my English and my communication skills.

I feel very comfortable living in Key West. I love that it is a small city where I can ride my bicycle everywhere. It feels safe, and there are many cultural activities and entertainment options. However, finding a job in Key West has been very difficult for me. My family encourages me to move to Miami, where life may be easier and more people speak Spanish, but I have chosen to stay in Key West. I want to continue improving my English and developing my communication skills here.

I hope to achieve this goal and remain in Key West, a place I truly love. Riding my bicycle through Midtown and around the island brings me joy. Cycling along the roads by the sea, smelling

the salt in the air, and watching chickens and seabirds makes me very happy.

During my time here, I have learned many things about Key West. I have visited museums and historical sites, enjoyed sunsets at Mallory Square, walked along Duval Street, and explored art galleries showcasing beautiful works. I have also found that people here are very friendly.

There are many reasons why I love Key West, and I wanted to share them with you. For now, I will take a short break, but I hope to return soon to share more about this wonderful island that has changed my life.

Raul Cartaya attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

An Opportunity for Change

My name is Samantha Casanovas. I was born in Cuba. In 2023, I truly believed that my life was figured out. I felt confident about my future because I was working while studying at the University of Medical Sciences. I had a clear vision of where my life was headed and that by 24, I would already be graduating and beginning my professional career as a physician. Even though everything in my life was going well, I had a dream of finding better opportunities. The United States seemed like a place where I could grow and have a better future. However, I didn't know how to get there. It felt far away, like something I wanted but couldn't reach.

Unexpectedly, life gave me a unique opportunity. On November 1st, 2023, I arrived in the United States with my mother. We came alone, searching for a dream and hoping to start a new life. It was a brave decision, but also a difficult one. One of the hardest parts of this journey was leaving behind my family, my friends, and my dog, who had been my companion for thirteen years. Sadly, my dog passed away recently, and I could not say goodbye. This loss affected me deeply and made the transition even more painful, reminding me of everything I had to leave behind to move forward.

Arriving in this country was challenging. Adapting to a new life has been a difficult process, especially for my mother. Socializing has been a barrier because it is hard when you don't speak the same language. Learning how to live within a completely different system has taken time. Working long hours, paying taxes, and understanding a new culture have all been part of a long and challenging journey. Each day requires patience, effort, and strength as we slowly adjust to this new reality.

Even with these difficulties, I have moved forward. Step by step, I learned how to face problems and keep going. I found job opportunities that helped me support myself and feel more confident. These jobs also helped me practice English and slowly start to understand the language better. Today, I feel thankful because my effort is bringing new opportunities. I now have a chance to study, which is very important to me because it helps me build a better future. It allows me to improve my English, learn new skills, and feel more confident in this new country. When I look back, I can see how much I have changed and grown as a person. This moment in my life is not only about living in a new country, but also about learning from my experiences, becoming stronger, and believing that I can create a better life for myself and my family. I know this is just the beginning, and I am ready to continue moving forward.

Samantha Casanovas is an ESOL student in the STAR Program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teachers are Mandi Groshans and Keir Borresen.

Trail of Tears

In 1979, after Cambodia overthrew the Khmer Rouge, I had two choices to make. The dilemma was, "Do I want to stay in Cambodia or move on to another country?" If I stay in my country, I don't know how to find a job or how I would survive because the country just got out of war. Then I decided to flee to Thailand. My plan was to go to the United States eventually. At that time, I was twenty years old, with my baby sister, who was thirteen. We were the sole survivors of our family of eight. A few weeks later, we started to pack everything. We could only carry a few items that we really needed. We had rice, a pot, and some dry food that we could carry on. We left very early in the morning along with another Cambodian family that had four

members: the husband (Sarun), his wife, her sister, and their three-year-old daughter.

Sarun was a soldier. He told us to follow him because he knew where the mines were hidden underground. We walked along a field surrounded by various trees together with many families trying to flee, just like us. While we were walking, we heard a loud “Boom!” It was the sound of an explosive device. Someone had stepped on a mine. In my mind I thought, “Next time it could be me.” I was so nervous and shaking.

We stopped in an area near a pond to cook rice, picking dead branches and rocks to make a fire to cook. We ate, and then we kept walking until sunset. We lay down on the big piece of plastic to sleep; we had no fear of snakes or any animals around us because we were so tired. When the sunrise came, we started walking again, following each other’s footsteps. At one point we didn’t know if this was the right direction because the sun was covered by tall trees. The third night we slept on the slope downhill of the mountain. It felt like my body was rolling down.

At sunrise that morning, we could see a few houses far away. Maybe it was a camp? At the same time, we heard a group of people saying that soldiers put Khmer refugees in the truck and dumped them back on the Cambodian border. Luckily, one of the Thai soldiers knew Sarun’s family very well, so he let us in the camp peacefully. Cambodian people suffered enough from mental and physical pain; this includes me.

Kanhya Chhoy is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Their teacher is Inguna Ozols.

From Italy to America: A Journey for My Family’s Future

I am Italian. I am married, and I have two children, who are now 20 and 17 years old. Until a few years ago, I never imagined that I would leave Italy to come to the United States.

Italy is a beautiful country with a history that began thousands of years ago. It is the birthplace of many great painters, sculptors, poets, engineers, navigators, and other important

people whose discoveries changed the world. I also believe that Italian cuisine is the best in the world because it offers so many delicious dishes. Italy has splendid beaches with crystal-clear water and majestic mountains with perennial glaciers and snow in winter.

For more than 30 years, I worked in Italy with a regular contract. Despite this stability, it has become increasingly difficult to live there because prices continue to rise while salaries have remained the same for about 20 years. Another major problem in Italy is the absence of real meritocracy. For these reasons, after praying to God and reflecting deeply, my wife and I chose to move to America so we could work with dignity, be paid fairly, and give our children the opportunities that this great, wonderful country provides.

America is a country I have always loved since I was a child: its history, its natural beauty, and its people who live there or come from all over the world. The United States may not be a perfect country—no country is—but if you work with honesty, respect the laws, and respect the people around you, it becomes a place where you can build a great life and enjoy many opportunities. For us, coming here has been a step of faith and hope for a better future.

Lorenzo Corrao is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Cinderella at 56 Years Old

Do you believe in miracles? I am one of God's miracles! My name is Mila, and I'm from Brazil. I lived in Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro, in a 20-square-meter commercial space that served as my office during the day and my residence at night. I worked as a real estate agent, and I also made food and sweets to sell. The life of a real estate agent is hard, and you need to work hard to get results, and sometimes you don't sell anything.

Since I was my own boss, the sales commission was substantial, so when I made a sale, I would set aside the commission money for six months and continue working from Monday to Saturday to guarantee the next six months, and in between, I

made frozen food to sell.

One night, I felt sick, and since I lived alone, I had no one to help me. At dawn, and feeling better, I knelt and prayed to God. “Lord God, in the name of Jesus Christ, I don’t want to die as a single person; I need a husband.” Until then, I had lived alone since my daughter was 4 years old.

After that prayer, I met my husband through an introduction made by my friend’s ex-wife. On June 28, 2022, I arrived in the United States and began a new chapter. For someone like me, who lived in a rented 20-square-meter commercial space, faced financial problems, felt discouraged, thought that the end was near, and met my husband (who introduced me to a different life in every way—a life I never imagined living except in the movies I watched—a life I had never lived before), I can say it was a miracle from God, transforming me into Cinderella with a Prince Charming, a white horse, and a castle.

My husband is the true prince of my dreams. He transformed my life, restored my dreams, and gave me a new chance to live. I thank God first and then my husband for this Cinderella transformation at 56 years old. This is just a part of my life. There are other stories I would like to tell through the books I wish to write.

Thank you for giving me this opportunity to write my story. To my dear teachers Naki, Mildred, and Jodi: you are very special to me!

Miliete Schuenck De Faria Filha is from Brazil and is now studying English at Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

A Turning Point in My Life

Arriving to settle permanently on April 27, 2024, a new perspective has begun a turning point in my life. I left my wife, my two daughters, my mother, my friends, and everything that I owned. I didn’t think about how I would separate from my family that I love so much, and finally, I did.

Life in America is not easy and requires a lot of sacrifices. Despite everything, I must move forward. But to move forward, I must adapt to a new system that has many challenges. I need to acquire some knowledge of my environment. I need to know the language, the culture, and the philosophy, which are the key elements for good integration in any system of a country. It is the same for the USA. I must continue to learn English and speak; it's an imperative for me.

My goals are to speak English fluently with more confidence and continue my studies in psychology. I take the first step: go to school and learn English. I make a lot of sacrifices; for example, I don't have a car anymore; I get used to walking. At times I have endured sun and rain. And more: after working 10 p.m. to 7 a.m., when I arrive at 8 a.m., I take a shower and put on my clothes. I've got 10–15 minutes to listen to English. And many times, I don't eat.

I have a dream: to learn English. It's so hard for me. Sometimes I think about my family, myself, and the many problems I have. I feel discouraged, depressed, anxious, and I can't go ahead. When I look around me, I tell myself, "Never give up; go ahead." Because I have some goals, and I want to achieve them. With consistency, motivation, patience, hard work, and self-confidence, I will achieve my goals.

Yvener Doutance is a student at North Tech / Rolling Green Site. His teacher is Ms. Annie Stubbs. He is originally from Haiti. He is working very hard to improve his skills in English.

A Turning Point in My Life

A turning point in my life was when I found out that I had Stage Three breast cancer because everything changed for me and my family. I found the first lump under my left breast when I was in the shower. I remember feeling under my breast again to make sure that I felt what I thought I was feeling. The first thing I did was call my daughter. She told me that it might be anything, but I already knew it was breast cancer.

Images of my mother kept going through my head because she had breast cancer too, and she wasn't scared. I was just numb. The doctor told me I was going to have chemo therapy and pro-

ton treatments. Six months later, the cancer was gone, and I rang the bell. My family was happy, but I knew it wasn't over yet. But that story is for another time.

Annette Epifanio is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Her teacher is Lisa Montgomery.

A Turning Point in My Life

The beginning was extremely hard. I had to face a completely new environment, a different language, and countless responsibilities. I started working two jobs—one at McDonald's and another in the electrical field while studying electricity at the same time. There were moments of exhaustion and doubt, but I never lost sight of my purpose. I knew that every challenge was part of the process, and every sacrifice was a step toward my dream.

After a year of effort and perseverance, I graduated from my electrical program and continued studying English to improve my communication skills. My next goal is to become an electrical engineer and keep growing both personally and professionally.

Looking back, I realize that coming to the United States was not just a change of place — it was the moment that transformed my life. It taught me discipline, patience, and the true meaning of hard work. I learned that success is not about how fast you reach your goals but how much determination you have to keep going despite obstacles.

I am proud of how far I have come, and I'm even more excited about how far I can still go. This journey has shown me that with courage, effort, and faith, no dream is too big to achieve.

Leidel Garcia is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College. His teacher is Perez Lapeira Caridad.

Starting Over, Never Giving Up

I have started over more times than I can count—new states, new schools, new routines—but this time, I refuse to quit. For years, moving from Massachusetts to Florida and now back to my hometown, Atlanta, Georgia, made it nearly impossible to

finish school or training. Every time I tried to go back to school or start training, I would quit before finishing. It felt like no matter how hard I tried, I could never catch up or stick with anything.

The turning point came when I decided that this time would be different. I was determined to finish both my GED and my lash training, no matter the obstacles. I realized that quitting over and over was holding me back from the future I wanted. This time, I committed to myself and my goals, knowing I had the courage and determination to succeed.

Moving so often taught me adaptability, but it also made consistency difficult. Despite returning to Atlanta, I continued my education virtually through the Literacy Alliance in Florida. On top of school and training, I work two jobs, making my days long and exhausting. Some mornings, I wake up before sunrise to study for my GED, work all day, and then spend evenings practicing lash techniques. There are moments when I feel drained, but every small achievement—completing a lesson, mastering a new skill, or receiving positive feedback—reminds me why I am pushing myself.

Restarting my lash training, something I had begun before but never finished, has been both challenging and rewarding. Each practice session builds my confidence and shows me that I am capable of more than I once believed. I've learned that setbacks are part of the journey, but quitting is a choice—and this time, I choose to keep going.

This turning point has shown me that no matter how many times life forces you to start over, you can still succeed if you stay committed. Going back to school, completing my GED, finishing my

Lash training and working two jobs are not just achievements—they are proof that I can overcome challenges, adapt, and grow. After years of moving, starting over, and facing obstacles, I am finally building a path to a stable and fulfilling future. This time, I will finish what I started, and I am proud of the determination and resilience that have brought me here.

Adrienne Geter is an adult learner from Atlanta, Georgia. She is working toward her GED, completing lash training, and balancing two jobs—all while proving that determination and hard work can overcome any obstacle.

A Turning Point in My Life

The turning point in my life is the day I found out I had my stroke. I was a turning point because I lost the ability to walk and had to be bound to a wheelchair. It was a dark night, and I was on my way home. All of a sudden, I felt something I had never felt before. Luckily, I was almost to my house. So I calmly called my wife and let her know what was going on with me. As I pulled up, the ambulance was already on the way. The next thing I remember is waking up and not being able to feel my legs. This was a turning point because I lost the ability to walk. I was forever bound to being dependent on my day-to-day needs. And it changed the dynamics of my family.

In my life I have always been a proud man who took care of my family. I was the backbone that everyone leaned on for help and for the foundation of my family. When that stroke happened, it made me have to depend on my people and my family for everything that I needed. I was trying to make it my way, but this turning point taught me that I had to rely on others. I was forever bound to a wheelchair.

With me being in a wheelchair, it made me think about everything differently. So I went to view life differently and appreciate what I do have. And it made me think about what I need to do to be better. I am going to be honest; at first, I was crushed. However, I made myself look at the bigger picture. This life is short, and I want to be grateful for my family and what I can still do, like get my education.

Eric Glover is a student at the Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. His teacher is Jonathan Marc.

A Turning Point in My Life

A turning point in my life was when I became a mother. It changed my life forever. I had received the greatest gift from the

heavens, my little princess. I had so many plans for myself, but God, as always, had a better one.

It was very difficult to leave my family and my country, but I had to do it. When I arrived in the United States, I felt blessed, and I told myself that I want to succeed in this country. I started studying English at night, and later I started working in a factory. Five months after arriving, I got pregnant. I was so scared. And my plans? I had forgotten the biological clock. I was already 35 years old and couldn't wait much longer to be a mother.

The first months were terrible—dizziness, vomiting, and nausea all day; I could barely eat. Afterwards everything got better, and I started enjoying my pregnancy. On July 20, 2025, my little girl was born. I don't remember having felt so much pain and happiness in my life. The reward for such immense pain is seeing that tiny creature in your arms, a little piece of you. I started to feel scared again, wondering if I knew how to be a good mom. I miss my mother every day, but those first days at home with the little girl were so difficult. My husband had 3 jobs; he left early and came back late. I was really missing some of Mom's soups and having her by my side. The postpartum period was also very hard, almost without help.

But being a mother makes you a different person; you find strength where there is none. My plans no longer matter. I close my wings for the moment to help open hers. Becoming a mother changed my life, and that is the most beautiful thing that happened to me. Every day I wonder who gave life to whom. Love you, my princess.

Yenisey Gonzalez Rodriguez is an ESOL student at Family Literacy Impact Program, School District of Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Carolyn Deli.

The Butterfly Effect

This term describes a phenomenon in which a small action can ultimately change the entire world. It's the idea that everything on our planet is connected, and every event has deeper causes. "Even the flap of a butterfly's wings can trigger a tsunami on the other side of the world. According to this theory, Earth—

with its oceans, deserts, mountains, forests, glaciers, and all forms of life—is a single living organism. And like any organism, it responds when it is harmed. It reacts to what people do to it. To what we do.

In recent years, natural disasters have become more frequent, larger in scale, and increasingly unpredictable. Floods and droughts, volcanic eruptions and earthquakes, wildfires and wars, and unknown diseases and epidemics now occur with alarming regularity. Our planet is no longer giving us warnings—it is issuing threats. At the same time, the media rarely discuss the growing damage humanity is causing: extreme pollution, melting polar ice, disappearing glaciers, and global warming. International organizations that once fought to protect nature and the climate are barely mentioned now.

Some governments seem to understand that humanity has already crossed the “red line,” and the harm done can no longer be fully reversed. They fear that a kind of “self-destruction process” has already begun. Instead of focusing on saving Earth, they are quietly preparing plans to leave it and relocate elsewhere. One of the most striking examples of the butterfly effect was COVID-19. Somewhere in China, someone ate a bat, and the chain reaction that followed affected the entire planet. Millions died. Everyday life changed drastically. Masks and sanitizers became mandatory. People were forbidden to go outside. Schools, universities, theaters, and museums shut down. Cities, countries, and even continents closed their borders.

In the spring of 2020, my wife and I needed to return from the United States to Ukraine. All commercial flights from the U.S. to Europe had been canceled, and each country had to evacuate its citizens on its own. Imagine Miami International Airport completely empty—no cars, no taxis, no police, no staff, no passengers. The lights were off, and the escalators turned on only when you stepped on them. Check-in counters and security checkpoints were closed. Eventually, we found a crowd of Ukrainians and airline workers dressed not in masks but in full protective suits like astronauts. No one weighed luggage; they simply checked tickets and loaded us onto the plane. A packed aircraft, aisles full of bags, flight attendants in protective suits, and 13 hours without leaving your seat—it felt less like a flight and more like an emergency evacuation. Events we once con-

sidered science fiction are becoming our reality. Take care of yourselves and your loved ones.

Leonid Grytsenko is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

A Turning Point in My Life

One of the most important turning points in my life was the moment I decided to emigrate from Cuba to the United States. It was not an easy decision, but I knew I had to do it. Saying goodbye to my favorite people broke my heart. However, I kept the pain to myself and hid my tears behind smiles that helped soften the farewell. Throughout the process, my husband was always my biggest support, and together we encouraged each other to make the decision that completely changed our lives.

We took the risk and crossed not only the ocean and many countries but also the limits of our fears. Emigrating was like crossing through a mirror into another life: everything familiar disappeared, and a completely new world began. At first, everything felt uncertain—a mix of emotions that is hard to describe: happiness, gratitude, sadness, and satisfaction all at the same time. Emigrating is like being born again, but as an adult. You have to start over, learning everything from the beginning, even things you never imagined. But you grow in adversity and keep moving forward.

Little by little, I began to understand that the American Dream doesn't fall from the sky—you have to earn it. It is built day by day, through both good and bad times, but you always have the opportunity to try and to achieve it. Everything depends on each person's effort and attitude.

Living in the United States has been a dream come true because this country gives us the chance to be and to do whatever we set our minds to. Every obstacle—finding a job, learning English, adapting to a new culture—became a lesson in strength. Love is what drives us and gives us life. My family remains in my heart always, and together with my husband, we continue to strive for our goals. With faith, patience, and perseverance, dreams are built and eventually come true.

Daring to step outside your comfort zone is the only way to truly know yourself. Emigrating was not the end of my story but the beginning of the person I want to become. My story is proof that even when life takes a 180-degree turn, we can find new beginnings, purpose, and hope on the other side. Remember: Thanks to stumbles, we rise stronger and learn to walk better. My motto: Live, smile, be happy, and be grateful, always. After all, every new beginning starts with the courage to take one brave step.

Masiel Gutierrez, originally from Cuba, attends Ms. Caridad Perez's ESOL class at Miami Dade College. I have lived in the USA since December 2022, and I'm studying English to improve my communication skills and achieve my goals.

Proof That It's Never Too Late to Believe, to Fight, and to Begin Again

My name is Rakhima Ismailova, and I'm 40 years old, a proud mother of four incredible children and a woman who refuses to let go of her dreams. My story began in Uzbekistan, where I was born into a family of doctors. I completed ten years of medical school and residency and earned my medical degree. Becoming a doctor was one of the proudest accomplishments of my life. Medicine was never just a career to me; it was a calling. I wanted to help people, to heal them, and to make a difference in their lives.

During that time, I also became a mother first to my daughter, who is now 19, and then to my son, who is 18. They were my greatest joy and my strongest motivation. But as much as I loved my work and my home, I wanted to give them a life filled with opportunity, a life where their dreams could stretch farther than I ever imagined for myself. With that hope in my heart, I made the hardest and bravest decision of my life: to leave everything behind and move to America. In 2013 I arrived in New York with my two little ones, a medical degree, and a heart full of determination. As an international medical graduate, I began the process of getting my credentials translated, preparing to take the USMLE exams, and planning to continue my medical career here in the United States.

But life has a way of testing our strength. Between adapting to

a new country, raising my children, and managing the everyday challenges of starting over, I began to lose the energy and time I once had to study the way I needed to. I was torn between my love for medicine and my responsibility as a mother. Eventually, I realized that while I couldn't do everything at once, I could still continue forward even if my path looked different than I had originally imagined.

After two years, we moved to Florida, where life began to bloom. I was blessed with two more children, my 9-year-old son and 8-year-old daughter. Florida became our true home. My two oldest made me incredibly proud, both attending Daytona State College, my daughter earning her bachelor's degree at 17 and my son at 18. Now, my daughter is pursuing medicine to become a surgeon and preparing for the MCAT, while my son hopes to become a dermatologist. Seeing them chase their dreams reminded me to keep chasing mine.

Though my path changed, my love for medicine never faded. Today, I'm pursuing a physician assistant program, continuing the dream I started years ago. From Uzbekistan to New York, from Florida to PA school, my journey has been one of faith, sacrifice, and love. I came to this country with two children and a dream, and now I stand surrounded by four.

Rakhima Ismailova is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Francesca Mullinax.

Sad Beginnings – Happy Endings

I can visualize the wheels beginning to turn as I take the first step by enrolling in the GED Preparation Program at Tallahassee State College. I live in Tallahassee, Florida, and I am a resident of Leon County. I currently live with my family, and I am the oldest child. Enrolling in the GED program represents a true turning point in my life. This chapter is about becoming a better version of myself—making choices that will create positive change and open new opportunities. As you continue reading, you will see why I chose this topic and why this phase of my life is so significant to me.

When I began what should have been my twelfth-grade year, my life changed in a major way. During that time, I became preg-

nant at a young age. This experience had a strong impact on both my family and me. I needed help to support myself, my newborn, and my family, and I could not handle the responsibilities of single motherhood alone. My family supported me as much as they could with the limited resources they had. My mother allowed me to live at home with my newborn—thank God for my mom. Because I became pregnant at an early age, I was unable to complete high school at that time. Although this period was very difficult, it taught me responsibility, gave me strength, and showed me the importance of family. This is why returning to school now represents such an important turning point in my life.

Now that my life has become more stable, I realize it is time to focus on my future. I decided to return to school because I want to improve myself and create better opportunities. Earning my GED is an important step toward reaching my goals and becoming more independent. I can see my life beginning to turn—slowly but surely.

The time is now for me to focus on balancing my education while finding a part-time job that works around my school schedule. To continue making this positive change, I plan to gain skills in Microsoft Office, Excel, and PowerPoint by earning a certificate that will help prepare me for my future career.

My goal is to complete my GED within one year. After earning my GED, I plan to attend Tallahassee State College to pursue a degree in business management. While I am still deciding on my specific career path, I am committed to continuing my education and building a better future for myself. It will take time, effort, dedication, commitment, and focus—a large task—but this turning point in my life will truly make a world of difference.

My name is Neltrecia Jones. I am a student in the GED Program at Tallahassee State College; my instructor is Ms. Brenda G. Johnson.

When Life is Hard, Keep on Going

When I was a child, I lived in my country, Haiti. I had a peaceful life and a happy childhood. I never thought I would have to leave my home and my country. But when I was 14, I experienced things I had never imagined. Life changed for my family and me.

In 2022, my father decided to leave Haiti and move to the Dominican Republic to find more safety. At that time, I was in 9th grade and had not finished school in Haiti. Our family of six faced many difficulties as we sought security. Life in the Dominican Republic was not easy. I went to school there and made new friends, but I still could not finish 9th grade. Every day, I had to adapt to a new environment, learn a new culture, and try to feel safe.

After one year in the Dominican Republic, my father decided to return to Haiti because life was too expensive. We lived in Haiti for a few months, but the country was still not safe. During that time, my father learned about opportunities to move to the United States. I felt hope for a better future, a chance to continue my education, and to live in a safe place.

This part of my life taught me many lessons. Leaving my home, moving to a new country, and continuing my studies was very difficult, but it gave me strength and resilience. It showed me the importance of hope, courage, and hard work. Today, I dream of a better future in the United States, where I can finish my education, help my family, and build a safe and successful life. These dreams give me motivation to keep going, even when life is hard.

Marie Sonica Joseph attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Inspiration: The Journey of My True Self

Chapter I: Stepping into the Unknown

Starting a new life in a new country was one of the biggest decisions I ever made. I walked away from a successful job, a respected title, and strong connections in Thailand. While facing the challenge of a new language, culture, and environment, I often questioned myself, “Should I keep going? Or was it time to give up and go back home?”

Returning to Thailand seemed like the easiest escape; no language barrier, only familiar surroundings. But the thought of starting over again after all my effort in the U.S. wasn't an

option. This unwillingness to surrender pushed me to stay and to carve out my own path in this “Land of Opportunities,” one that truly reflects who I am and what I stand for.

Chapter II: Lost in Uncertainty

During this period of uncertainty, advice poured in from every direction regarding my next steps. While those ideas were inspiring, deep inside I knew they weren't truly mine. Lost and uncertain, I jumped from one idea to another, whether it was going back to school for a safer degree or following a career path that lacked passion. I was trying to figure out what was best for me while realizing that major life changes were not as simple as flipping a switch.

Chapter III: The Power of Self-Trust

After a long period of confusion, I began to reconnect with who I truly was. My turning point came with a simple realization: “TO BE MY TRUE SELF AND TRUST MYSELF.” I understood that I couldn't let others define my future. That means standing strong for what I love, what I believe in, and what I've decided to do. With this mindset, I've learned that the search for the “Right Thing” isn't a passive waiting game; it's an active journey of growth, learning, and courage.

Chapter IV: Moving Forward with Faith

My biggest goal remains the same. While waiting for the “Right Time,” I keep learning, developing new skills, and trying new things, without limiting myself or being paralyzed by fear. I now believe that success isn't measured by how fast we achieve our goals but by how honest we are to our dreams and who we truly are.

Now, my compass is set, and I'm moving forward with patience and faith. To anyone facing a similar battle, I hope my story reminds you that you are not alone. **STAY PATIENT, STAY TRUE**, and someday, sooner or later, you too will find your own way.

Chaninat Kanjana is a student at Flagler Technical College, whose teacher is Davlantes.

A Turning Point in My Life

My name is Ofni La Rosa. I am 55 years old from Venezuela. The turning point in my life began in 2016 because of the protests in Venezuela against a very repressive government. The Maduro regime at the time persecuted us for having different opinions. At one point, they shot at my house because they were watching day and night to see if we participated in the protests.

With a heavy heart, I had to take my daughters out of the country because their university classmates were being arrested and tortured, and some were even killed. Today, I too find myself out of Venezuela with my wife and daughters seeking asylum in the United States, in the state of Florida. It has been quite challenging to find housing, learn English, find jobs, and overcome many obstacles of living in a new country. At the same time, it has all been worth it because we are now living in a country that offers me freedom, opportunities for personal and economic growth, and a great deal of security.

I am currently studying English at Lakewood Community Adult School. My goal is to study electricity at Pinellas Technical College in St. Petersburg and continue my education as much as possible.

Ofni La Rosa is originally from Venezuela and now lives with his family in St. Petersburg, Florida. He is studying English at Lakewood Community School with plans to pursue a program in electricity at Pinellas Technical College-St. Pete.

The Light On Me

Who am I? Am I on the right path?

I am a special woman who loves beautiful things: roses, nature, beaches, mountains, and especially love. However, my journey hasn't been an easy one. It was so hard to be separated from my family, my friends, and my country. I had to leave all of that behind, all my beautiful memories, as well as my sad experiences.

It was dark before, but now I am following a bright light. I feel as though I have been born again. I have started a new life with new dreams. To pursue my goals and find a new perspective, I

have begun to adapt to American life: the culture, the climate, and the social, mental, and physical environment.

A big part of this change was improving my English. That is how I found Clearview Adult Education Center and met my fantastic and incredible teachers: Mrs. Mildred, Mrs. Naki, and Mrs. Jody. Now I am learning English every day, embracing new cultures, and making new friends. I am truly enjoying this new life with a different taste.

Have I reached my goals? Not yet. But after four years in the USA, I have decided to be a strong woman, a new mom, and have a free soul. The light that started to shine in the beginning is now illuminating everything even brighter. It is becoming stunning, shining all around me and my lovely family.

Life is like a garden: you reap what you sow.

Nour Lakhlioui is from Morocco and now studying English at the Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

Miracle

Since coming to America, it has been a pleasure to see some members of my family living together in the same area. Generally, the beginning is always difficult. I have noticed that in this country, everyone has their own activities at different times. It wasn't easy for my sister and my brother-in-law to take us to work, school, or anywhere. There were three new people in their house. We had to move, of course, but before moving into our own home, my sister and I had to get our learner's licenses, and then we went to driving school.

A few months later, I got my first car, but to use it, I needed a license. We should take the road test in Tampa, but the problem was that no one was available to give us a ride. Finally, we decided to drive by ourselves in my car so that we wouldn't miss the appointment. I was driving across the bridge on 275 towards Tampa; we were both in the car. On our way, there was a slower driver in front of me, and then I saw a truck in the rearview mirror far away. While I was changing lanes to the left, maybe

my movements were too slow or the truck was too fast. I don't know how the truck driver managed to hit my car and push it toward the right lane. Unfortunately, the car that had appeared pushed my car back in front of the truck; whoops! A terrible accident. Everyone thought we were both dead. Divine intervention stopped the truck. Miraculously, the two tires in front of the truck were flat; only the rims were visible. The car was a total loss; thank God we didn't have a scratch.

After the damage assessment we had to spend a lot of money: penalty tickets, repairing the truck, towing, emergency services, and buying another car. However, these expenses were no more valuable than the life God made easy for us; we glorify Him. This is the most remarkable and triumphant story of my life, having my life saved from a serious injury that could lead to disability or death.

Marie Chantal Laureore is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

The Day Merit Opened the Doors to My Destiny

There are dates that remain etched in our memory, not because of the magnitude of public events, but because of the irreversible turn they give to our personal history. For a teacher by vocation, recognition of knowledge is the highest validation one can aspire to. August 14, 1974, was not just any day on the calendar; it was the exact moment when my efforts were rewarded, and my professional future took on a clear purpose under the umbrella of national education in Colombia.

At that time, the national competitive examination system for secondary school teachers represented the gateway to stability and civil service. The competition was fierce. I remember the mixture of anxiety and hope as I waited for the results of the national ranking. I knew I had prepared rigorously, but the number was intimidating: 850 applicants from across the country were seeking a position, all with the same dream of educating the new generations of Colombians.

When the lists were finally published, the surprise exceeded all expectations. Not only was my name among those selected,

but I was at the top of the list. Having ranked first among nearly a thousand colleagues was a powerful revelation. At that moment, I understood that study and discipline were tools capable of breaking down any barrier. Being number one was not a trophy for my ego, but rather an unavoidable commitment to academic excellence that I had to demonstrate from then on in every classroom.

That triumph changed my life radically. It gave me the confidence to know that my abilities were up to the nation's standards and allowed me to begin a teaching career backed by my own merit. More than fifty years after that day, I look back and confirm that August 14 was the foundation of my professional identity. It was the day the nation entrusted me with its greatest treasure: the education of its youth, and I accepted that challenge with the honor that only first place can inspire.

Jose Lizcano is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. His teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

A Turning Point In My Life

I worked at McDonald's for 29 years. I used to make biscuits and work on the grill and then moved up to be a cashier. One day, while I was taking orders for customers, Bob, my manager, came over and started screaming at me and yelled, "You need to speed up!" I started crying, and the customers were staring at me. I told Bob I was quitting, and I gave my two weeks' notice. Later that day, things got even worse. Another employee came in and told us about a bad car crash. My friend Margaret was in a head-on collision. She survived the crash, but her husband passed away. She was in the hospital and had to start going to rehab. I went to see her every day. She is a good friend of mine. It hit me hard.

I was ready to give up, crying and praying every night and asking the Lord to help me get through my pain and for guidance. He showed me the way to go in my life. Then my daughter asked me, "Do you want to go to church with me?" I said yes, and we went to church. I was afraid to talk to anybody, but I stood up to worship. The more I went, the more I started to feel comfortable. One day, after service, we went into a prayer room. I told

someone what was going on in my life, and we prayed together. She told me, “The Lord is on your side.” It took a weight off my shoulders. I cried again, but this time it was happy tears. The Lord was telling me that everything is going to get better. Pastor Lonnie said they’re going to be baptizing people after service, and anyone who wants can join. So that night, I got baptized, and Pastor Lonnie said I have been saved.

I’ve been going to church every Sunday and writing in my diary. It has changed my life. I’ve made lots of new friends at church. My mom said she noticed that my personality is different when she calls me every Sunday. My husband said the same thing when we were having lunch together. Now, he always asks me if I had a good day at church. My answer is always “yes.” I don’t let anything get to me, but when something does, I’ll go into my room to pray and ask the Lord for guidance. The Lord has changed my life for the better, and He can change your life too.

Marsha McDonald receives tutoring at the Columbia County Public Library. She is studying reading and math so that she can one day get her GED. Her teacher is Michael Elliott.

Accepting Myself For Who I Am

Throughout my life, I have faced many difficult moments, even though I am only 19. I like to call them moments of courage because each one, good or bad, taught me something about myself and helped me grow. Today, I want to share one moment that was both brave and beautiful: a special person who, without knowing it, taught me to be brave and to trust myself more.

The turning point in my life was not about an award or recognition. It was a change in how I see myself and how I choose to live. Because of this wonderful person, I found the courage to face my fears and accept myself. Before that, I always worried about what others thought of me. I never acted freely because I was afraid of judgment, and I could not live authentically or pursue my dreams.

I learned to show myself as I am, to trust my decisions, and to live according to my own truth. Since then, I have pursued my

dreams without hesitation, shared my voice on TikTok, and truly shown who I am. Now, every step I take is guided by authenticity and my desire to live fully, not by what others think.

Although we are no longer together, this person left me a lesson I will always remember. True courage is accepting yourself and choosing yourself. From that experience, I learned to be happy from my heart, to value my inner strength, and to pursue what I want with determination. Every difficult moment became a reminder of my resilience. Today, I am proud because I discovered that happiness comes from loving myself and being true to who I am. That moment changed my life, and I know now that I will always have courage, that my voice matters, and that I can face any challenge with confidence and joy.

Oyanthay Montes attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Starting A New Life in the Land of Opportunity

Well, this has been a long-standing plan of my family since I was born. My parents had already planned to move to the United States because they wanted my sister and me to be able to grow up here. But the wait was too long; it took almost 15 years to get here, and then the bad things happened. My older sister couldn't come with us. The year I came to America to start a new life was also the year I turned 19. This is an age where we are aware of many things, but at the same time, there are still many things we need to learn. We were so lucky that my grandmother came along on this trip. This was the first time we had left our hometown for such a long journey, and we didn't know when we would be able to come back.

I felt lost and lonely without my sister. It's like studying abroad, but with your parents accompanying you. I miss the lifestyle and culture of my hometown. I also remember the memories I shared with my friends.

Changing things and having to adapt to them always comes with many difficulties. For example, it's not easy to use a second language, which is not your mother language, to deal with issues such as those related to taxes and insurance.

In contrast to those things, the most exciting thing about coming here is the new opportunities that open. I can work and earn money while still studying here. I have many opportunities to learn about the field I dream of and have more chances to advance to higher positions. The percentage of people who can travel around the world has also increased significantly.

Although I am still very sad, I am gradually becoming grateful for what has happened as it has allowed me to develop myself more strongly in this country.

Kristina Nguyen is a student in the STAR program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teachers are Mandi Groshans and Keir Borresen.

Racing Against Time

When I was 39 weeks pregnant, I was lying in bed imagining what my baby would look like. Suddenly, I felt something—my water broke. My body started shaking, but I was not scared. Earlier, whenever I thought about giving birth naturally, I felt terrified. But at that moment, I felt surprised. The water poured out, and my body wouldn't stop shaking.

My husband and I went to the hospital at 1:20 am. I thought the doctor would perform a C-section immediately because my water had already broken. However, they said that the baby was still fine and wanted to monitor me until my cervix opened enough. Then the labor pain began, and it was extremely painful. Four hours passed, the water kept flowing, and the contractions grew faster and stronger, but I was not dilated enough. I was very worried about my baby because, in Vietnam, once the water breaks, the doctor delivers the baby right away. We talked to the doctor, and she told us not to worry; everything was still fine.

After 6 hours, the pain became unbearable. The doctor suggested spinal anesthesia, and it helped a lot. I waited until 12:30 pm the next day, but I had dilated only to 4 cm. Then the doctor decided to inject medicine to help me. After finishing the injection, a nurse told me it might take some time. Suddenly, my son's heartbeat disappeared from the monitor. She tried adjusting the device, but she couldn't find it. She called more nurses. Then the doctor came in, and I became very scared. What was happen-

ing? The room quickly filled with maybe ten people, doctors and nurses. I knew something was wrong. They immediately prepared for emergency surgery. On the way to the operating room, I could feel how urgent the situation was—they even hit my bed against the corners several times. They started the anesthesia right away. While I was praying for my baby, I knew they were opening my abdomen. Just before I lost consciousness, in a blur, I saw the clock—13:20.

I woke up at 14:30. I knew the surgery was over. My first question was, “How is my son?”—and I was terrified waiting for the reply. I feared hearing bad news. Fortunately, a nurse told me, “Your son is fine; don’t worry.” I felt so relieved. About an hour later, they moved me out of the recovery room. The moment I saw my son, I cried the first truly happy tears of my life. Later, I looked at my son’s birth certificate and saw the time of birth—13:20. I realized the doctors had acted within seconds to save him. I am thankful to the doctors and nurses at Bayfront Hospital. They not only saved my son, but they also saved my life.

Tuyen Nguyen is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

How My Life Changed in One Hour

I come from Cuba, a country filled with scarcity and hardship, where many young people are forced to emigrate not out of ambition but out of necessity. Growing up in that environment taught me from a very early age the value of sacrifice, resilience, and hope.

For years, I dreamed of coming to this country, seeing it as an opportunity to change my life and the future of my family. In 2023, that dream finally became a reality. However, when the moment arrived, my life was no longer just my own: I had already built a family, I had a young daughter, and parents who had always stood by my side. In less than one hour, I had to make the most difficult decision of my life, a decision that would change my path forever.

When I arrived, I believed everything would be fast and that

we would soon be together again. I held on to that hope to find strength. But reality was different. Distance began to be measured in phone calls, voice messages, and video calls. Today, I watch my daughter grow through a screen, and I see my parents grow older without being able to hug them. There are days when the absence feels heavier, days when silence hurts, and nostalgia becomes overwhelming. Even so, I have learned to transform that pain into motivation, constantly reminding myself why I made this decision and for whom I must keep moving forward.

Despite everything, I have not given up. Every day I work hard, make an effort, and strive to become a better version of myself. I consider myself a responsible, hardworking, and grateful person. I have taken on the challenge of learning a second language, English, because I understand that it is a fundamental part of growing in this country and opening new opportunities. School has become my second family; it is the place where I not only learn but also laugh, share my stories, and build sincere friendships. I thank God for every blessing, especially for the opportunity to have a wonderful and healthy family. Although the journey has not been easy, I remain strong, convinced that every sacrifice will be worth it and that one day we will be together again, celebrating that love and perseverance were stronger than distance.

Jorge Perez Machado is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Don't Be Afraid to Change Your Life

I was 33 years old, and although I lived a full life with my family, I still didn't feel completely happy and peaceful. One day after consulting with my wife, we decided to try our luck in the lottery to win a green card so we could come and live in the USA. My wife didn't believe it, but I told her we would win. After a while I received a letter saying that I was lucky in the lottery and we had won green cards. I couldn't believe that I had won a green card, so I read the letter again and again, thinking maybe I had misunderstood something, but when I finished reading it, I realized that I was a "lucky baby" and I had won. Without waiting, I went to tell my wife the good news. When I told her everything, she was very surprised that I could be so lucky. At

first, we were very happy, but after a while we were overcome by a feeling of anxiety. Do we really need this? We have everything: family, home, good jobs...

After much deliberation and hesitation, we together made a very important decision to take the risk and come to live in the USA. The first year of life in America was very difficult, full of various challenges trying to survive. We were staying strong despite what the people around us were saying, "Why would you change your life when you already had everything?" It was hard to hear, but I told everyone, "You are the guides of your own life; you will remain standing still, and you won't know if anything could have changed in your life if you don't take risks and try."

My children had a hard time adjusting to life in a new place with strangers. They didn't know how to speak English when they started school, but despite everything, at this point in time, they now speak very good English and now feel comfortable living in the new country. Four years have passed since my whole family came to live in America. We now feel happy. The children go to school; they have found new friends, and we have good, well-paid jobs and can afford much more than we would if we still lived in our home country. Even though everything is good, sometimes we feel lonely because we left our parents, friends with whom we had lived for a long time.

Vidas Pogis is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

The One I Also Was

Let me confess something no one expects to hear: I wasn't always this person who speaks as if he was born awake. Not even close. I was exactly like everyone else—an impressively confused human, surviving on ego, fear, drama, and decisions made from the purest emotional stupidity.

I was a spiritual idiot. A devoted egoist. Olympic champion of mystical self-deception. I thought awakening was a competition, enlightenment a trophy, and ego something you beat into submission with emotional discipline. I confused awareness with seriousness, responsibility with guilt, and growth with control. I

believed I was deep when I was just scared. Wise when I was just repeating borrowed quotes. I advanced when I was really just running away from myself—with better excuses.

That inflated importance, all that “I know,” “I understand,” “I’ve transcended”—it was just ego wearing a guru costume. Bad lighting. Cheap enlightenment. Until one day, I saw it. And I laughed. I laughed at my rigidity, my private dogmas, my subtle spiritual poses, and my ego trying to teach humility. That laugh saved me. When I stopped defending the spiritual idiot I had built, what remained was the only thing real: simple humanity, quiet spirit, and a truth that never needed decoration.

I used to believe the world was against me. That reality had formed a secret committee just to test, judge, and inconvenience me. I lived like the tragic protagonist of a play no one else was watching. It took years to realize something liberating: the world wasn’t thinking about me at all. Not because I didn’t matter—but because everyone else was too busy surviving their own internal soap operas.

And that realization was freedom. When you stop believing the world is chasing you, you stop running. When you stop imagining secret enemies, you finally rest.

I always had a radar for absurdity. I could see adults fighting over relative truths, defending their pride like sacred property, suffering over imaginary futures. I saw my fears as emotional shadows. My anger was a passion for things I couldn’t even remember later. My ego as a very serious actor convinced me it was the star—when it was just overacting a minor role.

But the real breakthrough wasn’t insight. It was laughter. Not mockery. Clarity.

Life kept trying to crush me. And every time—after fear, after tears—laughter appeared. And it taught me what no sacred book ever did: the ego only exists if you take it seriously.

Eventually I understood life is not a problem. It’s a flexible script played by confused people who forgot how to laugh. And awakening doesn’t begin in temples, mountains, or books. It begins the moment you stop taking your character so seriously.

Because life isn't revealed through solemnity. It reveals itself when you dare to laugh at who you thought you were.

My name is Marcelo Reyes. I was born in Ecuador and currently reside in the United States, a country that has provided me with opportunities to work, study, and grow. I live in Miami, Florida, and I am enrolled in the ESOL program at Miami Dade College. Through this educational experience, I aspire to achieve my personal and professional goals.

A Turning Point in My Life

Hello, my name is Sharquita M. Richardson. I was born in New York City. I'm an adopted child born with drugs in my system. I'm living in a sober-living house with a year and 2 months clean. I have been on the streets for a very long time, and I felt after 10-15 years of being on the streets it was time for a change. The last grade I completed was the 8th grade, so I'm back in school so I can make a way for myself. I've burned bridges and rebuilt them back. My family is back in my life. I finally met my family after 20 years. My mom, who raised me, is back in my life again because I chose to be clean and sober today. I no longer have to look over my shoulder. I can look people in the eye. I changed people, places, and things. I had to stop going back to my old places, thinking people miss me because they don't; they just miss what you can do for them. Today I can be myself and don't have to put on a mask.

Sharquita Richardson is a student at the Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Her teacher is Jonathan Marc.

Strength in Every Step

My life story is one defined by resilience and constant self-improvement. This journey truly began with the birth of my beloved daughter. Before she came into my life, my world lacked a clear sense of purpose. Leaving my comfort zone felt unimaginable, and I lived according to society's expectations of what a "good life" should look like. In doing so, I often sacrificed my own happiness to please others, convincing myself that conformity would be enough.

However, when my daughter was eight years old, a series of unexpected events shook the foundation of what I had once believed to be a “perfect life.” Her paternal grandmother fell into a coma and remained hospitalized until she passed away—an emotional blow that profoundly affected our family and indirectly contributed to the end of my seventeen-year relationship with her son. As a result, our emotional and economic stability crumbled. Although I was a trained professional, my income was no longer sufficient to cover our basic needs, and the hope of building a better future in Cuba felt increasingly out of reach.

At that critical moment, I realized that resilience was not merely an admirable quality—it had become an absolute necessity. I was forced to emigrate in search of a more hopeful future for my young daughter and myself. She became my greatest source of strength and the reason I dared to attempt what once seemed impossible, especially given the financial limitations that weighed heavily on the difficult journey ahead. Like many immigrants, I stepped into the unknown with fear, yet also with an unwavering determination to create a better life.

Only God, my professional preparation, and the invaluable support of my family and a few loyal friends made it possible for us to start over in a completely unfamiliar country—the United States of America. When I look back on all the challenges we faced, I can say with absolute pride that every sacrifice was worth it.

Today, my daughter is growing up in a land of freedom, surrounded by endless opportunities where nothing and no one can limit her dreams. Her future depends solely on her dedication, consistency, and discipline. Through this journey, I have learned that the sky is not the limit but rather the starting point for those who courageously pursue their purpose.

Ultimately, my story serves as a reminder that resilience has the power to transform pain into strength and uncertainty into possibility. No matter how overwhelming the journey may feel, we must hold tightly to our dreams and continue moving forward. Above all, never give up.

Leyanis Rodriguez is a 43-year-old mother and chemical engineer originally from Cuba. She is currently a student at Miami Dade College with teacher Caridad Perez Lapeira.

My New Beginning

My life started to change the moment I decided to return to school. As an adult, I was afraid because English is not my first language. I was worried about making mistakes. I knew I had to try very hard if I wanted a better future.

While in my class, I faced many challenges. Sometimes I didn't understand everything. I felt embarrassed to speak. I would talk to myself and remind myself to participate and complete my work. I spent extra time studying. Little by little, I became better. I worked hard, and the improvements came. I became brave, and then I realized another dream.

I was accepted into the CNA classes at my school. There I learned how to take care of patients, check their vital signs, and help them feel comfortable. I was nervous at first, but I kept trying and didn't give up. The CNA class taught me to be confident and to care about people. CNA is special to me, and I love helping people when they're sick or need support.

These experiences help me believe in myself and feel proud of myself. Going to school and taking classes helps me grow. It gives me hope for a better life. I am so happy that I decided to return to school!

Sonserve Sainrus is a student in the ESOL program at South Florida State College at their Hardee Campus. He immigrated to the US from Haiti and continues to work hard to achieve his goal of a high school diploma and higher education. His teacher is Cindy Forkowitz.

Motherhood

I have had many turning points in my life—for example, my first experience teaching in a serious private school, my decisions about marriage, moving to the United States, and many other events I can no longer clearly remember. However, I did not realize the significance of any of these moments until I became a mother. I now have a daughter who is twelve years old.

I would like to share my journey into motherhood. I did not feel any urgency to become a mother immediately after getting

married. Although I occasionally dreamed of having a baby, I did not want to have a child right away.

I still remember the days of my pregnancy as if they were yesterday. One afternoon, while returning home from school, I decided to buy a pregnancy test from the pharmacy because I suspected I might be pregnant. At home, I waited anxiously for the result. When it appeared negative, I felt deeply disappointed, yet something inside me insisted that I truly was pregnant. The next day, I went to the clinic for a blood test. Then came the unforgettable moment: I learned that I was indeed pregnant. I now carried two hearts within me, beating at the same time, though at different rhythms—my baby's heart beating faster than mine. Even now, I feel as if that little heart still beats with mine.

I will never forget the first time I met my baby. I gave birth under epidural anesthesia, surrounded by doctors and nurses in the operating room. My favorite song, *Historia de un Amor*, was playing on the radio. When my doctor placed my baby in my arms, I breathed in her scent and kissed her neck. I can still recall the warmth I felt against my lips; nothing else has ever smelled like her. I wish I had taken more photographs in the operating room. Looking back, I have very few from that day.

Although motherhood carries enormous responsibilities, it also brings immense joy. Being a mother has given me so much. I believe I am a better person now—more patient, more considerate, and more protective. Of course, it is not necessary to become a mother to grow or improve as a person. Motherhood is a choice, just as choosing not to become a mother is a valid choice. No woman should ever feel pressured or obligated to have a child.

Motherhood has transformed my life far more than I ever expected. It has shaped me emotionally and personally, leaving unforgettable memories in my heart. Despite its challenges, it has taught me the deepest form of love. This is the main reason why I would like to have a small business about Anatolian and Turkish cuisine for a better future for my family.

Banu Saruhan is a 48-year-old Turkish national happily married with a 12-year-old daughter. She used to be a chemistry and science teacher in Istanbul. She has been living in the U.S. since June 2023. Her English instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

A Turning Point in My Life

When I got married, everything changed. In 1975, I met my wife. My cousin introduced her to me. We started dating, and it was an on-and-off relationship. But I told her that if she continued to talk to me, we would be married. She didn't believe me and thought I was crazy. A year and a half later, when I was 23 years old, we got married. Two years later, we had a son. Eleven years after that, we had a daughter. We now have five grandchildren. In 2026, we will have been married for 49 years. From the first day, my whole life changed for the better. I thank God for my wife and my family.

Rufus Scott is working towards his GED. He is always in class, ready to read. He is a longtime resident of Jacksonville and is semi-retired, working as a school crossing guard in his neighborhood.

A 180 Turn

I was born in Jacksonville, Florida. I am 31 years old with 2 daughters; Daruinna is 15 years old and Darielle is 10 years old. I have fought many battles to get to where I am now.

My life took a drastic turn after my mom kicked me out. I dropped out of the 7th grade, and I began selling and smoking weed. I hung out in the Eureka Gardens projects. Things became even worse when I lost my Uncle John in front of me and the rest of my family. Losing him messed up my mind even more. I started drinking, taking X-pills, having sex, and smoking cigarettes. I turned into a troublesome teen with no direction in life. I was lost.

I searched for love in the wrong places—in the streets, drugs, alcohol, girls, and pills. I needed a father, but he was not around. When I finally found my dad, I stuck to his hip because I was scared for him to leave out of my life again. I still held a grudge against him because I felt he should have done more or at least tried to do more for me.

Life with no direction was like a free fall for me. No religion, a daddy letting me do whatever I wanted to do, not going to school, no proper guidance, using drugs, and drinking alcohol. I was in

the fast lane driving down a path of destruction on a motorcycle with no helmet. I lived a life of getting in fights, carrying guns, and getting in shoot-outs.

That life led to me getting run over by a car in 2011. I had severe injuries. Yet, nothing changed. Five years later I was shot, which fractured one of my ribs, and I landed in prison for the first time. Prison life has proven to be rough. I have been stabbed in the head and the left side of my neck since being incarcerated.

Since I've been incarcerated, I have found Allah, which means "God" in Arabic. Ever since I've found Him, a lot has changed in my life. I have a direction to follow—the Prophet Muhammad and all his ways. I am following the straight way, turning into the man that I need to be and not the man I previously wanted to be. Becoming a Muslim has changed my life for the better. I'm glad for finding Allah, as He helped me do a 180° turn in my life. My goal is to be an example to others. I am disciplined at being at all five prayers each day. I find this rewarding and calming. I am also fasting for the month of Ramadan. Islam changed my outlook and goals in life.

Darius Sumpter is a student at Adult Education at Putnam Correctional Institute. His teacher is Rebecca Ellison.

Starting Over in a New Country

My name is Cecile Umurerwa. I was born and raised in Rwanda, and I came to the United States at the beginning of 2023. When I arrived, I had already finished high school in my home country. As one of the oldest children in my family, I felt a strong responsibility to help my parents, especially with paying bills.

Coming to the U.S. was exciting, but it was also very challenging. One of the biggest challenges I faced was the English language. In Rwanda, I communicated easily and understood everyone around me. In the U.S., everything felt different. I quickly realized that finding a job without strong English skills is very hard. Many times, I felt frustrated and discouraged because I could not express myself the way I wanted.

Another challenge was adjusting to work expectations. In Rwanda, the way people work and communicate at work is different. Here in the U.S., jobs expect you to understand instructions clearly, speak confidently, and interact with customers and coworkers in English. At first, I struggled to understand what was expected of me. I felt nervous during interviews and worried about making mistakes.

Even though it was difficult, I did not give up. I knew that learning English was the key to building a better future. That is why I joined Clearwater Adult Education Center. Step by step, I began to improve my language skills. Learning English helped me feel more confident, not only at work but also in everyday life.

I am still learning, and I am not yet where I want to be. However, I have made progress, and I continue to improve every day. I am proud of how far I have come. My journey has taught me patience, strength, and hope. I believe that as long as I keep learning and trying, I will reach my goals.

Cecile Umurerwa is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

This Was My Life

I write this story with tears in my eyes and deep pain in my heart. It describes what I lived through in El Salvador during the Civil War (1980 – 1992), a time of violence, loss, and fear that forced many families to flee. On December 24, 1993, my sister, only 22 years old, was killed when armed men with machine guns shot up the car my family was traveling in to meet relatives for Christmas. My younger brother, covered in her blood, tried desperately to save her by driving to the nearest hospital, even though the car tires had been shot. When he finally arrived home, I saw the bullet holes and the blood. At the hospital, the doctors confirmed that she had died.

That night was a nightmare. My parents didn't know anything yet, and I had to live with the agony of bringing my sister's body home after legal medicine released her close to midnight. The next day, family, friends, and neighbors came to support us and help us hold a vigil. It was one of the most painful moments of

my life. After the violence and fear I experienced in my country, I emigrated to the United States. Over time, I met a kind man named Willian Rosa at the Catholic Charities Office. He helped me with my immigration paperwork and guided me through the process of becoming legal in this country.

Thanks to this support, I received my work permit and was able to apply for jobs. I was hired for the first job I applied for and worked there as a machine operator for 20 years. With my first paycheck, I bought a gift for Willian to thank him for everything he did to help me move forward and support my family. I remain deeply grateful to him and to all people who help me without even knowing me. Their kindness has stayed in my heart forever.

Gladys Venezia is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Living the Dream

My name is Madeleine. I was born in Caracas, Venezuela, and my parents are Carmen Ines and Jose Leopoldo. I now have four siblings, three of them on my father's side and one on my mother's side. My mom and dad got divorced when I was five years old, and a few years later, my mom remarried. My mom, my stepfather, my brother, and I moved from Caracas to Valencia, where I studied human resources at a university and got my bachelor's degree in industrial relations.

When I was 25 years old, I married my boyfriend of four years. When I was 28, our daughter Constanza was born, and four years later, Maximiliano was born. When he was one year old, my husband passed away. One year later, I decided to move to Chile, where my little brother lives. During the four years I lived there, I grew up personally and professionally. It was an experience with many ups and downs. The great people I met there gave me a hand professionally, giving me opportunities that aided my professional and personal development. In addition, they offered me kindness and support when I needed it.

Four years later, I decided to move again, but my new destiny was the United States, where my sister, cousins, and uncle live.

I had selected Alpharetta, Georgia, where my cousins live, but God had other plans. Owing to different situations, we couldn't move there, and a friend, who was a co-worker in Venezuela for twelve years, offered her house in Lakeland to live for six months. Since I didn't have my documents yet, I cleaned offices and houses, took care of dogs and cats, and worked remotely there with an international company in Chile.

After seven months, I found my own apartment to live with my kids. Five months later, I found an administrative assistant position in a company, where I met incredible people. I started to understand Portuguese, so now I talk daily in that language at my current job, during meetings with my colleagues in Brazil. I feel very grateful for a lot of things in my life, my children, my family and friends, and my work. My new job allows me to fulfill my life's purpose. It makes me feel that I am contributing to the world through my service as a human resources partner, which allows me to help many people.

Madeleine Veracierta works for a bank in Lakeland, Florida. Her tutor is Neal Steiger at READ Lakeland.

Empty Nest Syndrome

Empty nest syndrome occurs when children leave home. For parents, it is a big and difficult change. The house feels empty, and daily routines suddenly change.

This happened to me last year when my daughter went to college, and suddenly my whole world changed. It was a turning point in my life. A profound sadness overwhelmed me because my main role in life had come to an end. Taking care of my daughter had been my main job for eighteen years.

My husband, my daughter, and I form a small, very close-knit family. Over the past eighteen years, we have moved often and lived in many countries, always together and without any extended family nearby.

I was not only a mother; I was also a friend, a chauffeur, a personal shopper, and much more. I had not worked outside the home since she was born, and my life revolved around the

well-being of the three of us.

I felt sadness because of the void she left behind but also joy as I watched my daughter take small steps toward independence. Seeing how she solves problems and how she makes mistakes has also been a learning experience for me. Letting go of attachments is both sad and joyful at the same time.

This process can take years. I allowed those emotions to fade slowly, and now I am learning to reinvent myself. It feels as if I lost my purpose. Currently, I am working on discovering who I am today.

Maria Mercedes Vigo Saavedra is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. Her teacher is Angela Faiola. She is interested in becoming an entrepreneur.

From Change to Strength

I started my studies at Palm Beach Central High School adult education, where I met my teacher, Pamela. From the first day, her positive energy made a difference. She encouraged me when I doubted myself and reminded me that I belonged there. Each day, I walked into the classroom feeling weak, but I walked out stronger.

Leaving my country was not just about moving to a new place; it was about stepping into the unknown. When I arrived in the United States, I believed I was ready for a fresh start. But very quickly, I realized how different everything was—the language, the culture, even the way people lived. I often felt lost, and I had to begin again from zero.

Today, I stand here proud of myself and confident in who I am. Moving to the United States became a turning point in my life. It taught me that change can be difficult, but it can also lead to growth, strength, and new opportunities.

Lamiaa Zemmita is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

Towards the Path of Opportunities

When the desire to overcome is greater than the difficulties, no obstacle can stand in my way, and I learned that over time. I was born in a country where opportunities are a luxury and scarce, but that's what shaped me and taught me to value whatever little or much one can start with. After seven years away from my country, having to distance myself from my loved ones and going through countless difficulties from which I learned, today I feel proud because that effort is finally bearing fruit in this beautiful country full of opportunities and real dreams. It showed me that giving up is not the best solution, that true warriors are not only those who go into battle but those who know how to rise from it.

The author wishes to remain anonymous.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

Between Roots and New Beginnings

My name is Weslaine. I am from Brazil, 27 years old, and I have two children. I became a mother very young, when I was 19. My pregnancy was extremely difficult, and I faced serious health problems such as diabetes and high blood pressure. Because of the complications, my daughter and I almost died. But God was always taking care of us. When everything finally stabilized, and I was able to see her, she was the most beautiful girl in the world. Her name is Angel, and she truly is an angel—sweet, lovely, intelligent, and always willing to help others.

Angel made me realize that I needed to take better care of myself. Every day when I come to school, I feel like I am doing exactly that. For a long time, I believed I was incapable of learning English. But my daughter, only seven years old, told me, “Mom, go to school because I’m sure you’ll be the best, because in everything you do, you’re the best.” Her words gave me courage. I started at level 3, and today I am at level 5. I am not the best in the world, but I am the best for her, and that gives me the strength to keep learning. With my effort and with the support of Clearwater Adult Education Center, I know I will succeed.

All immigrants who leave their country to live in another one are brave and capable of learning anything we dedicate ourselves to. And we will always have someone somewhere who is proud of us.

Brazil is my roots—my language, my culture, my family, my customs. It is the place that shaped me as a woman. But my story as a mother began in another country. Angel was not born in Brazil, and that makes my journey even deeper. I crossed borders carrying dreams, fears, and a life that was just beginning.

On the day I left, I tried to be strong. Sometimes strength looks like silence. I swallowed my tears, hid my fear, and said, “Everything will be okay,” without knowing how. Arriving in another country felt like learning how to exist all over again. I did not understand the language. I did not know how to explain who I was or how to ask for help. I felt small, invisible, as if I were

starting from zero.

Being an immigrant means living between two worlds—feeling pride for trying and guilt for leaving. There were days when I thought about giving up, but deep inside me, there was a quiet certainty: I had to keep going for my children. So, they could grow up knowing that courage is also an inheritance. Leaving Brazil did not mean abandoning it. Brazil lives in me — in my accent, in my faith, and in the way I love and resist. I carried my country with me, and with it, I began to build a new beginning.

Weslaine Dutra is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Believe in Yourself

Advice is an opinion or guidance that someone gives you about what you should do. Everyone receives advice at different times in life. It is up to you to decide how to use it to motivate yourself.

The best advice I ever received was to believe in myself, even when things are difficult, uncertain, or seem impossible. When you believe in yourself, you will never stop working for what you want. Self-confidence is the most important motivation.

I received this advice when I was doubting myself. I was afraid of failing and often compared myself to others without thinking about what they had gone through to succeed. I sometimes wanted to give up and often said, “I can’t.” Then someone spoke to me and said, “You can. Believe in yourself, work harder, and focus on your goals. If you have the will to do it, you will. Don’t be afraid to fail or make mistakes. These are part of life. When they happen, start again with more energy and confidence. This will make you stronger.”

This advice changed me. It taught me to trust myself, believe in my decisions, and work hard instead of giving up when things are difficult. I learned to stay motivated and focused. This advice reminds me who I am and what I can achieve when I believe in myself.

Jeff Myrlene Emile attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Best Advice I Have Ever Received

Some time ago, I heard the following phrase: “Patience is a tree with bitter roots but sweet fruit.” Although I knew that phrase, I had never understood its meaning through my own experience.

That’s when I had to be patient because my husband emigrated, and I had to wait a long time before we could be together. Those moments were hard, and sometimes I felt that every day, week, and month that passed was a punishment. It wasn’t easy to deal with the distance, and it certainly made the situation worse.

During that time, one of the most important people in my life, my mom, advised me: “Good things take time, so do not rush the process.” After that, I realized that some things are beyond our control, and the best way to handle them is to focus on what we can do. I started spending my time more productively: I learned new skills, listened to podcasts about personal growth, explored places in my country that I had never visited before, and spent more quality time with my family. These activities helped me grow, stay positive, and see life from a different perspective.

Finally, after almost two years of waiting and working on myself, I was able to live with my husband, and it was a true blessing for me. However, living as an immigrant requires a deep sense of patience. Starting a new life in a different country means learning to adapt to unfamiliar ways of living, working, and connecting with others. Some days we miss our family a lot, and there are moments of instability and even frustration when things don’t happen as quickly as we hope. Now, I understand that patience is not something we practice only once. Even now, I remind myself to stay calm, take things step by step, and continue improving my patience. I have learned that patience is a lifelong lesson, helping me deal with problems and enjoy the good moments more.

In conclusion, the advice I received about patience has changed the way I see life. I have learned that waiting and being

patient is the key. It is a chance to grow, to focus on what is really important, and to face life with a calmer mind.

Liana Garcia is a student with Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Perez Lapeira.

Some Life Advice

One day while I was on TikTok, I heard some advice that I had never heard before and that I should have heard before in my life. It was a lady who was giving some advice about life.

She said, “Do not dare get married in your twenties; your twenties are for becoming who you are, and marriage freezes you in a version of yourself that has not finished forming.” She also said, “Don’t you dare have a baby before you understand life.”

The most interesting part for me is when she said, ‘Learn your taste before choosing a partner—your taste in peace, your taste in money, your taste in travel, your taste in lifestyle, in rest, and in ambition.’ If you do not define it, you will live inside of someone else’s preferences; it is the best advice a lady is supposed to hear at the age of puberty.

Angeline Jerome was born in Haiti and is attending the High Intermediate ESOL class with Ms. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is working diligently to improve her skills in English to later obtain a degree in nursing.

The Best Advice I Have Received in My Life

Throughout our lives, we receive many pieces of advice, but only a few stay with us forever. The best advice I have received was not expressed through exact words but through actions, gestures, and a way of living. That advice was given to me by my nona, a woman who deeply marked my life and the life of my entire family and whose example continues to accompany me even in her absence.

My nona was the pillar that kept our family united. She had a special way of bringing us together, of making every gathering

a space filled with love, respect, and understanding. She was a conciliatory woman, always willing to listen, to mediate conflicts, and to seek peace rather than confrontation. She never imposed her opinions, yet her serenity and wisdom made all of us reflect. Thanks to her, I learned that family is not sustained only by blood ties but by patience, dialogue, and constant affection.

What I admire most about my nona is her inner strength. Despite going through difficult moments and carrying many problems, I never saw her give up. She always maintained a positive attitude toward life, even when circumstances were unfavorable. She smiled, kept moving forward, and found light even on the darkest days. Her optimism did not ignore pain; instead, it faced it with courage and hope. Through her example, she taught me that giving up is never an option and that the attitude with which we face our problems can change everything.

Today I understand that the best advice my nona left me was to teach me how to live with love, to preserve family unity, and to never lose faith during difficult times. Her legacy lives on in my memories, in my decisions, and in the way I try to face life. Even though she is no longer physically present, her teachings continue to guide me, reminding me that true strength is born from the heart and that love always unites and sustains us.

Jarvin Lopez is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. His teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

You Need to Save Yourself

The best advice I've ever received was never something groundbreaking or inspirational at first glance. It was quite uncomfortable, but somehow still life-changing: "No one is coming to save you."

When I first heard it, it hurt. It felt inconsiderate, and I instantly became defensive. I knew I was capable of help and capable of the same opportunities I saw my peers and family have. But over time, I realized that statement wasn't meant to take away my hope or my faith, and it didn't deem me incapable. It made me face responsibility. It made me realize that waiting on the "right moment," the "right person," or the perfect circum-

stances was simply just that—waiting—and keeping me stuck.

Sometimes, as an adult learner, it's so easy to blame your past. "If my mom never had that tumor, I would've finished high school." "Maybe if my dad never had that heart attack, I would've never dropped out." Countless "what ifs" to blame, just because it's so much easier to believe that something external will eventually fix things—more time, more support, more motivation. But life doesn't pause, and opportunities don't always arrive wrapped in certainty. If it doesn't challenge you, it will never change you.

This advice forced me to look at myself honestly and ask, "What is Bela willing to do for herself? What is Bela willing to sacrifice to get where she needs to be, even when things are hard or unfair?" Understanding that no one was coming to save me never made me feel alone. After finally understanding, it showed me I had more control than I thought—over my choices, over my efforts, but most importantly, over my future. Even when I'm feeling defeated, unprepared, or afraid, I still have the power to show up and keep going.

This advice taught me responsibility, independence, and accountability. Growth starts when excuses end. Choosing to continue my education wasn't about being rescued; it was about deciding I was worth the effort.

No one ever came to save me, but in the end, I didn't need anyone to. I learned to save myself, with God first, one day at a time.

Saniabelle "Bela" Ramirez is a residential student at Pinellas County Job Corps Center. Bela is working towards her goal of becoming a certified medical assistant. Her teacher is Ms. Holly Heintz from Lakewood Community School.

The Best Advice

I still remember when I arrived in the USA in 2022. I've never forgotten this moment. It was very difficult for us. I had one daughter, and my wife was pregnant. Life was difficult because I didn't speak English. Sometimes when I was looking for jobs, I

found some, but I failed the interview, and I felt it was a waste of time.

One day I sat around the front door of the school waiting to pick up my child. I saw a beautiful lady. Her name was Ms. Pikliz. She asked me a question. I said, "I don't understand." And then she said, "I'm sorry, you're a newcomer?" I said yes. She told me about the school where you can learn English. She wrote it on a piece of paper for me.

Today I feel my life is better because I can speak and understand when I am listening. Ms. Pikliz gave me the confidence to talk to whoever I want. She is one of the best teachers. Ms. Pikliz, how can I ever thank you and Village Readers? I really appreciate it, thanks. And now I have advice for you: When immigrants come to the USA, you can go to school, where you can learn English. It's very essential for you.

Genel Samson is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. His teacher is Siena Mayers (AKA Ms. Pikliz).

The Importance of Mental Health in Students

Mental health is an essential aspect of students' lives because it affects their academic performance, their relationships, and their emotional well-being. Most of the time this happens because of the pressure that parents put on their children, demanding too much without thinking about the consequences. These and many other reasons are what affect the students so much.

Emotional health is how a person feels and thinks and how they manage their emotions in life situations. For students, mental health is so important because this can affect how they study and how they get along with other people, especially their classmates. When a student has good mental health, they can concentrate better, manage stress, and feel more confident. But when they don't have good mental health, problems such as anxiety, depression, and a lot of stress can appear.

A lot of students don't look for help because they are afraid of

being judged; they think they are exaggerating; and they think that going to a psychologist is only for crazy people. They are afraid of being bullied because of it, because that's what most young people think.

The best advice we can give students is not to be afraid, to talk to someone they trust, and to share their problems, not to keep silent. And to parents, don't put so much pressure on your children. We know that parents may not realize how much they affect their children; listen to them, talk to them always, and let them know they can trust you and that you are not their enemy.

In conclusion, mental health is really important for students because it affects how we feel and learn. When students have problems like stress or anxiety, school can be harder. That's why teachers, schools, and families should care and give support. If we talk about mental health and get help when we need it, students can feel better and do better in school and in life.

Linda Gabriela Vallejos is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College, ESOL-6 Advanced. Her teacher is Miguel Dubrocq.

My Bravest Moment

The Day I Found Out How Brave I Could Be

“Every person is capable of more than they realize, but not everyone knows what they are truly capable of.” — Unknown

Sometimes it takes a moment of danger to discover how strong and brave we truly are. I learned this lesson one summer day when I was just a child.

My parents worked a lot, so my cousin and I often spent time on our own. We were used to being independent and exploring the world without much supervision. Even when we went to the lake or the beach with our family, we often wandered off to play and swim by ourselves. One warm weekend, my father took us to a lake to swim and enjoy the sun. I loved the water and could swim very well because my parents had taught me early. My cousin, however, wasn't as confident in the water.

We spent hours jumping off the wooden pier into the cool lake water, laughing and playing. At some point, we decided to swim across to the other side. It seemed easy at first, but halfway across, my cousin began to struggle. She started to panic and sink. I screamed for help, but the music and voices around the lake drowned my cries—no one heard us. I realized I had to do something myself.

Without thinking twice, I began to dive under the water and push my cousin upward from below so she could catch her breath. I had always been good at swimming underwater—that was how I learned before I could even swim on the surface—and that skill suddenly became the thing that could save her life. Over and over, I dove beneath her, lifted her toward the air, and pushed her forward toward the shore. It felt endless, but I didn't stop until my feet touched the sand beneath me.

When we finally reached the shore, we were very exhausted but happy that both of us were safe and alive. Only then did I understand how close she had been to drowning — and what I had just done. That day, I discovered that bravery doesn't always come from strength or age. Sometimes it comes from love and

the instinct to protect someone you care about.

Natalia Bielous is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. Her teacher is Angela Faiola.

Act Even If You Are Afraid

My journey in medicine started when I chose a high school program focused on internal medicine in Guatemala, at a private school in Sibilia. At first, I could not imagine giving injections to other people because I was afraid of needles. But during my final year of high school, I learned many important things about medicine and patient care.

As part of the program, my classmates and I had to complete a certain number of hours as observers and assistants in a hospital, clinic, or health center. We first had to submit applications. Luckily, our first application to a local health center was accepted. Twenty students, including me, were selected for a one-month internship. We practiced everything our nursing teacher had taught us in the school laboratory. I was nervous and scared of making mistakes that could hurt a patient, but I went on the first day. That day was the start of what I consider my bravest moment.

During the internship, we worked in different departments and observed doctors treating patients. We learned how to disinfect instruments, give injections, and check patients' oxygen levels. One day, I treated a patient with a serious dog bite. I was scared when I saw the wound, but I focused on my work. I gave anesthesia and carefully stitched the wound. At that moment, I thought only about helping the patient, and my fear disappeared.

For me, that moment was true bravery. Bravery is not about having no fear but about acting even when you are afraid. Many of my classmates struggled to control their nerves during minor procedures, but I learned to stay calm. During that month, we saw sad and happy moments. We learned about pain, healing, and gratitude. This experience gave me confidence and courage and taught me to care for others. It is one of the most important moments in my life.

Jessica Cardona attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Out of My Comfort Zone

Hi, my name is Beautiful Conner, and I'm 20 years old, from North Carolina, and have been residing in Jacksonville, Florida, for approximately ten years.

My bravest moment happened when I stepped out of my comfort zone and did something I never thought I would do. While thinking about it long and hard, I began to step out on faith.

The issue was coming to grips with making up my mind to face three employees on my job that were causing me to doubt myself while at the company. I wanted to follow protocol and fought within myself before informing my superior because I didn't want to cause conflict.

I had to come to the realization that sometimes you need to ignore negativity instead of entertaining the issue of concern. The situation got so bad that one of the employees approached me and began to question, which I felt would only lead to an altercation. I felt rage in my heart, and my palms were sweating. I feared that I would handle the situation in a healthy manner.

My favorite place to go is the memorial park just to smell the natural air and to read my books under my favorite tree. I also like to look at the radiant water flowing and to enjoy nature's aroma and enjoy walking while feeling the wind blow from the water's current.

Beautiful Conner is a student at the Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Her teacher is Jonathan Marc.

Despite Fear and Uncertainty

The day I was forced to leave my country and settle in the United States was filled with both joy and sadness. At that time, I was deeply involved in my university studies and working hard to build my future. Leaving everything behind was painful, espe-

cially because I carried my greatest dream with me—to become a doctor.

During my first seven months in the United States, I felt completely lost. I constantly wondered what would happen to my dream and whether it was even possible to continue pursuing it. The uncertainty followed me every day. I knew it would be extremely difficult to continue this path in a new country, and at times, the weight of that reality was overwhelming.

One day, I realized that I had to motivate myself and accept my new reality. I understood that I was in another country and that I had no choice but to find a way forward. The transition was extremely difficult, and I went through many dark days. However, I decided to help myself by learning English, knowing that it was the first step toward integration and stability. I began learning through videos and later enrolled in a vocational school.

I studied to become a nursing assistant, and after earning my license, I started planning how I could continue working toward my dream here in the United States. Choosing to keep going despite fear and uncertainty was among the bravest moments of my early life in this country. This journey taught me resilience, determination, and the courage to adapt while holding on to my dreams.

Socrate Emile attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

It's Never Too Late to Begin Again

There was a time I believed I had fallen too far behind to ever catch up. Life had thrown its share of pain my way. Disappointments, heartbreak, and moments where I felt completely lost. I used to watch everyone moving forward while I stood still, pretending I was okay when I wasn't. There were dreams I buried because I didn't think I had what it took to make them real. But honestly deep down, I always knew I wanted more. I just didn't know how to start again after so many years of feeling like I had failed myself.

No one in my family ever graduated from college, and that

weighed on me. We were raised to work hard and survive, but not always to dream big or chase opportunities that felt almost out of reach. So, when I made the decision to go back to school, it wasn't just about earning a degree or getting good grades; it was about rewriting the story for myself and my family. I wanted to be the first to show that it's possible to start over, even when you feel scared and unsure. Moving to a new state, leaving behind everything familiar, was one of the hardest things I've ever done. But it forced me to grow, to trust myself, and to believe that my life could still change for the better.

Going back to school after so long comes with so many challenges. I doubted myself often, wondering if I was smart enough or if I even belonged here. There were nights I cried out of frustration, days when I wanted to quit, and moments when fear tried to talk me out of continuing. But every time I thought about giving up, I would remind myself why I even started in the first place. I've never strived for something so badly: the growth, confidence, and a chance to finally feel proud of myself. Every small step becomes a victory, proof that I was stronger than my excuses and capable of creating a new beginning.

This is an ongoing journey that's taught me that starting over isn't a weakness; it's being brave. I've learned that healing takes time and progress doesn't happen overnight, but small steps still count. I may not have everything figured out yet, but I'm finally learning who I am becoming, and I'm proud of her. If my story can reach even one person who feels lost or they think it's too late to change their life, I hope they see that it isn't. It's never too late to begin again. You just have to believe that you're still worthy of chances, because trust me, you are.

Jazmin Estevez is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Ohree.

Speaking About Change in Cuban Sports

One of the bravest moments of my professional life happened in 2009, when I spoke publicly about the need for change in Cuba's sports system. At that time, Cuba was not adapting to the global reality of professional sports. I shared my opinion on an important national television program where sports discussions

were closely linked to government ideas. After that program, I was never invited again, which showed how sensitive the topic was.

My opinion came from facts that were already clear. Since 1959, sports in Cuba have been closely connected to politics. After the Revolution, professional sports were eliminated, and the government created a system fully controlled by the state. The goal was to make access to sports a right for everyone. In 1961, INDER was created to organize athlete training and international competitions. For many years, this system worked well and helped Cuba become a respected sports nation.

During the 1970s, 1980s, and early 1990s, Cuba achieved great success in sports like boxing, track and field, volleyball, and baseball. These victories were used as proof of the strength of the system. However, much of this success depended on support from the Soviet Union and other socialist countries, which was not often discussed.

By 2009, global sports had changed. After the collapse of the socialist bloc, Cuba faced economic problems. There was less money for facilities, equipment, and training. At the same time, professional sports around the world were growing fast. Athletes were earning better salaries and gaining more opportunities. Many Cuban athletes began leaving the country in search of better conditions.

During the program, I said that Cuba needed to adapt. I warned that refusing professionalism would lead to losing talent. Some people disagreed with me, while others quietly agreed.

Looking back, there is irony in this story. While Cuba has slowly tried to reform its sports system, I changed faster. After many years working in that system, I left and rebuilt my professional life in another country. This experience helped me understand both the strengths and the limits of the system. My personal journey reflects the same struggle between tradition and changes that Cuban sports still face today.

Angel Luis Fernandez is a student at Miami Dade College's Hialeah Campus. Their teacher is Miguel Baleri Dubrocc.

My Journey Through Life

I can modestly say I have had few moments throughout my life where braveness has been fundamental to being able to face them. However, there is a particular one I could say was the bravest moment I have experienced, and this was when the company I work for asked me to move from New York to Miami.

Despite that it wasn't the first time I moved, it was an entirely different scenario because I had lived in the US for one year only. My first immigration was in 2018, when my parents and I moved from Venezuela to Colombia, but I used to go to Barranquilla for the summer every year since I was a kid because it is where my mom was born and where her family is settled down, so it was not as shocking as I thought it would be, especially because we had my mom's family support.

Later, we moved to the US searching for better opportunities, and we experienced a huge change. Nevertheless, we had a smooth adaptation, despite it being a completely different lifestyle, because we faced it together as a family.

Initially, I was hired to work remotely, but after a year the company requested all employees work in the main office, which is in Miami. Then, I had to make a decision between resigning or moving to Miami on my own, since my parents refused to make another change. I took so many things into consideration, and I finally decided to come here to Miami. A friend of mine opened his house doors to me.

At the beginning, it was very difficult because I didn't have a car and I had to depend on someone else to go anywhere, but fortunately my friend helped me a lot with establishing myself. Eventually, I could buy a car, and I gradually began to fend for myself, and I started noticing how good this change was for my life. I met new friends, I knew new places, I worked so hard that I got a promotion, and the most important thing is I feel I have grown up as a person.

In conclusion, I learned that you have to take every situation you face as an opportunity to grow up and improve yourself, even if you don't feel comfortable with it or you are afraid of it, because it could lead you to the start of the life you've been

craving for.

My name is Cristhian Ferrer Hernandez. I am 28 years old, and I was born in Venezuela. I am a petrochemical engineer, and I have been living in the United States since 2023. I just started English classes at Miami Dade College this semester, and I hope this is the start of a new chapter of my career.

My Bravest Moment

It all started when I was at a grocery market called El Zocalo, when I noticed an advertisement announcing the Adult ESOL classes at South Florida State College. I'm a senior lady, and since I moved to the USA, I have been feeling sad because of the English barrier. At the same time, I still feel that I'm capable of enrolling in a learning experience, even though I have my doubts. I felt at that moment the urgency to enroll in the adult ESOL classes.

The moment came to be in the English classroom, and I was terrified and fearful. To my surprise, taking the English placement test was a success. I told myself, I'm one step closer to my goal. At that moment I felt encouraged and more motivated than ever.

The exciting part is that all my fears regarding the Adult ESOL English classes benefited me immensely. This goal has changed me, and I have a positive perspective, to the point that I'm bright and early every day. I am usually the first to arrive to class. Also, I successfully submit my homework every week.

In conclusion, my fears about enrolling in the Adult ESOL classes have turned my life perspective; I'm no longer sad, and I'm more confident and happier about my learning to speak and to write in English.

Daysi Gomez is a student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Maria Schneider.

My Bravest Moment, Migrating

Leaving behind experiences, family, and friends and packing them into a suitcase is one of the most difficult decisions to make. With your heart in your hands and wiping away your tears, you are heading towards what you believe will be your happiness, to a place where you think all your dreams will be possible.

You arrive and face new customs, a new language, and an ocean of difficulties to overcome, but nothing stops you; you become stronger to achieve the success you so longed for. You learn the language and, with it, the culture of a country where you no longer feel like a complete stranger. You make new friends, and gradually you have a new life; you discover abilities you didn't know you had, and being resilient is your best weapon.

Nobody said it would be easy, but in that suitcase that at the beginning of the journey we packed memories and the people you love; today you pack the fulfilled goal of having a profession, the ownership of the house you always dreamed of, and the name of the company you created after long hours of work, after questioning whether it was possible to achieve it.

Today, that look towards the future seems more certain, and you are convinced that the past was not in vain and that what you see around you is the result of having taken that big step and embracing every opportunity that this new country has given you.

Vanesa Gomez is an ESOL-6: Advanced student at Miami Dade College's Hialeah Campus. Their teacher is Miguel Balerdi Dubrocq.

Destination: Freedom

This story begins with my 24-year-old self living in Cuba but with an immense desire to seek a better life for myself and my family. When that moment arrived, bittersweet emotions came all at once, because I was leaving behind two of the most important people in my life: my mom and my dad. However, courage was always with me, and even without having a clear future, the story began.

On September 2nd, I traveled alone from Havana, Cuba, to Managua, Nicaragua. Upon arriving, the person who was supposed to be waiting for me was not there, since my flight had been delayed and there was no way to let them know. There I faced my first problem, but thanks to God, I was never abandoned; good people appeared to help me communicate with my "coyote" (that is what they called the person who was paid to help you make the journey).

I began the journey, and without knowing anyone, I was making friends along the way—friends who became my support and comfort, those who gave me moments of joy amid so many worries. I crossed three countries: Nicaragua, Honduras, and Guatemala, until I finally arrived in Mexico. All of this happened over the course of three days without bathing or even brushing my teeth. I arrived in Mexico on September 5; that day was my birthday, and the greatest gift of my life was being able to take a shower and sleep after three days. In Mexico, I stayed for one month, waiting to get an appointment at the United States border in order to be able to enter this great country. It was a hard month, full of uncertainty and fear for my future and sadness for the people I had left behind, but always with the hope of achieving my goal. During that month, I lived with people I did not know, and living together was difficult with strangers, but little by little we all formed a bond, since we all had the same dream of moving forward.

On September 27, I found out that I already had a date for my appointment at the border, and once again the journey began from the south of Mexico to one of the many border checkpoints that Mexico had with the United States at that time. Fortunately, part of this internal journey was done by plane, since traveling by land was more dangerous. The final part of the trip to reach the border was done by bus, and this was one of the most dangerous moments because of the several border checkpoints we had to cross.

Finally, the long-awaited day arrived on October 17; the line of immigrants was enormous; everyone was given the same opportunity, from people over 60 years old to mothers carrying babies in their arms. By noon, I was already in the land of freedom, in the state of Arizona.

Gabriela de la Caridad Gonzalez Garcia is a 27-year-old Cuban doctor. She has lived in the United States for two years and three months. She is an ESOL 5 student in Professor Carmen Whu's class at Miami Dade College on the Kendall campus.

Dream or Do

Seven years ago, when I arrived in the USA from Venezuela, I was filled with insecurity. I came with a small son and had become pregnant with my second; my arrival was not a planned decision, much less the dream that anyone in South America would dream of. It was a way to survive and, above all, a way to avoid having my second child born again without his father present. As time went by, I didn't know if I might have been depressed after the postpartum period, from the loneliness of a house full of people who only worked and dealt with their own worries, or perhaps also because I longed for what I once was or what I thought made me happy. I had my profession and my own business, and I had been totally independent at 29 years old. I realized then that faith, discipline, hard work, and doing things the right way helped my husband and me build what we have today, a small company that has continued to grow.

Despite the language, new customs, and financial obstacles, we have been able to develop over the years. I also learned that making decisions based on fear and betting on the uncertain, only trusting our skills and mind power, works and that you just need to make sure you do it well and give it your all. Attitude and aptitude play a fundamental role because when you are a mother, you cannot afford to fail. That is despite not being paid for any job for 5 months and surviving on our savings. Today, I can say that we and the two people who have been with us since that madness began are more economically stable, and although in this country we are still considered aliens, we just want to continue growing, and I want to represent my roots with pride; I will continue here, surpassing myself, learning, and being happy, with the certainty that God will be my guide, and every day we will continue like the eagle, trying to hunt and fly as high as possible, always fighting to keep our family together and continue to be a channel of blessing for the people around us.

Vanesa Guillen Aleta is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Bravest Moment

Most people will tell you having a child as a teenager will ruin your life. I have to agree and disagree, because my bravest moment came from being her mother. Yeah, nobody is a perfect mother. We all make mistakes, but you learn from them and grow. Watching my daughter go through school with good grades, getting to high school, and finally doing something neither one of her parents did. Walking across that stage to get her diploma was my bravest moment because she did it for us. The little girl in me did something right. Watching my daughter graduate with honors and decide to go serve her country is my proudest moment.

Kennisha Hogan is a Jacksonville native who attended Robert E. Lee High School. She is the mother of four beautiful children. With IT experience, Kennisha is currently working in the help desk department for a medical company.

Leaving Venezuela

The bravest decision of my life occurred when I chose to leave Venezuela and move alone to Medellín, Colombia. It was the first time I had ever been away from my home and family, and although I felt anxious, I was equally motivated by the desire to begin a new chapter and gain independence.

At the beginning, the experience was extremely challenging. I did not know many people, and I was suddenly responsible for all aspects of daily life—cooking, cleaning, managing expenses, and solving unexpected problems. There were moments when I felt deeply lonely and missed my family intensely. However, these difficulties gradually taught me resilience, discipline, and emotional strength.

Despite the challenges, my time in Medellín also offered diverse positive experiences. I met new friends, explored different neighborhoods, and discovered the city's rich culture, welcoming people, and vibrant food traditions. Each encounter and every new experience contributed to my personal growth and helped me develop greater confidence in myself.

Ultimately, living alone taught me that bravery does not mean the absence of fear; rather, it means confronting new challenges despite that fear. This understanding has shaped the way I approach opportunities and uncertainties in my life. Today, I have embarked on another adventure, living in a completely different country with a new language and unfamiliar customs, but that, undoubtedly, is a story for another time.

Alejandro Nuñez is a very motivated student who is studying ESOL 4 at Miami Sunset Adult & Continuing Education Center. His teacher is Ms. Carmen Whu.

The Strength of Life: A Survivor's Journey

Life has a way of testing people without warning. That happened to Juan Carlos, a Dominican father of two, who went from feeling unusually tired to facing a battle he never imagined would be his own. What started as fatigue and shortness of breath turned into a shocking discovery: a large tumor hidden deep in his mediastinum, pressing against his right lung and heart.

From that moment on, everything changed. His days became a cycle of hospital visits, cold machines, and endless procedures. He went through twenty-one rounds of chemotherapy and seventeen radiotherapy sessions. Each one drained him but, at the same time, reminded him why he was fighting: his wife, his children, and the faith that kept him steady even when he felt he couldn't continue.

Eventually, the doctors said surgery was the only option left. They explained the risks, all of them serious, but the operation moved forward and the tumor was removed. No one expected what came next: Juan Carlos fell into a coma that lasted a month and a half. During that time, doctors suggested disconnecting him; they believed there was no path to recovery. His wife refused. "He'll come back," she repeated. And she was right.

Waking up was not the end of the struggle; it was the start of another one. He couldn't walk, speak, or eat. Every basic action had to be relearned. With therapists guiding him and his family cheering through every small victory, he slowly began to re-

build his life. A step one day, a word the next. His determination became a source of hope for everyone watching him fight his way forward.

Today, Juan Carlos still carries scars, some visible, others buried deeper, but he lives fully again. He works, he laughs, he sits at the dinner table with his wife and children, enjoying moments that once felt out of reach. Hearing his kids call him “Papá” is now a reminder of everything he almost lost and how much he regained.

His journey is more than survival; it’s proof that God exists and still makes miracles, proof of courage, love, and stubborn hope can bring a person back from what seems impossible. As he often says, being alive isn’t luck. It’s a gift. One he intends to honor every day.

Jhonatan Pimentel is a student with Miami Dade College. His teacher is Perez Lapeira.

The Road to My Freedom

On November 13, 2022, I saw my grandfather leaning against the door for the last time. In the midst of his Alzheimer’s, he didn’t understand, but in his tearful eyes I saw a moment of clarity—he knew. That night, I was leaving Cuba. I never hugged him again. The country’s situation worsened each day, and with the degree I had chosen, there were only two paths: censorship or constant persecution. I chose to escape.

I cried desperately against the window of the plane bound for Isla Margarita. I was alone. I had never left my parents behind. Today, I believe that was the last time we were all together. Over time, my family fractured while I tried to rebuild myself far from home.

I traveled from Venezuela to the Dominican Republic and then to Nicaragua. The real journey began in Managua—a foreign country, unfamiliar faces, and the fear of the unknown. I took a bus to Jalapa, near the Honduran border. Then, at night, I crossed the Dipilto-Jalapa mountain range, where peaks rise more than 2,100 meters. I rode in four-wheel-drive trucks under

the rain, and when the tires slipped in the mud, I continued on foot until dawn.

Crossing from Honduras into Guatemala was similar. I traveled inside a completely sealed truck with almost no oxygen. Later, I sailed in a wooden boat for two hours along the San Pedro River until I entered Mexico.

I spent several days hidden in a humble house until it was safe to continue to Cancún. When I finally felt a bit of relief, I flew to Mexicali. I had no documents, and the coyote made a mistake. The police arrested me.

I crossed Mexico for three days, handcuffed. In the immigration prison in Villahermosa, I spent fifteen days. I had to find a lawyer on my own to be released. I will never forget his name, Edgar; it was written with toothpaste on a bunk bed.

In prison, I met extraordinary women who formed a prayer circle every morning. They asked God to help them leave. I will never forget Sarahí, a Salvadoran woman fleeing because an MS-13 member had killed her family. In that place, I truly understood the reasons so many were forced to flee.

When I was finally released, fear followed me with every step. But I kept going. At dawn on December 10, I ran along the Mexican side of the wall with a desperation I had never felt until I reached the point where the fence is lower and you can cross.

There it was—the flag of the United States. The frost scraped my face as tears poured down. Only then did I realize everything I had been through; I was alive. It had been the bravest moment of my life—the one that made me a free woman.

Blanca Amelia Ramírez is a student in the Continuing Education English Program at Miami Dade College. She studied journalism in Cuba and emigrated to the United States in 2022.

Starting Over in the United States

My bravest moment was when I left my country to start a completely new chapter in my life. It was one of the hardest

decisions I have ever made because I spent all my life in Mexico, surrounded by my culture, my family, and the people I loved. I never imagined myself living far away from them, and the idea of leaving my country made me feel sad and scared. However, deep inside, I knew that I needed to take this risk to grow as a person and create better opportunities for my future.

Saying goodbye to my family was especially painful. They have always been my biggest support, and leaving them behind made me feel emotional and vulnerable. I also had to leave the life that I was used to. It felt like I was leaving a part of myself behind. Even though it was difficult, I reminded myself that sometimes we must make sacrifices to achieve our dreams and become stronger.

I flew alone for the first time, traveling from Mexico to Tampa. It was overwhelming because everything was new to me. Knowing that I was going to a place where people spoke a different language was scary. Even though the journey was not long, I was worried. Fortunately, everything went well, and I arrived safely at my destination.

When I arrived in Florida, language was my first challenge. Not being able to communicate made me feel insecure and frustrated. In the beginning, adapting to a new culture and environment was difficult, and sometimes I felt lonely and overwhelmed. However, I knew that learning the language was the key to feeling more confident and independent.

I enrolled in an English school to learn the language. At first, I was frustrated because I could not understand what my teachers were saying. Sometimes I felt discouraged and doubted my abilities, but I did not give up. Each small improvement gave me motivation to keep learning and moving forward.

I eventually got my first job in a restaurant. I had to learn to work in a fast-paced environment. Communicating with other people was difficult because of my limited English, but they were always friendly, patient, and supportive. That helped me feel more confident and less afraid of making mistakes. Studying English made communication easier, and I started to understand instructions better and express myself more clearly. Every day, I felt a little stronger and more capable.

This journey has shown me that being brave does not mean being afraid but having the courage to continue even when things are difficult. Leaving my country, starting a new life, learning a new language, and working for the first time were all challenges that helped me grow. I am proud of myself for taking this step, because it has made me more independent, resilient, and confident in my abilities.

Alondra Rocha is a student in the STAR program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teachers are Mandi Groshans and Keir Borresen.

A Time to Be Brave

My family has just moved to the United States from Mexico. It has been a hard experience for me, but I am trying to be brave. It is hard to start a new life, and it is harder without being able to speak English.

I am scared living here because I don't have family here. My mom is still in Mexico, and I miss her. I came to live here with my husband and sons. I have to provide for them and give them a better life, including education and teaching them to be independent.

I am scared of the immigration raids. I am afraid that since I don't speak well, they will take me. I am trying to learn English. Even though I am struggling, I'm putting in the effort so I can speak and write it.

My goal is to help my children with their homework and to be able to find a job. I know that I must work hard and be brave for my family to have a better life.

Ana Romero-Cecilio is a student in the ESOL program at South Florida State College at their Hardee Campus. She is a recent immigrant from Mexico and started her studies in the summer of 2025. Her teacher is Cindy Forkowitz.

Never Give Up!

Sometimes circumstances change our lives, and we are forced to make sudden and important decisions. It is not always easy, but we need to convince ourselves that we can face any obstacle with strength. We make significant efforts to adapt to new situations. This is my story.

Ten years ago, my son and I left Cuba. We initially thought our journey to the US would last only a few days. However, it turned out to be completely different. After living in Paraguay for eight months, we found a new opportunity to travel to the US, which had been our main goal since leaving our country because of the opportunities this country offers. Additionally, I wanted to fulfill my son's dream of studying computer science.

We left Paraguay and dangerously crossed four countries for fourteen days. We had to run and walk through mud for many hours. Finally, we arrived in Mexico, and I felt we were closer to our goal. I thought I would see my sister, who lives there, and that my son and I could eat hot food, take a shower, and sleep in a bed. I believed our treacherous journey was over, but I was wrong. I did not suspect that the most dangerous moment was still ahead.

At that moment, we were part of a group of eleven people. While walking through a forest, something felt wrong; police were searching for immigrants. Suddenly, I saw a light pointing at us and heard a voice shouting, "Run!" We ran as fast as we could, and I fell to the ground. A few seconds later, a motorcycle passed near us. After the silence, I could only think about my son and scream his name. His reply relieved me. The other people had disappeared; only three of us remained. We were lost! In that moment, my only thought was to arrive safely. I could not lose hope, and I had to take care of my son.

I do not know how many hours we walked in the middle of the night. I was exhausted. My feet hurt, my arms were scratched, and we were thirsty; it felt like a nightmare. But in my mind, I repeated again and again, "Don't give up!" Suddenly, the road split, and we stopped near a big tree. Luckily, the other child found a cell phone in his pocket. We had a signal! We called the coyote immediately. He told us that the rest of the group had de-

cided not to continue without us and were hiding, waiting for us. Finally, we found the correct path and continued together.

Today, my son has a bachelor's degree in computer science, and in a few months, we will buy our own home. Life is not always easy, but if we are persistent and determined, we will never lose our way.

Teresa Ruiz had a happy childhood in Cuba, but she is grateful for her life in the US and for her son's new life. Her instructor in ESOL 5 is Professor Carmen Whu at Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus.

Where My Courage Began

The word “brave” has always been a part of my story. My mom has called me that for as long as I can remember, and sometimes I think that hearing it so often made me believe it... and eventually become it.

When I was 18, I was accepted into the university I had always dreamed of, in the career I was passionate about, pure chemistry. At that same moment, life placed another door in front of me, the opportunity to come to this country. I was afraid, but I didn't hesitate. Because to be brave, you first have to feel a little fear. I left my family, my roots, and everything I had ever known, embracing the unknown with more dreams than certainties.

Today, almost four years after that decision, I look back and recognize myself. I feel deeply proud to be here, to keep moving forward, to work every day to turn those dreams into accomplished goals. And above all, to have had the courage to choose a path that transformed my story... and to keep walking it, even when adversity tries to stop me.

Eliana Sánchez is 22 years old and from Venezuela. She arrived in the U.S. in January 2022. She is a student at Miami Dade College ESOL Program. Her instructor is Caridad Perez Lapeira.

I Can Do Amazing Things

My bravest moment was when I danced in front of 500 people without any preparation. I will explain how it happened from beginning to end.

It was a Sunday morning at 10 a.m., and my two friends and I decided to go to a dance competition in the city center where I was born. The event had a beautiful atmosphere, and people came from all over the country to watch. There were performances and battles to reach the final. The stadium was so full that many people could not find a seat. My friends and I bought front-row tickets so we could enjoy the show better.

The competition started with a group that energized the stadium, and every performance after that seemed even better. After the fifth performance, the host took a break and surprised everyone by asking if anyone in the audience wanted to dance for a short performance. Without thinking, I got up, and the host chose me. When I stepped on stage, I felt like I was in another world. Every eye in the audience felt like it was on me. My legs started shaking, and I whispered to myself, “Why did I do this?” My confidence almost left me.

Then my friends shouted, “You can do it, Thierry!” Other people also cheered for me. I felt strength inside, and I said, “Yes, I can do it.” I stopped feeling afraid. I started dancing, doing a few movements at first, and the audience cheered. I gained more confidence and danced without stopping. When I finished, everyone applauded, and my friends hugged me with joy. My feet were shaking because I could not believe I had done it. This moment changed my life. I learned that fear cannot control me and that confidence and courage can help me do amazing things.

Jean Thierry Sanon attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Gentle Voice

On the night of January 12, 2010, in Haiti, my beautiful country, once called “The Pearl of the Antilles,” a very strong earthquake occurred, and so many screams were heard. It was the

first time in my life I had experienced a situation with so much fear. The ground shook beneath my feet. The walls rumbled and everything seemed to fall around me. Fear was a cold shadow gripping my heart, and the silence turned into a heavy, frightening wind.

Suddenly, a soft light shone near my ear. An angel appeared, calm and bright, like a lighthouse in the storm. It whispered, “Breathe, be brave, you’re not alone.” Its words were rays of sunshine in the dark night, feathers gently brushing my soul. My fear lightened like snow melting in the morning, and a quiet strength filled my heart.

I felt courage grow in me like a rooted tree. I stood up slowly and stepped forward carrying the angel’s light with me. Even as the ground continued to shake, I felt a magical peace inside. That night, I understood that true courage comes from a gentle voice, love, strength, and hope. Even in the darkest moments, a light can guide our steps.

Yolande Senatus is an ESOL student with Ms. Siena (Ms. Pikliz) at Village Readers Family Education in Delray Beach.

Why So Much Violence

Two years ago, I never thought that tragedy would strike at the end of the day. I was going home from school in a taxi when some armed young men ordered the driver to stop and told everyone to get out. They tried to rob us and take all our belongings, but another young man and I had the same idea: to escape. The armed men were planning to execute people after they took their belongings. The other guy and I ran away. They saw us and started shooting. I didn’t have much in my bag, which is why I was able to run as fast as I could. One of the bullets hit the other guy, and he fell. I could not do anything for him because they kept shooting. And for me, stopping seemed impossible because I could feel the projectiles hitting the walls. There were no police or other civilians because everyone was scared. It was just me, my life, and my bravery. After a while, I didn’t hear any more shots and managed to escape. An old man saw me and said, “Hey, little one, come over here.” Without thinking, I ran to take refuge with the old man. He had two children, and they told me

to calm down, gave me water, and handed me a phone to call because I had lost mine while running. I had to wait almost 40 minutes for my father to arrive.

Two months later, my uncle, who was already living in the United States, heard about this awful story and contacted me to see how I was. He informed me that the government had established a program that allows family repatriation. He said he could do something for me because the people who were trying to find me believed I had seen their faces and that I was going to report them to the police, which wasn't the case, as 95% of that unit had friends on the other side. After my uncle submitted the application for me to come to the USA.

I stopped going to school for three months, and then they responded to my uncle's request, and that's how I ended up here. It's a little peaceful and calm, but it helped me a lot.

Here, I understood that there was hope to continue my studies and go to university to pursue my dreams and become the man I've always dreamed of being. I trust one day my country will return to how it was before, peaceful, and I can go home.

Jean Arlly Thesalus attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Goals and Ambitions

A Better Life

My goal is to receive my GED so that I can create a better lifestyle for my daughters and me. I want to be a role model for them. Receiving my GED will create more job opportunities for me, as well as more education. I would also like to receive my GED so that I can further my career in the dentistry field as a dental hygienist or dental assistant. It is my passion to help people learn proper and effective dental hygiene skills and help people build higher self-esteem with their smiles. Receiving my GED will also mentally and emotionally decrease a lot of my anxiety. Not only that, but I would be very proud of myself for that accomplishment. Receiving my GED will put me in a position to be able to give my daughter so much more than what I can currently do for them.

Another goal for myself would be to save \$10,000 in my savings account for emergencies for my family, because I am a first-time homeowner. This is very important to me. One day I will be financially stable for my family and me. I give myself five years to accomplish these goals. I am 35 years old, and my goals are to accomplish everything that I desire by 40 years old. It will happen! Work hard and maintain consistency, and with God by my side, it is possible.

Tyreeka Abercrombie is a first-time homeowner in Jacksonville, Florida, with 2 beautiful daughters, 11 and 3 years old, respectively. She works as a team-lead certified nursing assistant and loves the health care field. She loves to laugh, love, and be a mother to her two beautiful 11- and 3-year-old daughters that mean the world to her. She is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida under the instruction of Jason Michael.

My Dreams

My name is Dagnia Aguilar. I am 28 years old and originally from Cuba. I currently reside in the United States, where I am studying to become a psychologist—a career that inspires me to understand the human mind and promote emotional well-be-

ing. As a future psychologist, my objective is grounded in a deep dedication to understanding human behavior, promoting psychological well-being, and advancing mental health awareness. As I build my life in the United States, a country that represents diversity and opportunity, I am determined to achieve excellence in both academic and clinical settings. My primary goal is to become a licensed clinical psychologist who applies evidence-based practices to help individuals overcome emotional and behavioral challenges while fostering resilience and personal growth.

The field of psychology has always fascinated me because it combines science, empathy, and human connection. I am particularly drawn to clinical and counseling psychology, with a focus on trauma recovery, emotional regulation, and cross-cultural adaptation. To achieve this, I plan to pursue graduate studies leading to both a master's and doctoral degree, which will equip me with the specialized knowledge and practical experience required to provide high-quality psychological care and uphold the ethical standards of the profession.

In addition to clinical practice, I aspire to conduct research exploring the relationship between cultural identity, migration, and mental health. Having personally experienced the process of adapting to a new culture, I recognize the emotional and psychological challenges that such transitions can bring. My goal is to contribute to studies on acculturation stress, identity formation, and social support, promoting culturally competent therapeutic approaches and making mental health services more inclusive and accessible to diverse communities.

Beyond professional success, I value compassion, balance, and purpose in my everyday life. I envision establishing a private practice that emphasizes inclusivity and holistic wellness while also engaging in community initiatives that promote early intervention and reduce the stigma surrounding mental illness. Ultimately, my ambition is not only to become a skilled psychologist but also to be a compassionate advocate for human dignity and psychological well-being, building a meaningful future in the United States through service learning and social responsibility.

I am also passionate about languages and am studying English to strengthen my communication skills and expand my opportunities. I believe that mastering this language will help

me integrate better into the country and provide quality care as a future mental health professional. My goal is to continue learning, growing, and helping others through knowledge, empathy, and dedication.

Dagnia Aguilar is a talented student who has big dreams. She studies ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her instructor is Professor Camren Whu.

From Sadness to Success

Today it is a pleasure for me to explain to you something about my goals and ambitions. My life in my country was not so easy, which was the cause of the death of my mother.

If you can, imagine a situation when a girl is only 10 years old and living without her mother. I was so smart when I was a little student, but I had been disappointed because of the death of my mother, which affected every aspect of my life.

After a period of sadness, my long-suffering propelled me to regain my strength and go back to school. I reminded myself that my victory was still waiting for me, so I must continue to learn and find the road to success.

After an extended period at school, I took the official test and did not pass, disappointed, yes, but I kept thinking about my goals.

I prayed to God every day to tell him about my goals. I already know that he always agrees when you are doing good. A day like today, he afforded me the opportunity to come to the United States of America.

When I arrived in the USA, I knew I had to attend school; I saw that there were a considerable number of opportunities to choose from. Nobody wanted me to go to school because I had my son with me, but I registered for an adult ESOL class at ATC and began learning English regardless of the lack of support.

Even though I met with significant difficulty, I continued with my ESOL class, and, in addition, I took my CNA class. In the

future, I will become a certified nursing assistant. I do not plan to stop there; I will continue my learning to become a licensed practical nurse. My advice is to never ever give up on your dreams and goals for any excuse in your life.

Guerline Jasmin Alce. She is from Haiti, Cap-Haitien. She is a student in the Adult ESOL program at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus, with Ms. F. Johnson. Guerline is working towards her goal to become an LPN in the future.

My Goals and Ambition

Since I was little, I've always been interested in animal welfare. I decided to study veterinary medicine and graduated in 2019. In 2021, I had the opportunity to come to this country (the United States). God was very merciful to me. For the next five years, I worked as a dog groomer. Over time, I've seen that it's a very profitable business.

But there's one skill I haven't fully developed yet, and that's the English language. When I heard that Palm Beach Central High School offered English classes, I was very happy. I looked for information and enrolled. My goal for 2026 is to complete the course, with the ambition of improving my vocabulary and being able to read, speak, and write English fluently.

All this learning will lead me to my second goal for 2026. I want to build my own business, with the ambition of financing a mobile grooming service and building my own client base to achieve optimal and stable financial growth.

Anything is possible in this life... you just have to have a dream and work towards it to make it come true!

Yohana Amaya is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

My Dream for My Future

My dream for my future is to learn English perfectly so I can

find a good job. I also dream for my family to reach their goals in life to be successful. Another dream I have for my future is to buy and own a house for my family. I want to also stay healthy until I'm really old and be able to enjoy being with my grandkids.

Maria Antonio is an ESOL student at the Family Literacy Impact Program, School District of Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Carolyn Deli.

A Tall Order

I am writing this essay to articulate my life goals and ambitions. My primary goal is to achieve fluency in English, graduate, and then complete my law degree, which I began in Haiti. Law is a field I deeply love; I am fascinated by the process of judgment and the way lawyers advocate for their clients. Since childhood, I have been captivated by lawyers, watching them on television as they plead cases and judges make final decisions.

I genuinely enjoy watching these proceedings, and I sometimes practice arguments at home. I believe I have a natural aptitude for law, as people often confide in me about their lives, including their marital difficulties. I listen to both sides, offer thoughtful advice, and, often, things improve. Therefore, one of my main goals is to complete my law degree. I had already reached my fourth year at the Faculty of Law and Economic Sciences in Gonaives before coming to the USA, and now I aim to finish my studies here.

Ultimately, I want to work in law, achieve financial success, start my own business, and buy a house. I also dream of marrying my soulmate, having two wonderful children, and building a life filled with love, respect, wisdom, and tolerance. I envision us serving God together and living a beautiful life with Jesus at the center. My ambition is to achieve all these goals: build a large house, run a successful business in my country, own a beautiful car for my business, and become a millionaire through my hard work and dedication.

Alexandra Cean attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

As a Mother and a Student

As a mother and as a student, my goals and ambitions are centered on creating a better future for myself and my daughter. Being a mother motivated me to work hard, stay focused, and never give up even when balancing schoolwork and family responsibilities feels challenging.

As a student, my goal is to complete my education successfully and gain the knowledge and skills needed to build a stable career. I want to become financially independent, improve my opportunities, and set a strong example for my child by showing the importance of education, discipline, and perseverance.

As a mother, my ambition is to provide love, support, security, and guidance for my daughter. I want to teach her confidence, respect, and determination, showing her that hard work and education bring opportunities. I also hope to teach her the value of responsibility, resilience, and self-belief through my own actions.

Overall, my greatest ambition is to balance motherhood and education successfully, proving to myself and my child that it is possible to overcome obstacles and achieve meaningful goals through dedication and determination.

Pascale Cetoute, who was born in Haiti, is currently attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is a mother and a student, and she also works. She is improving her English skills to reach her academic and career goals. Pascale hopes to continue her education and build a better future for herself and her family.

How to Become an Orthodontist

My name is Sunnary Comerford. I was born in Cambodia. I came to the United States 16 years ago. Moving to the USA was a very challenging new chapter. Back in Cambodia I used to live in the city, but once I moved to Massachusetts, I lived in the countryside. It took me a while to adapt to the new area. For example, it was very quiet, and we rarely saw people on the street.

Living in a country where I didn't speak the language wasn't

easy. In September 2024, my family and I moved to Palm Coast. I researched education in the English language. Luckily, I found FTC to help improve my communication. So, I have two goals: one is to study English, and the second is to become an orthodontist. FTC is helping me to achieve my goals and dreams for an orthodontist degree.

I'm so grateful that FTC has directed me to reach my inspiration for my future goals and dreams, and thanks for letting me have this opportunity.

Sunnary Comerford is a student at Flagler Technical College, whose teacher is Francesca Mullinax.

Dedication to Learning

My name is Chevena Delias. I am working hard to improve myself to have a better future. I would like to share my goals and ambitions with you.

My goals and ambitions are to grow academically, spiritually, and personally. I want to improve my English skills by staying focused and building habits that make me stronger. I hope to pursue a career I like, become independent, and make a positive impact on the people around me. I am determined to keep learning and work hard toward the future I want.

Most everyone has ambitions that guide their life, and my ambitions motivate me to work hard and to build a strong future. One of my main ambitions and goals is to become a nurse; it is my dream and passion to help people who are sick and have an influence on their healing. I want to support my community and make a positive difference in the lives of patients. Nursing inspires me because it requires compassion, patience, and dedication. Becoming a nurse will allow me to use my skills and compassion. I am determined to study hard, stay focused, and follow the path that leads me to this career.

In conclusion, my goals and ambitions will give me purpose, strength, and confidence in who I am and who I hope to become by staying motivated and determined. I believe I can achieve my dreams of becoming a nurse and use my skills to help others.

Chevena Delias, born in Haiti, is attending a high intermediate ESOL class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is here to improve her English so she can attend the university. She is working on her communication skills to speak more confidently in public.

Three Step Journey Toward My Goals

The first step in my journey is to perfect my English language skills. By achieving fluency and proficiency in English, I will be able to access the best educational resources available. This solid foundation in English will support my academic and professional aspirations.

My second step is building on my improved language skills; my next goal is to pursue a degree in business administration. Through this program, I aim to master essential management and financial strategies. Gaining this knowledge will prepare me for leadership roles and further my understanding of the business world.

Finally, my third step: I intend to use the education and experience gained from the previous steps as a foundation to launch my own business. My ultimate objective is to create value and generate opportunities within my community, contributing positively to its growth and development.

Nelky Dorvil, who was born in Haiti, is currently attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is highly motivated to improve his English language skills to pursue a degree in business administration.

How to Succeed in Life

Success in life does not come easily. To succeed, you need a strong mindset and the courage to keep going when things are hard. Every step you take teaches you something, and every mistake gives you a chance to improve. When you learn from your mistakes, you become stronger and more confident. This helps you face challenges and not give up when life becomes difficult.

Having a plan for the future is also very important. Making a

plan means thinking about where you want to be in the next few years. You should ask yourself honest questions about your goals and write your answers down. When you understand what you want, you can set deadlines for your goals. Deadlines help you stay focused and remind you to keep moving forward.

One helpful way to organize your goals is by using the SMART method. SMART means specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-based. When your goal is specific, it is easier to understand what you are working toward. Measuring your progress helps you see improvement over time. Choosing goals that are realistic keeps you motivated. If you do not have all the skills you need, you can always learn and improve. Your goals should also be meaningful and useful for your life or future career. Setting a deadline helps you stay disciplined and organized.

I would like to share my own experience using the SMART method. I studied computer engineering in Haiti, and I have always enjoyed working with technology. When I moved to the United States, continuing my career was difficult because it felt like starting again from the beginning. Even though my degree was not accepted here, I believed in myself and my abilities. I decided to look for work related to technology.

After researching different opportunities, I found a job at DHL as a ramp agent at the airport. While working there, I earned a certification as an international specialist. Later, I found another job as an inventory clerk at a company where I use computers every day and work with modern technology. This experience helped me learn about supply chain management, and I continue learning new things each day.

After work, I also attend school to improve my English, even when I feel tired. Sometimes I feel discouraged, but I remind myself of why I started. My goal is to earn my bachelor's degree in the United States and continue improving my future. I set deadlines for myself and stay motivated even when challenges appear.

To succeed in life, you need more than dreams. You need effort, planning, and self-discipline. Using clear goals helps you stay focused and realistic. Success is not about where you begin but about how much you are willing to work every day.

Kervens Duzorin is a student at Miami Dade College ESOL. Their teacher is Miguel Balerdi Bubroicq.

Goals and Ambitions of a Newcomer

Moving to a new country is not easy because it means facing challenges and making sacrifices. However, it also means having new opportunities and starting to build what many people call the “American dream.”

In Cali, I learned that nothing comes without effort and determination. As a child, I knew that it was necessary to work hard to achieve what we wanted. Having this mindset led me to earn the highest grades in school. Later, I started working as an administrative assistant at a well-known company in my city. I subsequently climbed the corporate ladder, eventually becoming the company webmaster. This experience taught me the importance of organization and responsibility.

Hard work, academic preparation, and especially the support of my family helped me understand that dreams do not come true by themselves but require commitment and preparation. Since opportunities were limited, every chance to learn or improve became especially important to me. This way of thinking helped shape my character, and even today, it supports me on this new path in the United States. The advice I received was that education and respect are keys to success; I follow it.

When I arrived in this country, life was not easy with a different culture and language. At the beginning, I struggled with the language; however, day by day, I improved a little. Sometimes I felt frustrated when I could not express myself well, but those moments also motivated me to continue studying. Although the challenges were significant, they also made me stronger. I realized that problems are not walls that stop you; they are tests that prepare you for the future. Here, I learned that with patience and commitment, a door opens, and determination always brings results.

Now, my goals are clear. I want to grow personally and professionally. First, by improving my English. Second, by following a path in technology and the digital world, such as marketing

or website design. I also want to be surrounded by inspirational people who help me learn more about this country. I seek stability, economic independence, and a calm life for my family and myself. For me, success is not only about money but also about being an example for others to achieve grandiose things in this country.

Every step I take in the United States brings me closer to my dreams. My story is just beginning, and I trust that where there is a will, there is a way. I am confident that I will achieve what I want. For me, the American dream is not only an idea but also a real goal built day by day with dedication, patience, and faith in oneself. I believe that one day I will look back and feel proud of every step I have taken, even the difficult ones, because they are an essential part of my journey.

Joel Garcia is from Cali, Colombia, where he learned values, discipline, and everything that guides him now in the United States. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

To Be Successful

My goals are to improve my English significantly, go to college, and learn another language, French. I want to have a good job and become a nurse. I also want to develop new habits, such as going to church more often, waking up early, going to bed early, reading more about business management, taking better care of my physical and mental health, going to the gym, and eating healthily. I hope to achieve all of this with God's help.

My ambition is to become a professional, excellent nurse. I also want to own successful businesses, manage companies and finances, and build a strong online presence by sharing positive, inspiring content. I dream of having my ideal home and cars, helping my mother, my family, people in need, and animals. I want to continue learning about my abilities and improving myself.

In general, my goal is to be very successful in every area of life, with God's guidance. I believe that with hard work, dedication, and faith, I can achieve my dreams and make a positive difference in others' lives.

Niurka Georges attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Goals for the Future

My goals are simple. I want a better future and a better life. I came to the United States to work, learn, and improve myself. I believe that education and effort are very important.

My first goal is to learn English better. English helps me communicate with people and feel more confident. Sometimes English is difficult for me, but I study every day. I practice in class, at work, and in my daily life. I want to speak English without fear.

Another goal is to have a stable job. I want a job where I can grow and feel proud of myself. I want to earn more money and have a better life. Having a good job will help me feel safe and independent.

I also want financial stability. I want to pay my bills on time and live without stress. My dream is to live in a comfortable home and not worry every day about money. I am learning how to manage my finances and plan for the future.

Finally, my goal is to become a better person. I want to be responsible, patient, and positive. I know success takes time, but I will not give up. Step by step, I am working to build a better future.

José González is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College. He is working hard to improve his English and build a better future. His teacher is Miguel Dubrocq.

My Dreams for the Future

I would like my dreams to come true. For the future of tomorrow, I hope to have a big business. With this business, I want to give jobs to many people and help many families.

My dream is to help children who can't go to school. I want to

pay for their education so that they can have a better life. Education is very important, and I believe that all children should have the chance to learn.

Right now, I already have a small business. My business is called Dieude Hair Beauty. I work with hair, and I would like my business to grow bigger. One day, I hope it can reach many states.

When my business grows, I will use the money to help children in Haiti who can't go to school. I would also like to help children here in the United States if they can't study. I want to help people in need, people who can't eat or pay their rent.

In Haiti, in the church I went to, I always tried to help people. Helping others makes me happy. My dream for the future is not only to succeed but also to give hope and love to those who need it most.

Dieudonne Helas is a student at North Tech / Online Site. Her teacher is Aimee Firvida. She is originally from Haiti.

Cosmetology: My Passion

I grew up in Haiti, and cosmetology has always been my passion. From the age of fourteen, I dreamed of learning makeup and building a career in this field. Although I could not complete formal training at that time, I remained determined to pursue my passion. Later, I graduated and decided to focus on hairstyling, taking both a hairstyling course and a makeup class to develop my skills.

After completing my training, I began working in the industry. This experience allowed me to refine my techniques, gain confidence, and demonstrate my abilities to clients. Working in cosmetology taught me patience, discipline, and the importance of continuous learning, all of which have strengthened my dedication to this career.

My long-term goal is to continue growing professionally, attend a prestigious cosmetology school, and obtain a professional license. I aim to further enhance my skills, stay up to date with

industry trends, and provide high-quality services to clients.

Cosmetology is more than a job for me; it is my passion and my purpose. I am committed to working diligently, learning continuously, and sharing my expertise to make a positive impact in this field. This career allows me to express my creativity while helping others feel confident and empowered, and I am determined to succeed in it.

Olmika Israel attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

I Refuse to Give Up

Today, it is a real pleasure for me to share my personal story. This month marks two years since I left the country where I was born, Haiti. I left because gangs attacked the house where my family and I lived. Even after we were forced to move, we were still in danger. Because of this situation, I had no choice but to leave my country and seek asylum in the United States.

When I arrived in the United States, I decided to go to school immediately because I did not speak English. Education is very important to me. My goal is to go to university and study psychology. I want to become a psychologist because one day my country will need my help. Haiti is facing many serious problems. People are dying every day, families are broken, and many friends I grew up with have suffered or disappeared. Psychologically, many Haitian people are not well, especially young children. The violence and insecurity they see every day are too much for their age. These children need emotional and psychological support, and I want to be someone who can help them.

I know that achieving this dream will not be easy. Life as an immigrant in the United States is challenging, and current immigration policies make the journey even harder. However, I refuse to give up. With determination, hard work, and faith, I believe I will achieve my goal. I love my country deeply, and everything I am working for today is for a better future for myself and for Haiti. Thank you for giving me the opportunity to share my story.

Mahiakovskhy Jean attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Building a Better Future

My goals and ambitions guide me in the direction I want my life to go. One of my main goals is to continue improving myself every day. I want to work hard, learn new skills, and build a better future.

Another ambition I have is to build a stable career. My ultimate dream is to become a nurse, help everybody with a disease, give reliable results, and feel proud of what I do. I know it will take time and dedication, but I am ready to work for it.

I also want to become more confident and stronger mentally. My goals are to stay positive, focused, and never give up on myself. My goals motivate me to make good decisions and push myself forward.

These goals and ambitions are important to me because they remind me that I have a purpose and a bright future ahead of me. Every small step I take brings me closer to becoming the person I want to be.

Withnie Jean was born in Haiti and is currently attending Level 5 ESOL classes with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is diligently working to improve her English skills to obtain certification in the field of health science.

Become a Lawyer

My goal is to become a lawyer. I have wanted to be a lawyer since I was very young. I have always believed that I can achieve this dream.

Now that I am no longer in my home country, I know I must make extra effort to learn English. Improving my English is an important step toward reaching my goal, and it motivates me to keep moving forward.

I am an ambitious person, especially when it comes to what I

love. That is why I always push myself to work hard and succeed in everything I do. I believe that with determination, effort, and education, I can continue following my dream of becoming a lawyer.

Jean Lovens Joseph attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Career Goals

I am pleased to share my goals and ambitions. Before I discuss my aspirations, it is especially important for me to explain why I am focused on learning English and how significant English is in my life. Without strong English skills, I cannot pursue my chosen profession, and this goal is central to my plans.

My goal is to become an air conditioning technician. I want to learn the skills needed for this job and, in the future, start my own air conditioning company. This dream encourages me to study, improve my English, and stay focused on my education.

Wood Edzer Joseph, who was born in Haiti, is currently attending the ESOL Intermediate class at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus, with Ms. F. Johnson. Wood is highly motivated to improve his English skills to later obtain certification in the field of air conditioning.

Creating My Own Product

Everyone has goals and dreams in life. Goals help us move forward and understand what we want to become. My goals and ambitions are very important to me because they give my life meaning and motivate me to work hard for the future.

One of my main goals is to succeed in my studies and earn my English degree. Education is very important today. When I finish my studies, I will feel proud because it will show that I worked hard and did not give up. Earning this degree is my first goal.

Another important goal is to improve my skills, especially my communication skills. Learning and practicing new skills will help me understand the world better and adapt to different

situations. These skills will help me both in my personal life and in my future career.

One of my biggest ambitions is to create my own brand. I helped my older brother develop his skincare line, which is now on the market, and I feel confident that I can launch my own products. I want to do more than just work for others. I want to build my own business to gain independence and freedom. Creating products will allow me to showcase my creativity and help people by offering high-quality, useful products.

Cardenflore Jourdain attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Born to Make a Difference

My name is Cosemantha. I was in the last year of high school at Ernst Duval, Port-au-Prince. I did not have the chance to get my diploma in Haiti. When I came to the U.S.A., I was passionate about learning. Now I am in level 5 at Atlantic Technical College, and I want to improve my English.

I wish I were an accountant, but I love taking care of people, which is why many people see me as a nurse. I have found ten reasons why I should be a nurse.

I grew up without a mother and father; I just grew up with an aunt. My whole dream was to finish school and to learn accounting because I wanted to be an accountant, but I also care about people. As long as someone is around me, I am supposed to be okay, and I am understanding and a patient person. So, I came up with these ten reasons why I think I should be a nurse in the U.S.

Here they are: job stability, flexibility, deep fulfillment from making a direct impact on lives, providing comfort, advocating for patients, enjoying lifelong learning, advancement, strong compensation, and global opportunities, making it a respected career for those seeking purpose and growth.

That is why nursing is the way for me to make a difference in other people's lives. It combines my natural empathy and desire

to help people. Nursing gives me a chance to positively touch people's lives, which has always attracted me to the thought of doing so.

To conclude, it is important for me to learn. I still like accounting, but my plan for the next 4 to 5 years is to improve my English and take the GED test, then enroll in a nursing program.

Cosemantha Laguerre, born in Haiti, is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is working to improve her skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of health science.

Never Give Up

When I was a little child, I always thought about how difficult life is. I always dreamt of traveling around the world, getting a good education, getting a nice car, and getting good security, but life is not easy like that. Sometimes circumstances don't favor you, and no matter how hard you try, there are times when you don't achieve what you want. But... despite that, we shouldn't give up. What kind of people would we be if we didn't even try? Even when everything and everyone is against you, you must get up and fight for what you want most. I once read a quote that captivated me deeply and still motivates me during difficult times. "What a shame for a man to reach old age without seeing the beauty and strength his body could have achieved," and thanks to that, I can get up every day to improve every part of myself.

That is the reason why I'm here, to have everything I dream of improving as a person, as an individual, and as a member of society. I try to be better every day and achieve everything I've ever dreamed of. I dream of having everything I need: health, money, and family. I know you can't have everything in this life, but I try to find a balance so I can experience different aspects of my life. They say you learn something new every day, and I'm sure that's true. I strive to be at the top because I remember when I was little, I had nothing. It wasn't my fault to be born without resources, but it will be my fault if I die without them.

Music helps keep my motivation afloat, because there are days

when I feel down, but those lyrics inspire everything in me. All those songs represent my story; they portray it as if it were me, from beginning to end, from starting with nothing to reaching the top. All those symphonies reach the deepest parts of me.

Many say that money isn't the most important thing in the world, but from my perspective, it's one of the most important things. You might ask, "Why?" Well, my answer is that with it you can buy food, you can get a good education, and you can help your family, not only yourself, but you can also help those most in need.

I just hope that everything I ever dreamed of as a child comes true.

Edwin Lopez is a student in the STAR program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teachers are Mandi Groshans and Keir Borresen.

My Dream for My Future

My dream for my future is to have my own auto repair shop. I have always loved working with cars and solving mechanical problems. When I fix a car, I feel proud because I know I am helping people stay safe on the road.

In my shop, I want to give excellent service, be honest with customers, and create a place where people can trust my work. I also dream of teaching young students about mechanics so they can learn a skill for their future.

Having my own business will give me the opportunity to support my family and provide a better life for my son. I know it will not be easy, but with hard work and dedication, I can make my dream come true.

My dream is not only about cars but also about building a future full of hope and success.

Jesus Lora Tellez is an ESOL student at Family Literacy Impact Program, School District of Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Carolyn Deli.

Imagination & Vision

My name is Shnaider Lormeus, though many people call me Jeski for short. From an early age, I have always had visions for many things simultaneously. Despite being young, my perspective on life and my understanding of the world should not be underestimated. I often see the world in unique ways, perceiving aspects of life that others might overlook. One aspect of my character is that I do not notice people's hypocrisy until they actually act in a hypocritical manner, revealing their true intentions only when they are tempted into such behavior.

At some point in our lives, many of us have imagined ourselves as the main character in our own story, even though we may not fully understand why our minds think this way. This phenomenon illustrates how our bodies tend to follow the direction set by our brains, sometimes operating on autopilot or experiencing mental rumination and brain fog.

Personally, I allow my brain to guide me toward my ambitions. My goals include becoming an orthopedic technician, a medical coder, and pursuing further studies in business management & analysis, as well as database application development & programming. Additionally, I am interested in plumbing. These aspirations represent the path I am determined to follow.

My ambition is to be present in the future...etc.

Shnaider Lormeus was born in Haiti and is attending the Intermediate ESOL class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is working to improve his skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of health sciences.

My Dream for My Future

Everyone has dreams because dreams are very important for us. They give direction and motivate us to work hard to achieve

our goals. Without dreams, there won't be any desire to pursue our objective, and that is why we should always dream. It is the seed of our future. That's why I'm always dreaming. Today, I'm going to talk about a few of my dreams.

First, I would like to open a nonprofit organization in my hometown, Aquin, a city in Haiti, with the main objective of feeding the students in the lower-class families. Most of these students go to school without meals and come back home with no hope of having even a bite, or if they find something to eat, it's not healthy food.

We know hunger can cause physical side effects like headaches, weakness, stomach growling, and shakiness. It can also cause mental and emotional effects, such as irritability, fatigue, difficulty concentrating, depression, anxiety, etc. Because of hunger, a lot of students can't get good grades at school. Some of them leave school early to go to work, selling water or cleaning cars on the street. This interruption in education is a big issue for society. Children without schooling is very bad for any country because they are the future of our society.

My second dream is to open a social club for children where I can share with them the customs or traditions of our country. We tend to lose our traditions. I want to teach children the values my parents taught me for a better life: believe in yourself, work hard, be generous etc. I want to gather all children together for social or recreational activities, forming a community and fostering relationships. I want to teach them how to appreciate our country and give love to one another.

Finally, my third dream is to help poor and suffering older people in my hometown to find medical care. I love people and like helping others. It makes me happy seeing everyone around me happy.

In conclusion, there is an adage that says, "Whenever there is a will, there will be a way." That's why I work so hard to make my dreams come true. As a businesswoman, I save ten percent of my dividend for my future organization. My dreams are very important to me.

Cherinette Louis is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central

CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

I Can Do It

My goal is to improve my English and go to university to study courses that will help me become a restaurant manager. This is an important goal in my life because I want to be an independent man who makes his own decisions, creates opportunities, and builds a successful and meaningful life.

My ambition comes from my desire for a better life. The life I dream of is one where I can live well, relax, and truly enjoy what I have worked for. I want to appreciate the present and take every opportunity that life gives me. I choose to keep going, stay focused, and never give up—because I believe in myself.

I will work hard every day to achieve my dreams. I am determined to fulfill them. I believe in myself, and I will continue moving forward because I know I can do it.

Wangly Mettelus attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

What Inspires Me?

My name is Svetlana. I'm from Ukraine. I like to study and learn new things, so I'm interested in observing nature, meeting different people, and learning new skills. I think that if you are lucky enough to be on this planet, you should take advantage of this opportunity and see, learn, and explore this wonderful place as much as possible.

When I turned 50, I set two goals for myself: to learn English and to learn to play the piano. I started implementing this in my country, but the war interfered with my plans.

I came to the USA last year and was very happy to learn about the available language courses, ESOL. Thanks to the school, I had the opportunity to continue learning the language in an

environment and meet people from different countries and continents: Africa, China, Latin America, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, and others.

Although my English is far from ideal, the main thing is that I was able to communicate with these people and learn more about them, their traditions, and their culture. This is wonderful! I thank my teachers from school, Denis and Nayvette, who help me achieve my goals.

The courses are a step towards further learning and improving my English. I think I can do it, and I'm not giving up on my dream of learning to play the piano. "The road will be mastered by the one who walks it!"

Svetlana Mykhailishchuk is a student at Flagler Technical College, whose teacher is Claudio.

My Journey

I was born in Puerto Rico, a beautiful island situated in the northeastern Caribbean Sea. One of the things I always wanted to do was to move to the USA and try new opportunities. I decided to wait until my son finished high school. It's been almost three years since he started college.

I thought it was time for me to move to the USA. It's been 13 months since I moved to Florida. At the beginning it was hard for me because I left my family. Now my mother has come to stay with me for a while. We are currently living with my aunt and cousin, but we will eventually move out. I also have a new job, and things are getting better day by day.

I hope to fulfill one of my goals of working as a private chef on a more professional level. I've already started working with social media to promote my services. With the experience I have gained, I would like to see my dream come true: a coffee shop, which is what I truly want. God has given me a way to embark on my new journey. I am happy and very grateful for his care. May the Lord continue helping me like he has been doing so far. For me, the sky's the limit, and remember:

NEVER GIVE UP AND NEVER GIVE IN!

Rebecca Nieves is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Davlantes.

The Power of English Proficiency

Learning a new language, particularly English, is of great importance in today's globalized world. My goals and ambitions in this process extend beyond language acquisition; they are focused on opening doors to greater personal and professional opportunities.

One of my primary objectives is to improve my English communication skills, as they are essential for interacting with people from diverse nationalities and cultural backgrounds. In addition, I aim to strengthen my listening comprehension and improve my pronunciation to communicate with greater confidence and accuracy.

Among my personal goals is to join the United States Navy and obtain American citizenship. Achieving a strong command of English is a critical step toward accomplishing these objectives.

From a professional perspective, I seek expanded career opportunities and an improved quality of life, both of which I believe are strongly supported by proficiency in English. On a personal level, my ambitions include the ability to travel freely around the world and to communicate effectively with my native English-speaking friends.

Luwin Parada attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

To Work Hard Every Day

I am a Haitian living in the United States. I left my country after completing my classical studies because I wanted a better life. When I left Haiti, I had a clear goal: to continue my education, go to college, and study law. This has been my dream since I was a child.

I love school because education is the key to success. Without education, it is very difficult to move forward in life. Studying law will allow me to understand justice and defend others, especially those who need help but lack a voice. Helping others is one of my biggest motivations.

My goals and ambitions push me to work hard every day. I want to build a good life, be financially stable, and support myself and my family. I know that achieving my dreams requires discipline, effort, and sacrifice. I am ready to study, work, and stay focused so I can reach my goals and create a better future.

Mirielle Pierre attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

It's Never Too Late

Getting your high school diploma is a great achievement. Something I never achieved. I can give you a long list of reasons why I didn't, but they would just sound like excuses and finger-pointing when, in reality, I should have received it. I made several attempts through the years to get my GED, but I didn't succeed.

Maybe I wasn't smart enough or didn't study hard enough. Sure, I was a teenage mother and high school dropout, married at the tender age of sixteen. Without telling my age, some five decades later, I'm studying to get my GED. I was in the Miami-Dade Public Library, where I saw the flyer for Project L.E.A.D. I decided to make the call and get started. I have completed two levels of the reading series, and I am now on my third book in less than six months. I'm also taking a math GED course. The math is not easy. In fact, none of it comes easy to me. So, I am studying, doing my research and homework.

I'm going to study hard and long. If it takes months or years, it doesn't matter. This is something I'm committed to completing. With the help of L.E.A.D. and my teachers, I will accomplish my goal. And possibly continue on to higher education.

Linda Roberts is a widowed mother of three adult children and

grandmother of six, a retired Walmart associate who enjoys gardening, morning walks, and playing dominoes with friends. She has an apothecary where she makes teas, tinctures, and concoctions. Life is good, but it would be better with a GED. She is a student at Project L.E.A.D., Miami-Dade Public Library System and her instructor is Rosemary Melinek.

My Future

Many people think success is having a big job or lots of money. But for me, true ambition is simple: building a happy family life and having my favorite job, which is photography. My dreams are connected, focusing on starting a good life here in the United States and beginning my photography career again.

At 29, I am happy because I already have the most important part of my future: I found a wonderful man five years ago. Now, my focus is on making our shared goals come true. After getting to know each other for eighteen months, we got married, and we have been married for five and a half years. We are incredibly happy. Our next big dream is to expand our family and have a baby next year. However, because we are new to the U.S., we know we need to be stable first. Before we take that exciting step, we must prioritize getting a stable, full-time job for both of us. A stable job will help us give our family a safe and good life when it grows.

My other big dream is my lifelong passion for photography. This is not just a hobby; it is my dream job. When I lived in Cuba, I studied photography and even had my own small studio. But here, I must start again from zero. This challenge does not scare me. Starting my business again will take steps, patience, and hard work. My first goal is to buy my first professional camera. When I have the equipment, the next step is to create social media accounts to show my talent. In the beginning, I plan to build my portfolio by taking photos of family and friends. I will use these pictures to promote myself and my business.

The cost of professional equipment and the time needed to find clients are big challenges. Still, I strongly believe in working hard and never giving up. Everything good takes time and effort. My experience as an immigrant has taught me that if you fight for what you want and genuinely believe in it, you can always make your dreams come true.

In conclusion, my goals are not just work or just family; they both depend on each other. They represent a commitment to creating a good life, a life where love, security, and passion are together. I am sure that with effort, dedication to my studies, and belief in my photography skills, I will achieve both my dream of expanding my beautiful family and successfully starting my own photography business here in the United States.

Arlet Robinson studies English to look for better opportunities. She is an ESOL 5 student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

1% Better Every Day

When I first arrived in the United States to join my husband, I felt completely lost. I was alone in a country whose language and culture I was completely unfamiliar with. My first reaction was to want to go back to my country. But, with great determination, I decided to face my discomfort and transform this journey into an opportunity for growth.

My goal was simple yet challenging for me: to understand what people were saying around me, the basics like going to a restaurant and ordering food. So, I started searching, day after day, for an English school that was financially accessible to me. And that's when I found an ESOL program and was surprised to discover that I wouldn't have to pay much to learn the local language—an educational support that doesn't exist in my country, but I found here.

Upon joining the program, I was welcomed in a way I didn't expect by the teachers, Mildred, Naki, Jodi, and my classmates, who received me with great enthusiasm. I quickly felt that I belonged in that space.

I was amazed by the dedication of those teachers in teaching immigrants like me their language so that we could build opportunities to live better in this new country.

I met people old enough to be my grandparents studying English with willpower, discipline, and humility to learn. They

showed me that despite my difficulties and language barriers, it's never too late to learn.

With so much inspiration and encouragement, I made a commitment to myself: to give my best every day. Maybe I wasn't the best student in the class, but I felt, deeply, that I was improving 1% every day. And it was in this process that I understood:

Learning is not about how fast you are growing; it's about never giving up and continuing to get better at least 1% every day.

Kelly Rodrigues is from Brazil and is now studying English at the Clearview Adult Education Center, Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

Success is to Persist

My name is Brenda Rodriguez. I am 31 years old, and I am from Cuba. I decided to move to the United States a year ago, as they say, "the land of opportunities." My uncles welcomed me and have supported me since day one. My parents and the rest of my family still live in Cuba.

Of all the things I like here, the tranquility of Palm Coast is the one I enjoy the most. Likewise, I like this country, and I have adapted well. I appreciate the opportunity it offers and the chance to reinvent myself.

I started at Flagler Technical Institute to improve my English because I studied for a while in Cuba. However, when we arrive here, everyone speaks English very quickly, and the accent is different.

One of my goals is to improve my communication skills. In this way I can have access to better job opportunities. I would like to practice my profession as a veterinarian. Which is my discipline and career in Cuba.

Another of my aspirations is to maintain a healthy and comfortable lifestyle. I would like to make this country my home, support my family, and travel the world.

I am the kind of person who finds inspiration every day in the people around me, including those in my work. I'm inspired by people who align with my way of feeling or my life purpose.

To finalize, I believe keeping an open mind to new experiences and continuous learning allows us to create opportunities. Because dreams are built every day. I once read this phrase, and I didn't forget it:

“Do something today that your future self will thank you for.”

Brenda Rodriguez is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Claudio.

My Goals and Ambitions

Even at 68 years old, I still have goals and ambitions in my life. I believe that learning and growing do not stop at any age. Every day is an opportunity to move forward and live with purpose.

One of my goals is to continue learning English so I can communicate better and feel more confident. One of my many ambitions is to be able to speak English fluently. I want to feel that I belong here and that I am part of this powerful country, the United States of America.

Currently, I am enrolled at South Florida State College, where I am taking an ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) course. This class is helping me improve my English skills and giving me the confidence to communicate in my daily life. Going back to school at this stage of my life is an important step for my personal growth.

Moreover, another important goal of mine is to take care of my health and stay active, because listening to my body helps me live with balance and peace. Living a healthy life is a priority for me.

I also want to continue helping others in simple ways. Serving my community and offering support to the needs of others gives meaning to my life. I do not need recognition; helping with love

is enough for me.

At this stage of my life, my greatest ambition is to keep learning, stay useful, and live with gratitude, faith, and hope.

Magaly Ruiz is a student at South Florida State College. Her teacher is Maria Schneider.

Waking Up Early Mornings

Waking up early is a challenge for me; it makes me think that I am not a morning person!

Some days I feel stressed from the lack of sleep, discomfort, and rushing into work without direction. I keep asking myself, why can't I wake up early like other people?

One day I randomly scrolled YouTube. I saw a podcast and listened to its meaning. It motivated me a lot. So, my opinion tells me that I must change my habit.

To overcome the obstacle, what I have to do is create or find the best ways that work for me. I told myself that if I want to make it happen, it needs to start with me. I put discipline into my early morning habits, such as:

- Prioritizing sleep by going to bed early
- Avoiding computer screens by reading books
- Getting up as soon as the alarm rings
- Moving my body with exercise or meditation
- Breathing in the fresh air

Because of my commitment to not give up, I start my early morning habit not just for one day or a week; it takes almost a half year until I get used to it. Now I can make it; I wake up at 5am every day. I feel so grateful; I am more productive, more focused, and more in control of my life.

Soknavanith Shier is a student at Flagler Technical College, whose teacher is Davlantes.

Never Say Never

Living in America was an incredible, unrealistic dream for me. I thought it would never happen, but never say never. My journey was long and difficult, but it was worth it. It all started in 2013 when I learned about the Green Card lottery. And even then I thought I would never win this lottery. I finished my internship and started working, but the thought of this opportunity never left me. In 2016 I decided to try to get a visa to attend an ophthalmology conference and applied for the Green Card. However, my application was denied, and I was devastated.

At work, some colleagues made fun of me and laughed. They said that it was impossible to win the Green Card. It was hard and unpleasant that my dream and desire were ridiculed. It made me more depressed. I thought I would never be able to see the real America. In 2017, I applied for a tourist visa. I was approved, and I was happy.

After that, I decided to play the Green Card lottery again, and in May 2018 I found out I'd won. It's impossible to describe what was happening to me at that moment. I couldn't believe it. I didn't say anything at work. There's a saying in Russia: "Happiness loves silence." I spent a year collecting all the necessary documents. In February 2019, I was scheduled for an interview. Everything went well. Leaving my beloved job wasn't easy. Leaving friends and colleagues was hard, but I was moving towards my dream.

After entering the U.S., I shared the information about my arrival with everyone at work. To be honest, half of my colleagues still didn't believe it. Later, I started telling everyone my story of coming to the USA. Now I always try to support and encourage people not to be afraid, not to listen to others who say that nothing will work out. Follow your brightest desires; follow your dreams. Believe that everything will work out and that everything has its time. Never say never to yourself. Move only forward.

Tatiana Sych is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

The Goals That Guide My Life

I have many goals in my life that keep me motivated every day. My first goal is to complete my education and become a skilled and confident person. I also want to speak English fluently so I can connect with people around the world and build meaningful relationships.

Another goal is to find a better job and earn a stable income so I can support my family and myself. I hope to earn enough money to visit different parts of the United States. There are so many interesting places. I dream of visiting Las Vegas, where I want to see the amazing Sphere, and Beverly Hills, where I hope to stroll along the famous streets. These dreams are part of my ambition to explore and experience more of the world.

My next goal is to become a U.S. citizen and live a peaceful and happy life with my family and friends. To achieve this, I need to improve my English skills every day by practicing speaking, reading, and writing at Clearwater Adult Education School and at home as well.

Every day, I try to improve myself and practice my English. I work hard toward my dreams and goals by learning new words and writing three or four sentences a day. This helps me recognize words and understand their meanings.

I also dream of having many new friends in the U.S. so I can speak more English, communicate better, share kindness, and support each other. I want to help others who are learning English, too. Sharing what I've learned is one of my biggest ambitions. I know that every journey toward a goal is not easy, but life is full of challenges. When things get harder, we grow stronger.

Another dream of mine is to become a singer one day. This has been my passion since childhood. Singing is my favorite hobby. When I feel stressed, I go to my room, stay alone, and sing my favorite songs out loud. Music helps me feel free and strong.

I always remind myself: if you have a goal, you must make an effort to reach it. Sometimes I feel like giving up, but when I

think about my dreams, my energy comes back. You may fall or feel discouraged, but don't let those feelings control you for long. You must struggle and pull yourself back. Reaching your goals takes time — step by step, no rush.

I try my best every day and show kindness to everyone. I always think positively. If you fill your life with positivity, you'll be able to do the things you want. Life can be difficult—you may feel tired, sad, or afraid—but remember: every problem has a solution. If you keep going, you'll find the path to success.

The most important thing is to never stop trying. Believe in yourself. Every day is a new opportunity to be better.

Saem Va is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, whose teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

A New Life in America

My name is Reem; I'm 19 years old. I'm from Syria; my mom and I came to the U.S. in 2024. We first started our trip in Oklahoma, where we lived for six months, and then we moved to Florida. We love Florida.

It's hard to find a job, but we always try. Also, we keep improving our English to make life easier for us.

I hope to study in college here because it's a great opportunity to get an American license. I want to become a psychotherapist. First, I will study ESOL; then I will study for the GED, and after that I will go to college. I know it's a big goal, but with support of my family, friends, and a lot of praying, I believe I can achieve it because nothing is impossible.

Reem Zghaib is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Mullinax.

My Favorite Place

SeaWorld

My favorite place is SeaWorld. I went there for the first time when I came to Miami, having one of the most amazing days I can remember. Thinking of it, I still feel excited because it was a place full of colors, animals, and happiness. I love animals, so it felt like a dream come true. In Colombia, we do not have places like this, and since my country's economy is not extraordinarily strong, it was a unique experience for me.

At first, I noticed the smell of food and the sound of children laughing. The first animals I saw were dolphins jumping high out of the water. I had only seen dolphins on television before, so seeing them up close was incredibly special. They looked like they were smiling at us. I remember being amazed by how big the tanks were and how clear the water looked. Everything was shining under the sun, and it made the day feel magical.

The show that impressed me the most was the orca show. They were huge and powerful, but they also looked gentle with their trainers. When one of them jumped, the splash of water reached the people in the front rows, and everyone laughed. Where I was sitting, I still felt some drops of water on my face. I will never forget it.

Likewise, I really enjoyed watching the sea lions. They were funny because they made sounds as if they were talking to each other. SeaWorld was not only about the animals; there were rides too. I remember going on one that made me scream a lot, but after it ended, I wanted to go again. The park also had many shops and restaurants. I walked a lot that day, and even though my legs were tired, I did not care. Every corner had something new to see, and I did not want to miss anything.

One of the funniest moments was when my mother made me go on an attraction called “Mako.” We thought it was another aquarium with sharks, but it turned out to be an extremely high roller coaster with many difficulties. We both screamed a lot and laughed afterward. It became one of our favorite memories from that day.

SeaWorld is my favorite place because it gave me memories that will stay with me forever. It is not just about the animals or the shows, but also about the way I felt while I was there. I felt free, happy, and curious. Even now, when I see pictures of dolphins or orcas, I think about that beautiful day.

SeaWorld will always be a special place in my heart. It taught me to appreciate the beauty of the ocean and its creatures. It reminds me how wonderful it is to explore the world with the people I love. I hope I can visit it again one day and feel that same excitement once more.

Wendy Acevedo was born in Colombia. She loves music and art, and she wants to become a veterinarian. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

Key West: Where the Sea Meets My Dreams

My name is Luz Aguilar. I am 27 years old, and three years ago, I arrived from my beloved Peru with a suitcase full of dreams and the uncertainty that comes with leaving one’s home. Today, as a student, I look back with a heart overflowing with gratitude. The United States did not just welcome me; it embraced me with generosity, opening labor, cultural, and social doors I never imagined and allowing me to discover corners where the soul finds profound peace. For me, that place is, without a doubt, Key West.

Arriving on this island is an almost surreal experience. The journey across the Overseas Highway that seems to float over the ocean south of Miami is the perfect prelude to magic. The island has a vibrant personality: its streets are lined with colorful Victorian-style houses, bougainvillea adorning every corner, and the famous scent of Key Lime Pie in the air. It is a place where time seems to stand still, where roosters roam free through the

streets, and the Caribbean influence is felt in every musical note drifting from Duval Street.

It was in this spectacular setting, specifically in front of one of its legendary sunsets that paint the sky in shades of fire, where my personal life took a new direction. I was accompanied by my boyfriend, and amidst the magic of the island, he asked me to be his partner officially. That moment transformed Key West into my sacred place, a piece of land surrounded by the sea that now symbolizes our union and commitment.

This journey taught me that Florida is not just the place where I work and study; it is the place where I flourish. Key West will always be a reminder that, after overcoming challenges, destiny has wonderful rewards in store for us. I am proud to be Peruvian, but today, my heart also beats to the rhythm of the opportunities and the love I have found in this beautiful country.

Luz Aguilar is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Their teacher is Yllka Bejo.

My Favorite Place

Touching the stars is drawing a singing rose petal; it's kissing the soul of God. Being with my children and my husband is my favorite place.

My family is my peace, supported and blessed happiness. I have the pleasure of living in a country full of fabulous places, but none compares to the safety of my home. That is the place I want to be. It does not compare to the most beautiful beach that exists. First, sharing time together strengthens our relationship and fixes indelible memories. Secondly, when we talk after an exhausting day of work or they hug me, I reaffirm that is where I always want to be. On the one hand, every moment is an opportunity to grow spiritually, learn from each other, and value the family—it is a divine gift. On the other hand, many people consider that their favorite place is a special city, a country, a hotel, a book, a jewel, or a song, but I maintain that my favorite place is where my family is. On the other hand, I feel that my strength multiplies like air in my lungs. Nevertheless, my purposes become possible when their eyes touch my skin. In addition, true

happiness materializes when the sun touches the curtains, and we say good morning. I have the feeling that it is my refuge in those stormy days when I miss my mother. I struggle with the language; my soul bleeds for my Cuba when I want to touch my brothers' hands. Through coexistence we feel respect and empathy for each other while taking decisions including all of us.

My favorite moments with them are doing homework together, going out on Sundays, having dinner, taking pictures, and giving us impulses to achieve even if we think it is impossible. But knowing that someone trusts me and inspires them by my example wrinkles my heart and rinses my eyes. Every hug, every kiss, every magic, and every spark of magic they make makes the imaginary axis of the earth turn, because the best memories are born from what we cannot buy in any store. That is why the painting in a trunk is where the key is in my heart.

Anyway, in this world full of stress, having a place that makes you touch the stars and kiss God's hand is, without a doubt, my family, my favorite place.

Naybi Alonso is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus. Her teacher is Perez Lapeira Caridd.

The Quiet History of My Home

My favorite place is home, because it has a long, quiet history of my life. It is the place where my earliest memories were born, where I dreamed.

Over the years, home became witness to every chapter I lived in. It saw my childhood innocence, my teenage questions, and the moments when I began to understand who I was becoming. It has heard my laughter during celebrations and held me during difficult nights when I needed comfort. The people I love the most have passed through its doors, leaving behind stories and lessons. Every corner reminds me of something—some joy, some moment that helped me grow.

Home is where I can return after a long day, a hard moment, or an exciting adventure and still feel the same sense of belonging. It gives me the space to rest, to think, and to become a better

version of myself. In many ways home isn't just a place from my past; it is a place that continues to shape my future. No matter how far I travel or how many places I visit, nothing feels as familiar or as peaceful as home. It is the one place that has been constant in every season of my life, and that is why it will always be my favorite place.

Vanesta Altimeaux is from Haiti and lives in Naples. She studies at Lorenzo Walker to improve her English and earn her GED so she can achieve her goals. Her teacher is Lisa Wroble.

Why Daytona is My Favorite Place

Daytona is my favorite place, not just because of its beaches or warm weather but because it represents home, family, and inspiration. For me, Daytona is more than a destination—it is where my personal history and future goals come together. Every time I am there, I am reminded of the people who have shaped my life and the values that continue to guide me.

One of the reasons Daytona feels so special is my family. My grandparents live right next door, which allows me to visit them often and stay closely connected. Spending time with my grandma and grandpa has taught me the importance of family, patience, and caring for others. Their presence makes Daytona feel safe and familiar, a place where I truly belong. Knowing that family is always nearby gives me a sense of comfort that I cannot find anywhere else.

Daytona is also meaningful because my family has a strong background in healthcare, which has inspired my own goals. My dad works as a physical therapist helping patients recover and improve their quality of life. My mom works as a nurse practitioner, caring for patients with dedication and compassion. My sister also works as a nurse in a clinic and hospital in Jacksonville, where she treats patients every day. Even my brother is studying math and lab sciences and plans to attend nursing school because he wants to become a nurse. Healthcare runs deeply in my family, and being surrounded by people who dedicate their lives to helping others has influenced the way I see the world. It has taught me the value of service, responsibility, and hard work.

Another reason Daytona is my favorite place is the time I get to spend with my cousins. They are coming to visit soon, and I am excited to show them everything I love about Daytona. We plan to spend time together at the beach, go out to restaurants, and enjoy being together as a family. These moments are important to me because they create memories that last longer than any vacation. Sharing Daytona with my cousins allows me to see the place through fresh eyes and appreciate it even more.

Ultimately, Daytona is my favorite place because it combines family, inspiration, and happiness. It is where I feel most like myself and where my values have been shaped. Whether I am visiting my grandparents, spending time with cousins, or thinking about my future, Daytona always feels like home. That is why it will always hold a special place in my heart.

Ibrahim Amawi is a student at Daytona State College. His teacher is Steve Reser.

Calm and Safe Place

Everyone has a place that makes them feel calm and safe, and for me that place is the beach. Ever since I moved to Florida, the beach has become the spot where my mind finally slows down. When I'm standing in front of the water, I feel like all my stress, school, money, and everything I'm dealing with just soften for a moment. What I love the most is the sound of the waves. It feels like they talk to me, telling me to breathe and take my time.

I especially enjoy going to the beach in the evening. The sunset always reminds me that even a hard day can end beautifully. Sometimes I sit in the colors, and simple moments make me feel stronger and more peaceful. Whenever life gets heavy, I think about the ocean. It brings me clarity, hope, and a kind of happiness I don't really find anywhere else. That is why the beach will always be my favorite place.

Benchy Aristhil is a GED student in Adult Workforce Education at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. She's from Haiti. Her teacher is Lisa Wroble.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is the Golden Corral on Normandy Boulevard. I love to eat their pasta and spaghetti and meatballs. I go there every three weeks or so. It's an all-you-can-eat buffet. I usually eat their spaghetti and meatballs, and I always leave a tip for the waitress. I go in the afternoon around 2:00 or sometimes in the morning for breakfast. I love their grits and gravy, pancakes and syrup, and onions-and-cheese omelets. I never leave there angry or disappointed.

Latonya Atkins is working towards her GED. She has been with the Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida since 2024 and is gaining skills quickly. Her teacher is Lisa Montgomery.

A Place by the Rock

Maybe you've heard of The Rock of My Salvation or Solid as a Rock, or perhaps of the entertainer, The Rock. There are probably other rocks, too. This is a story of a rock by the Big Lake. Many years ago, I lived in far northern Michigan, not far from the shores of Lake Michigan. I discovered a special place; well, I didn't actually discover this place; someone made it a small state park. It became special to me. Liking to check out new places, I pulled into the little parking lot. There was only enough room for about twenty cars. A nice thick stand of cedar-like trees separated me from the rocky lakeshore.

It was a beautiful summer day the first time I stepped through the trees. The rocks were round and smooth; they were crowned with a boulder about four feet around. That first day I just checked out the place. I was very secluded. There were no signs to indicate it was a state park until I pulled into the parking lot. When I looked back at the stand of trees, I could not see the parking lot.

Lake Michigan beaches go from very rocky with no sand to very sandy with no rocks. At this little slice, I walked in the lapping waters under the noonday sun. I climbed upon that rock and sat as the Great Lake extinguished a fall sun. I stepped on a frozen shore on a calm winter's day. I was there a number of

times to think, plan, remember, contemplate, or chill. I drank beer and a Pepsi and ate fast food there. I even took my sweetheart there. She didn't seem to find it as magical a place as I did. Still, she liked the place and would ask me about it from time to time.

There came an awful day when I went there to cry and to shout at the top of my lungs at God until I fell to my knees. It was an awful time. I had to be strong for my wife.

She couldn't see how tragedy may have undone me so. At that place I stood on the rocky shore and laid my body across that rock. My face was toward the big lake as tears flooded out of my eyes. How can loss hurt so much, so deeply? I cried when my father and mother passed. This was different; it wasn't as natural, and it was deep. Friends and family attempted to console the inconsolable.

That time was hard. Harsh reality. Young couples shouldn't have to go through that. I remember that place, that rock, a place I needed to think and reason through the unthinkable. It was late fall with a chill in the air. A perfect place for the moment. My wife found solace there with me leaning on the rock. We are people of the North.

David Austin is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. His teacher is Kimberly Gaskin.

Varadero Beach

Varadero Beach is the most famous and beautiful beach in my country. It is located on the Hicacos Peninsula in the north of Cuba, where the waters of the Gulf of Mexico and the Florida Straits meet. It is situated at the northernmost point of the island.

In this stunning place, you can find the clearest, warmest, and most turquoise water. You can see small fish swimming when the sea is calm, and occasionally, you might find small shells and snails at the bottom. The sand on the beach is soft and white, forming beautiful dunes. The sun shines brilliantly, and the warm temperatures invite visitors to swim.

I grew up near Varadero Beach, which makes it an incredibly special place for me. This marvelous location is a narrow peninsula that faces north, allowing you to watch both the sunrise and the sunset over the sea. The reflection on the water during these moments looks like molten gold, creating an unforgettable experience.

For fishing enthusiasts, Varadero Beach is a paradise. The waters are home to many species of fish and other marine life. It is also very affordable to practice scuba diving and sport fishing. Additionally, there are many water sports available, such as kayaking, sailing, surfing, yachting, and more.

At night, when the water is calm, the sea reflects the moon and stars, creating an amazing spectacle.

Even now, far away from Varadero Beach, I miss its clear, warm, and turquoise waters. It remains my favorite place.

Jose Blanco is a Cuban national who studies English in order to get better opportunities in life. He is a Miami Dade College ESOL 5 student at the Kendall campus. His instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

Brazil – A Tropical Country, Blessed by God

Brazil has an area of approximately 8.5 million km² and a population of over 220 million people. It has a predominantly tropical climate and a remarkable variety of biomes, including the Amazon Forest, the Cerrado, the Caatinga, the Atlantic Forest, the Pantanal, and the Pampa. Because of its vast territory and ecological diversity, Brazil is considered one of the most biodiverse countries in the world.

Before European arrival, the territory was inhabited by thousands of Indigenous people with diverse languages, cultures, and social systems. In 1500, the Portuguese arrived and began the colonization process. Brazil declared its independence from Portugal in 1822, a decisive moment in its history. In 1889, it became a republic and later experienced different political phases. Today, Brazil is a multicultural nation whose identity was shaped by Indigenous people, Africans, and immigrants from various regions of the world, resulting in great cultural richness.

Immigration has played a central role in Brazilian history. Between the 16th and 19th centuries, millions of enslaved Africans were forcibly brought to Brazil, leaving a profound influence on music, cuisine, religion, and language. Portuguese colonization strongly shaped the country's official language and early political institutions. Between 1870 and 1920, Italian immigrants settled mainly in the Southeast and South, contributing to agriculture, industry, and culinary traditions. German immigration, beginning in 1824, influenced southern Brazil through architecture, festivals, and community organization. In 1908, Japanese immigration began, forming the largest Japanese community outside Japan and significantly impacting agriculture and cultural life.

Brazil is divided into five regions, each with distinct cultural, touristic, and economic characteristics. The Northeast is known for its hot climate, extensive coastline, and traditional cuisine. The North is dominated by the Amazon Forest, with strong Indigenous influence and tourism linked to rivers and nature. The Southeast is the most populous and economically developed region, home to major cities such as São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, as well as famous landmarks like Sugarloaf Mountain and Corcovado. The Central-West stands out for the Cerrado, the Pantanal, and its large beef cattle production. The South has a cooler climate and strong European cultural influence.

Brazilian society is marked by ethnic, cultural, and regional diversity, with no single "Brazilian identity." The population results from the mixing of Indigenous peoples, Africans, Europeans, Asians, and Middle Eastern immigrants. Brazilians are often described as warm and welcoming, valuing personal interaction, informal communication, and social closeness. Creativity and adaptability are reflected in the concept of the *jeitinho brasileiro*, meaning the ability to find practical solutions to everyday challenges. Music, dance, Carnival, regional traditions, and football play a central role in the national culture. Despite social inequality and economic difficulties, Brazilians are known for resilience, optimism, and strong family and social bonds.

Lester Bulbarelli is from Brazil and now studying English at Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. His teacher is Mildred Pioli.

The Beach - My Peaceful Place

My favorite place is the beach. When I go there, I feel calm and relaxed. I like the waves, the sound of waves, and the fresh air. The beach helps me forget about my stress, and I can think clearly there.

I enjoy going to the beach early in the morning. The sunrise is beautiful, and the color in the sky makes me feel hopeful. Sometimes I go alone to think, and other times I go with friends to laugh and talk.

The beach also reminds me of my home in Haiti. It brings back good memories with my family.

In conclusion, the beach is my favorite place because it brings me peace, gives me strength, and reminds me of beautiful memories from my home country.

Sophia Cherenfant was born in Haiti. She is studying in the ESOL Intermediate class at Atlantic Technical College, Arthur Ashe Campus, with Ms. F. Johnson. Sophia is working hard to improve her English so she can continue her education and become a nurse in the future.

My Mother's House

My favorite place is my mother's house. It is a small apartment where you can hear everything the neighbors say and the noise of the cars passing by the street. Nevertheless, that little apartment could become a huge castle or maybe a volcano with a floor made of lava. It could become anything I could imagine.

In addition, the best part was the delicious smell that filled the air every day after six in the evening. It came from the kitchen, an aroma that made my stomach roar. My mother is not the kind of person who gives hugs or kisses, but she shows her love through her cooking.

Because of all those memories, this apartment will always be my favorite place. In conclusion, it is not just a house — it is a home full of love, imagination, and unforgettable moments.

Liu Chik Li is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Perez Lapeira Caridad.

Gratitude for the Blessing in My Life

I would like to begin by expressing my heartfelt gratitude for all the blessings that God has bestowed upon me. I am deeply thankful for the gift of life and for the many wonderful people with whom I have been fortunate enough to share it. Two years ago, I arrived in this beautiful country, and in that time, I have come to love it more than I ever thought possible. The opportunity to explore and experience places I had never imagined seeing has been one of the greatest gifts I could ask for.

I also want to take a moment to acknowledge that I am here with my family in the United States, where many of my dreams are coming to fruition. I am incredibly happy and fulfilled because my children now have access to numerous opportunities they could not have had elsewhere. Though the beginning of our journey was challenging, I believe that with God's help, all things are possible. Every day, as we settle into our new life, we feel more confident and assured that we are on the right path.

My husband and I share a dream of one day owning our own business. While I cherish everything about this country, I believe my favorite place will always be my home—the place where I am surrounded by my wonderful husband and three children. They are my greatest treasures and the source of my strength and inspiration. I thank God every day for the many blessings He has granted me and for the love and support that fills our lives.

This journey has not always been easy, but it has been worth every effort. With each passing day, I see how far we've come, and I look forward with hope and excitement to the future we are building together. I am deeply grateful for the strength and resilience we have gained along the way and for the love that binds us as a family.

Lidice Echeverria is a student at Miami Dade College. She is in

ESOL 5. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

My Grandmother's Kitchen

To begin with, my favorite place in the world is my grandmother's kitchen in the countryside. Since my childhood, it has been more than a room where food was made; it was the heart of our family. Every time I think about it, I can almost smell the smoke of the wood fire and hear the soft crackling of burning charcoal.

In the middle of a small house surrounded by fruit trees, her kitchen stood like a warm sanctuary. The walls were darkened by years of firewood smoke, yet they carried the stories of countless meals shared together. Moreover, the aroma of garlic, onions, and roasted corn always floated in the air. There was no modern stove—only a clay oven and a big iron pot sitting above glowing coals. Besides, chickens clucked outside, and the wind carried the scent of fresh earth, creating a perfect harmony of nature and home.

When I was a child, I loved sitting on a small wooden stool near the fire. I remember watching my grandmother's hands move gracefully, turning simple ingredients into magic. Because she cooked with love and patience, her food had a flavor that no restaurant could ever match. Therefore, each meal was not just food—it was a memory, a lesson, and a hug. As a result, that kitchen became the place where I learned what family and tradition truly mean.

In conclusion, my grandmother's kitchen will always be my favorite place, even though it no longer exists in the same way today. Nowadays, I live far from the countryside in a big city and cook on a modern stove, but the memory of her fire and her laughter still warms my heart. After all, some places live forever—not in geography, but in the soul.

Doryan Fernandez is a student with Miami Dade College. His teacher is Perez Lapeira.

A Magical Place

There is a place in the world that no matter how many times I go, I never get tired of. It is a place where my inner child is happy because the magic that surrounds it reminds me of all the movies I saw as a child. I have always dreamed of going to this wonderful place since I was a little girl. This place has a positive effect on me every time I visit it. That is why Disney World is my favorite place.

I have gone countless times to Disney World, and I never get bored since every time I go, I go to a different park. My kids, of course, also love going to Disney World. So, because of that, on all of their birthdays we go to one of the many Disney Parks. My daughter Katherine really likes the Hollywood Studios park because it has a very cool Star Wars section.

My other daughter, Keily, loves the Epcot park because it has a Frozen attraction, which is her favorite movie of all time. She also likes looking at other countries' cultures that are being represented in the park. The other attraction Keily especially likes is the Ratatouille ride. She obviously likes the corndogs they sell at Epcot.

Now it is my son Dylan's turn. Dylan always wants to go to Magic Kingdom, which without a doubt is his favorite park. He likes to go look at the parade in Magic Kingdom because he can see some of his favorite characters like Mickey Mouse. Magic Kingdom is also a perfect place for my youngest boy because it has attractions for kids his age. Besides, most Disney Parks have attractions made for older kids. Finally, Dylan's favorite place in Magic Kingdom is the castle, especially at the end of the night when they have a fireworks show in the castle.

For me to consider a place my favorite one, it must have three especially important characteristics. Number one, whatever that place makes me feel, I must have never felt before in any other place. Number two, it makes me forget about all my problems and makes me enjoy the full experience of the place. And number three, it must make me feel like I am in a magical movie where all dreams are made true. And this one and only place is Disney World.

Ibis Garcia is a 39-year-old Cuban national who owns a landscaping company. She, her husband, and their three children came to this country 5 years ago. She is an ESOL 5 student in Professor Carmen

Whu's class at MDC-Kendall to be able to communicate better in English.

Beautiful Blue Skies

The beautiful blue skies are clear. Not a cloud in sight. The sun is beaming down on my face and skin, and the feeling of the sun's ultraviolet rays has my skin all warm. The beautiful mountains appear across the horizon. I see miles and miles of beautiful color-changing leaves falling from the trees on a day in fall, located in the mountains of western North Carolina. The Blue Ridge Great Smoky Mountains, looking over Virginia, Georgia, and North Carolina—it is a breathtaking experience. It is the only place where I can be at peace and do some self-inventory. Relaxing, reminding myself to be grateful, and continuing to work hard. Keeping faith in God and the people that I surround myself with. I love hiking, fishing, and hunting in that place. There is nowhere I would rather be.

Colby Gibson is a happy, compassionate, hardworking 34-year-old and was born in the mountains of North Carolina. Colby loves the outdoors and is a believer in the Lord. Some hobbies include hunting, fishing, hiking, dirt biking, four-wheeling, and making good friends. A student of Jason Michael at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida, Colby is strong-minded with big goals and a bright future ahead.

Grandma's House on a Beach in Cuba

My favorite place has always been my grandmother's house by the beach in Cuba. The first time I saw it, I thought it looked like a secret, hidden hut nestled between the ocean and the palms. The house was small, painted a faded blue, with windows that rattled whenever the wind carried the salty air. To me, it was a palace—one where a new memory was born every summer.

My grandmother, always watching from a distance, sat beneath a white straw hat. Sometimes she joined us, her laughter ringing like the tide itself. But mostly, she enjoyed seeing us free, our hair tangled by salt and wind. She would pack us snacks

such as mango slices, sweet guava jam with crackers, and bottles of water that never stayed cold for long. Somehow, everything tasted better under the Cuban sun.

What makes my grandmother's beach house unforgettable is not only the place itself but also the feelings it gave me: freedom, belonging, and love, moving together like waves meeting the shore. Even now, far away, when I close my eyes, I can still hear the laughter of my cousins, taste the salt on my lips, and feel my grandmother's presence by the sea. That house, that beach, will always be my heart's anchor.

Melissa Gomez is a student at Miami Dade College, Kendall Campus. She is in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 class.

My Country – My City

Bucaramanga, often called “The Beautiful City of Colombia,” has earned its name thanks to its unique blend of modernity, natural charm, and cultural richness. Located in northeastern Colombia, the city stands out for its pleasant climate, friendly people, and a vibrant mix of traditions and food.

Bucaramanga's cultural identity is deeply rooted in the strong and hardworking character of the Santander region. The city preserves its history through landmarks such as García Rovira Park and colonial houses that reflect its past. Festivals like Feria Bonita, local theaters, music, and traditional dances highlight a lively cultural scene.

Surrounded by mountains and lush canyons, Bucaramanga offers some of the most stunning natural landscapes in eastern Colombia. One of its greatest highlights is the Chicamocha Canyon, considered one of the largest.

Overall, Bucaramanga stands out as a city where cultural tradition, rich cuisine, and breathtaking landscapes come together to form a vibrant and unforgettable destination.

Bucaramanga is a city that stays with you; its flavors, its people, and its landscapes create a warm and living memory you will not forget.

Angel Gualdrón wants to speak English well to achieve his goals of studying at a university. He is currently in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is St. Thomas. I went on a cruise with my family to St. Thomas. I remember we had to walk to the boat. My sisters and I were on the front of the boat. I was scared at first, but then I was excited. When we got to the island, we got off the boat, and we had to meet with the driver who was driving us from the cruise ship to St. Thomas. The road was so small, and everybody who lived there drove trucks. I was amazed, and the driver was telling us everything about the history of St. Thomas, how everybody walks to the beach and has a home on the island. Some celebrities have their own private islands! They have different food cultures. We had to meet the driver at the same time every day or we would be left behind. I was so excited to go to the island for the first time. When we got to the island, we went to the beach. The water was clear, relaxing, and not too deep. After the beach, we had to go to meet the driver, and I almost got left behind, but my sisters came and got me, and we got on the bus. The driver was playing island music. We went to a restaurant where they had different food. I didn't know what to get, but I decided to try new food, and it was so amazing. At last, we got on the bus to go back to the cruise ship. I was so tired and full.

Alexandria Howard is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Her teacher is Lisa Montgomery.

My Sweet Home

My favorite place is my home because it is where I feel safe and happy. First of all, my home is special to me because it is the place where I can relax after a long day. I like to sit on the sofa and watch my favorite TV shows. Also, my home is where I can spend time with my family. We talk, laugh, and eat dinner together every evening.

Moreover, my home is comfortable and full of memories.

Every room reminds me of good moments, like birthdays and holidays. For example, the kitchen is my favorite room because it smells like delicious food and warm coffee in the morning.

In addition, my home gives me peace. When I am tired or sad, I can rest in my room and feel calm. Finally, my home is my favorite place because it is not just a building—it is where my heart belongs.

Jisel Jauregui is a student of Yosbel Blanco at Miami Dade College ESOL who loves learning new things. Jisel studied from 1999 to 2002 and is now a certified registered behavior technician (RBT), helping children with special needs because it makes her happy to see their progress. In her free time she enjoys being at home, listening to music, and watching movies. Her dream is to keep growing and to help others in her community.

The Beach

My favorite place in the world since I was a kid is the beach. Beaches make me feel calm and relaxed, giving me a keen sense of peace that I do not find in other places. When I arrive, the first thing I notice is the sound of the waves touching the shore, which helps me forget my stress and reminds me that life is not only about problems or worries; it is also about the simple moments that make everything feel lighter.

One of the reasons I love the beach so much is that it helps me connect with nature. When I walk on the sand, I feel a soft, warm sensation under my feet. Sometimes, the sand gets extremely hot, but I do not mind it. I enjoy the feeling because it reminds me that I am in a natural place, far away from the noise of the city. The ocean breeze is also incredibly special. It is salty, a little humid, and it moves my hair in a way that makes me feel free. I can stand there for long minutes, just breathing in the fresh air and gazing at the horizon.

Another reason the beach is my favorite place is how it helps me think more clearly. When I face a difficult decision or something is confusing me, I like to sit near the water and watch the waves. The rhythm of the ocean is slow but constant, and this helps me feel more focused. It is almost as if the sea is giving me advice without using any words. Many times, I have gone to the

beach feeling worried, only to leave feeling stronger and more certain about what I need to do. It is almost like therapy, but it is free and open.

I also have many beautiful memories at the beach. When I was younger, my family and I used to go there often. We played in the water, built sandcastles, and collected small shells that we always took home. Some of those shells I still keep, and when I look at them, I am reminded of those happy days. Now that I am older, the beach continues to be a place where I create important memories. Sometimes I go with friends, and we sit on the sand while talking about life. Other times, I go alone to rest, read a book, or simply listen to music. Every visit gives me a different yet equally rewarding experience.

In conclusion, the beach is my favorite place because it brings me peace, helps me think more clearly, and holds many memories that I will always treasure. It is a place that makes me feel safe, happy, and free. No matter how many times I go, it always feels special, and I believe it will remain a major place for me.

Maria Elizabeth Leon is a very disciplined student in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 class at Miami Dade College, Kendall.

My Favorite Place To Relax

My favorite place is Seminole Park. It is located not so far from our house. It's literally a ten-minute drive. It is a beautiful and peaceful spot where we often go with our friends and family. As soon as you enter the park, it seems like you are on another planet. The park greets you with silence, coolness, and calmness. Birds are singing. The air smells of pine trees; in the morning the grass sparkles with dew like diamonds. The park is very large, and they have taken care of visitors' comfort here: tables under awnings, benches, barbecue areas, volleyball courts, parking, etc., so there is enough space for everyone.

My husband Sergey loves fishing on the shore of the bay. However, he usually releases the fish back into the water. The process of fishing is important too, not just the catch. Sometimes we are just sitting quietly, watching the bay and listening to the gentle sound of the waves. The nature around us is amazing. Big birds

dive into the water from high above to catch fish, and sometimes a crocodile swims close to the shore. Herons surround us in the hope of getting a fish. It always feels like a little adventure; you really merge with nature and feel a part of it.

One day we came to the park with friends. The guys fried pre-marinated meat on the grill, and my girlfriends and I set the table. Then I went to Sergey to invite him to lunch. He didn't see me. Suddenly, instead of catching a fish, he accidentally caught me. The hook caught my sleeve, and luckily nothing bad happened. Someone joked that Sergey caught the best fish. We just laughed so hard that we couldn't stop for a while.

Every year, in May, our son comes to visit from NY for a few days. We always take him to the park; he knows this park, and he likes to relax there. One day, while we were walking, he noticed a monument with the date when the park was founded. I don't remember the year, but it was written "May 18"—my birthday. Since then, I always say, "This park was made just for me."

Galina Leonteva is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Iguna Ozols.

My Hometown

My hometown is a beautiful little island, where the sea holds the memories of my childhood. Every morning, the sea gently wakes the town. The salty sea breeze carries many stories.

There are many amazing sights here. The sunset on the beach, rows of fishing boats, and the warm lights of homes. I am most proud of our golden sandy beach, where I played as a child. At low tide, colorful umbrellas look like flowers on the sand. Children collect seashells that shine like little stars in the sunlight. At high tide, the green sea meets the blue sky, and white sails float on the horizon. It feels like the sea and sky are one.

In the morning, the sun rises over the mountains, and the light shines on the sea like gold. Small girls with pigtails carry baskets and skip along the beach looking for treasures. The sunlight makes the seashells sparkle. Sometimes, playful waves bring small shrimp, and the children laugh as the water tickles

their feet.

In the evening, the sun sets, coloring the sky orange and pink. The sea reflects the clouds and birds, like a mirror. Fishing boats return, and their holds are full of fish and crabs. At night, the moon rises over the masts, and the waves make a soft sound like a lullaby. The stars twinkle, and the lighthouse light draws a golden path across the dark sea.

Hongye Lin attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Day at the Museum

Every morning in St. Petersburg begins with sunlight reflecting off the building of the Salvador Dalí Museum. People arrive with smiles, cameras, and curiosities. For me, that moment is magical. It reminds me why I am here—to share the inspiration that Dalí and his work awaken.

My name is Eddy Lopez; I was born in Venezuela, and I love art and architecture. Since I arrived in the United States two years ago, I have dreamed of finding a place where art, creativity, and emotion come together. That place is the Dalí Museum in St. Petersburg. Its energy captivated me from the very first day, and today I have the privilege of being a volunteer helping visitors live an unforgettable experience.

St. Petersburg is a vibrant city, full of art, history, and light. It's a place where culture plays an important role and where the Dalí Museum has become an international icon for its modern architecture and for the depth of Salvador Dalí's work, which is displayed here with great care and passion. Dalí was not just a surrealist Spanish painter; he was a visionary. In each of his works, there are symbols, emotions, and a creative universe that touches the hearts of visitors.

Being a volunteer at the Dalí Museum is an experience that has transformed me. Every day I volunteer, I learn something new, connect with people from different countries, and share the beauty of art. I am proud to be part of this place that honors the legacy of one of the most complex, awe-inspiring, and fascinating

artists of the 20th century.

Eddy Lopez is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. His teacher is Inguna Ozols.

My Favorite Place

After my husband and I got married, we went to Krabi Beach in Phuket, Thailand, for our honeymoon. Phuket is one of the southern provinces of Thailand, which consists of the largest island of Phuket and 32 smaller islands off its coast. It is connected to the east across Phang Nga Bay by the Sarasin Bridge to Krabi. This area was the site of the Boxing Day tsunami, or Indian Ocean tsunami, the disaster that took place on December 26, 2004. It was triggered by a massive 9.1-9.3 magnitude undersea earthquake off the coast of Sumatra, Indonesia.

I thought to myself that this was the most beautiful place I had ever seen in my life. On the bed in our hotel, red rose petals created a large heart shape in the center of the bed, with two swans' necks touching to form the heart to complete the romantic honeymoon welcome. I was so surprised to see what they did to welcome us. The room smelled so delightful.

The next day we went for a boat ride. The bottom of the ocean was so blue and crystal clear that you could see the fish swimming around you. You must try a classic day trip that visits Panak Island, Bat Cave, Hong Island, and James Bond Island. The most common way to visit is by joining a guided boat tour, which often includes hotel transfers, lunch, and snorkeling equipment. Many day trips include a visit to Koh Khai Nai with other nearby attractions like the Phi Phi Islands or Coral Island. If you want to go to the Bat Cave, you must go with the tours, which usually include local guides who know the tide and conditions, ensuring a safe trip through the tight passages.

When we went into the Bat Cave, we saw thousands of bats flying around. It was so unique to see them. The big boat takes you into the bay, and then you transfer to a small inflatable canoe or kayak. Guides paddle you through narrow sea cave tunnels that lead to hidden lagoons. The highlight is the final 600-800 meter passage where the cave ceiling drops so low that you must

lie completely flat on your back in the boat. There can be mere inches between your face and the rock ceiling as local guides use their hands to pull the boat through.

I loved every bit of our honeymoon time together. My husband also took me to Hong Kong and Singapore, which I loved. These were the first three places I had ever gone after I met my husband. Before that, I never had a chance to go anywhere besides my village, my school, and the dorm where I lived. This is why these three places are always going to be my favorite places to go.

Nantana “Noy” Luxenberg came to the United States from Thailand as a young woman. She is married with three grown children and is working on her GED.

Sightseeing in San Francisco

My name is Edith. I got married in February 2025 to a young man named Rafael. He is Nicaraguan by birth, and I am Peruvian, but we met in Miami in January 2024. For a while, we maintained a long-distance relationship, and after many visits and separations, we finally decided to get married. Since then, we have been extremely focused on resolving my legal situation in the United States, so we postponed our honeymoon and any major celebrations. However, we suddenly had the opportunity to travel to San Francisco, and we decided to take that trip as our honeymoon. It turned out to be wonderful, as we were able to visit many beautiful places such as Alcatraz, Angel Island, Chinatown, Little Italy, and the entire city of San Francisco.

We visited many attractions, took photos, and enjoyed each moment together. One of the most beautiful places was Muir Woods Park. We explored it with great excitement. The weather was cool, and the giant trees were utterly amazing. I also loved the food, especially the Asian cuisine, which made me feel extremely comfortable. We walked a lot during the trip, but it was worth it. My husband walks frequently to take care of his health, and he encourages me to do the same, especially since we are both over forty years old.

Visiting Alcatraz prison was particularly striking. I wondered what life must have been like for the people who lived in those

harsh conditions. The cold is overwhelming, the cells are extremely small, and daily life must have been exceedingly difficult. Being there made me ask myself many questions. I believe visiting iconic places like this is important because it allows us to understand a part of the city's history.

Speaking of history, Angel Island was also a meaningful experience. It is an important symbol of Asian immigration. During tough times in China, many immigrants arrived there hoping for a new opportunity in life. The island still preserves many historical traces—portraits, writings, and documents of the people who passed through it. The museum area explains the entire immigration process and helps visitors understand how the Asian community in San Francisco began and developed.

One of the things that surprised me the most was learning how San Francisco has grown and how welcoming it is toward immigrants of many nationalities. The city is full of diverse cultures: the Mission District, where many Mexicans and Nicaraguans live; Chinatown, home to the Asian community; and Little Italy, among others. It is truly a mix of cultures living together.

I loved the trip so much that I hope to go back one day.

Edith Mamani is a student in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Edith studies English to take advantage of the great opportunities there are in the US. She loves Peruvian food.

A Lakeside Refuge: Finding Peace and Perspective

In our busy, fast-paced lives, finding a place to pause and reflect can be rare. For me, that place is a quiet lakeside spot in Florida, a simple, unassuming space where the gentle movement of water, the whisper of the breeze, and the songs of birds create a sense of calm unlike anywhere else. This place is more than just a location; it is a sanctuary where I can think clearly, reconnect with my roots, and gain the strength to face life's challenges. Through my visits to this lake, I have learned the value of patience, reflection, and hope.

When I go there, I like to sit on a bench and watch the water move slowly. The sound of the waves helps me forget my stress

and focus on the things that are profoundly important. Life can be busy, and sometimes we forget to breathe or appreciate the present moment. At the lake, everything slows down. I feel as though the lake listens to me without judgment. It is the one place where my mind becomes quiet.

This place is especially meaningful because it helped me through difficult moments. When I first arrived in the United States, everything felt new—new language, unfamiliar environment, and new responsibilities. I often felt overwhelmed, but visiting the lake gave me strength. It reminded me that change takes time and that I could build a new life step by step. The calm water encouraged me to face challenges with patience and determination.

Another reason I love this place is that it inspires me. When I sit there, I think about my goals, my dreams, and the future I want to create. Being near the water helps me organize my thoughts and make better decisions. Sometimes, I bring a notebook to write ideas, plans, or reflections. Other times, I simply enjoy the silence and let nature speak to me.

My favorite place also connects me with my home country. Back home, I used to visit rivers and beaches with my family. The lake in Florida reminds me of those moments. Even though I am far from where I grew up, the water makes me feel close to my roots. It gives me a sense of belonging and comfort.

In the end, my favorite place is not just about the location itself. It is about the feeling it gives me. It is a place of peace, hope, and renewal. Whenever I visit, I return home with a lighter heart and a clearer mind. That is why this simple lakeside spot will always be my favorite place.

Antuan Mesa is a Cuban young man who studies English to get better opportunities in life, such as getting a university degree and opening his own business. His instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at Miami Dade College, Kendall campus.

Love

An intriguing topic, isn't it? What is love? It's the emotions

and feelings we have for children, for a man or woman, for nature, and for the world around us. There is another kind of love as well—love as a calling. It is no less important, both for a person and for society. How can we recognize love? We can sense, feel, understand, and even see it. I want to share two episodes from my life—both connected to my first experiences in America and the way love shows itself through real actions.

Episode One: Disappearing Paradise During one of my first days in Florida, my son took me to Fort DeSoto Park, to the beach. When we arrived, a breathtaking view opened before me: a stream of water, like a small river, and a little bridge crossing it, leading into a grove of ancient pine trees. Under their shade, people were escaping the summer heat, breathing in the sea air mixed with the scent of pine needles. I fell in love with the place instantly and completely. I kept returning to it again and again. But two years later, when I came back expecting the same beauty, I was stunned. Before me lay a deserted beach: no stream, no bridge, no trees. Some areas were marked off with yellow tape and warning signs. And it wasn't the result of natural disasters—that pine oasis had been removed by the park staff. I asked my son to find out the reason. From official sources he learned that the area had been altered so that endangered species of sea turtles could safely lay their eggs on the widened beach. This decision, based on science, was made to preserve nature. Scientists, environmental specialists, and park workers gave up the familiar beauty in order to protect life. That was the first sign of love I saw: love for nature and love for one's work—love that sometimes requires difficult, unpopular, yet wise decisions.

Episode Two: The Birth of Hope This year, on another beach, I witnessed a truly miraculous sight. One autumn evening we drove out to watch the local attraction—the sunset. And there, again, were the same yellow tapes with warning signs. The moment the sun touched the horizon, tiny baby turtles began emerging, one after another, from the carefully protected patches of sand. As soon as they surfaced, they crawled toward the sea. I watched, holding my breath, realizing that I was witnessing a miracle—the result of tremendous love for one's work, for nature, for the living world, and for the future of each fragile creature. And in those tiny beings that so bravely made their way to the water, I saw the most important feeling that drives all life on Earth—the love of life itself.

Tatiana Mezentsova is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

The Beauty of Nature

Everyone around the world has a favorite place where they can feel relaxed and find peace. For me, my favorite place doesn't have a specific location, but a feeling in itself. Whenever I'm surrounded by trees, flowers, and fresh air, I feel calm and alive. Nature is my favorite place because it helps me relax, think clearly, and appreciate the simple beauty of life.

First of all, nature helps me escape from the stress of daily life. Whenever I go for a walk in the park or visit the mountains, I always feel more peaceful. The singing of the birds, the sound of the wind, and the smell of the flowers relax me a lot and make me feel refreshed. Moreover, being in nature gives me time to reflect on my thoughts and feelings.

Nature inspires me in many ways. For example, I love watching the sunrise because it gives me hope for a new day. Besides, I enjoy taking photos of landscapes and animals because they show how wonderful and diverse nature is. As a result, every time I spend time outdoors, I feel grateful and connected to the world around me.

In conclusion, nature is my favorite place because it brings me peace, inspiration, and joy. It teaches me to slow down, breathe, and appreciate the beauty that surrounds us every day. Therefore, whenever I need to find balance and happiness, I go outside to enjoy the magic of nature.

Yusnely Novales Ramirez is 18 and from Cuba and has lived in the United States for one year. She is currently studying in the ESOL English class at Miami Dade College, where she is improving her language skills and working toward her academic goals.

My Quiet Place

My bedroom is my favorite place. I feel comfortable when I

am in my bedroom; I can spend a whole day there. That's why I keep my bedroom always clean and smelling good. I change the blankets and pillows every week and vacuum regularly. My bedroom is very simple; I don't like decoration. When I spend time at work and other places, I can't wait to go back to my room and relax and watch Nigerian movies and videos on TikTok. I dream a lot of things in my bedroom, for example, about my goals and my future dreams for my Haitian children.

When my family doesn't see me for a long time, they say, "Where have you been, Farah?" Sometimes they even forget that I live with them because I spend all my time in my bedroom. If I could spend all my time in my bedroom, I would do it without any problem. In my bedroom there is no stress. That's my best place, and I love it so much.

Farah Melle Ocean is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

The Sea

The sea is my favorite place in the world, a space where I find peace and balance amid the noise of modern life. We live in a society where so-called false dopamine dominates our days. Social media, electronic devices, and the constant consumption of stimuli make us believe we are experiencing happiness, when in reality it is only a superficial and fleeting sense of satisfaction. In contrast, the sea represents a genuine source of well-being, a real dopamine that comes from connecting with nature. Every time I visit it, I feel my mind clear and my spirit filled with calm.

Visiting the sea allows me to experience a sense of freedom that few things in life can match. The simple act of looking at the endless horizon awakens in me a feeling of both greatness and humility. Listening to the sound of the waves gently hitting the shore reminds me that life has its own rhythm and that not everything needs to happen quickly. When I walk along the sand, I feel each step releasing tension and reconnecting me with what is essential. Instead of the artificial and ephemeral satisfaction that screens offer, the sea provides an authentic pleasure that stays with me long after I return home.

The sensory experience that the sea offers is irreplaceable. The smell of salt, the fresh breeze on my face, and the blue that fades into the horizon create an environment that completely envelops me. There, my mind becomes clear, and my thoughts flow more freely. The sea becomes a refuge from the stress and anxiety imposed by modern life. It is as if nature reminds me that true happiness is not found in the immediacy of digital stimuli but in the ability to stop, breathe, and contemplate. This real dopamine that comes from being in front of the sea not only nourishes my momentary well-being but also strengthens my emotional resilience in everyday life.

In conclusion, the sea is more than a beautiful landscape to me; it is a healing space, a reminder of what is essential, and a provider of genuine happiness. In a world where false dopamine seeks to occupy every corner of our attention, the sea offers an alternative that is authentic, natural, and lasting. There, I find a balance that cannot be bought or replaced with anything artificial. That is why I consider the sea my favorite place—not only for its beauty but also for the deep and genuine well-being it gives me every time I am fortunate enough to visit it.

Viviana Ortiz is studying English to improve her opportunities for a better future. She is an ESOL 5 student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

My Favorite Place

One of my favorite places is Spain because we visited it for my birthday and went to many places. We were there for about a week, and when my birthday arrived, we went to a beach in Valencia. We also went to France from Spain and visited a little bit there as well, because my younger half-sister lives there, and I wanted to visit her. I would also like to move to Spain, to a town called Ferrol, since it's like a small town and it's very beautiful. I would like to learn more about their culture and food, as well as their traditions and many places I didn't get to see when I was there.

Spain has a strong culture of dance and food. Traditional dances like flamenco are full of passion and show the history and emotions of the people. Food is also very important in Spanish

culture. People enjoy sharing meals with family and friends, and traditional dishes bring people together. This combination of dance and food makes Spanish culture lively and meaningful.

I want to try their food, such as paella, tapas, and other dishes. I also want to be at one of their music festivals or carnivals, like the April Fair in Seville. That's why I love Spain, the culture, the food, and the beaches! I want to live there eventually to really experience the country, even more than when I first visited.

Diego Pacheco is nineteen years old and from Venezuela. He studies with Adriana Pabon in Palm Beach Gardens.

Our Jamaican Vacation

This year, my daughter and I decided to visit another country. At the hotel, we felt very welcomed by the staff, and to our great joy, they assigned us a room with an ocean view. When we entered the hotel room, we found everything very clean, comfortable, and cozy. We were also fascinated by the beautiful view from the balcony. We could see and smell the beautiful ocean. Every morning, we woke up early to enjoy exquisite breakfasts by the sea. During the day, we could enjoy the warm waters at the beach, lounge by the pool, sip refreshing piña colodas, and more. All of that was magnificent, but the most impressive thing of all was climbing Dunn's River Falls.

We chose my daughter's birthday as the day for this excursion. We were excited because it would be our first experience climbing through a waterfall. We left early to catch the bus that would take us to a catamaran that would later take us to the waterfall. At the dock, we gathered with about forty other tourists, and the trip included a traditional Jamaican lunch. On the boat, they played traditional Jamaican music. On the way, our tour made a quick stop for people to snorkel. My daughter decided to snorkel, but I decided to sit on the boat and enjoy the view and warmth of the sun, as I had never learned how to swim.

When we arrived at the waterfalls, we saw crystal clear water cascading over smooth limestone tiers, creating a symphony of rushing sound and misty spray. It was a moment of pure connection with nature. The guide, a skinny man, recorded the climb-

ing experience. He said that wearing water shoes was mandatory due to the slippery rocks that we had to climb. He told all of us to hold hands when entering the waterfall, and if one person fell, everyone had to help. The guide was very kind and safely guided us to the top of a waterfall.

As we were climbing, the guide gave us many chances to admire the view, take pictures, and immerse ourselves in the cold waters of the pools. A photographer took funny photos of us grimacing as we experienced them. My favorite part was being submerged in the fresh waters. The nearly thousand-foot climb took about an hour. When we reached the top, I took a picture in front of a sign that said “Congratulations” to show my husband when we got back from the trip.

Coming down from the waterfall, we had two options: either go back down the stairs or go down zip-lining. We chose to go down the stairs because we were tired and we didn’t have time before our boat had to leave. On the way back to the hotel, the DJ on the catamaran played more music, and the staff served food and drinks for everyone. This experience was one to remember. I’d definitely return to Jamaica again.

Mayuri Perez emigrated with her husband and two children from Cuba. She is now a supervising psychologist for the Polk County Public Schools District. Her tutor is Neal Steiger.

Proud To Be Guatemalan

I am a daughter of the moon and the volcano, of culture and tradition. With pride and heart, I am Guatemalan!

Our culture is a tapestry of colors, flavors, and sounds that make us unique in the world. From the majestic mountains and volcanoes that surround us to the beaches of the Pacific and the Caribbean, Guatemala is a country of contrasts and natural beauty that fills us with pride.

Our history is rich and complex, with a Mayan heritage that connects us to the past and inspires us to move forward. I am proud of our ancestors, who fought to preserve their identity and culture, despite adversity.

Guatemalan food is a reflection of our cultural diversity, with delicious dishes like pepiàn, kakik, and tamales that unite us at the family table. Music and dance are also an integral part of our identity, with rhythms and movements that make us vibrate to the rhythm of life.

But what makes me most proud is the warmth and hospitality of our people. We Guatemalans are known for our kindness and generosity, always willing to open our hearts and homes to those who visit us.

Being Guatemalan is being part of a community that values family, friendship, and solidarity. It is feeling deeply proud of our roots and our identity and working together to build a better future for all.

To conclude this tribute to my favorite place, I would like to say in the Mayan language of my Mother, which is Sipakapense: “Ruk’ ri rchi’ qoom xuqke ri rmeq’alil ri wsaaq, Kin k’owsaj ri nq’ijlil, in ina’jpaxil kinxla’jij wib’ ruk’ ri kuktem.”

I would also like to say in Spanish: “Con el ritmo de la marimba y el color de mi traje, celebro mi identidad, soy guatemalteca, con orgullo y alegría.”

And finally in English, the language that I am continuously learning: “With the rhythm of the marimba and the color of my dress, I celebrate my identity; I am Guatemalan, with pride and joy.”

Leidy Madai Perez Lopez is taking ESOL & GED classes at Forest Hill High School Adult & Community Education. She was one of nine students selected from 600+ to read her essay at the ACE-PBC 2025 Adult Learner Essay Reception. Her teacher is Monika Pompetzki.

My Beautiful Country

Haiti is one of the most beautiful countries I know, a place where I have many happy memories. It boasts many magnificent beaches. A country of sharing. A country of love. A country where everything is natural. The sea and sunshine. I thank you, God, for letting me travel so I could see the goodness of my

country. I have traveled to more than 13 countries in my life: Chile, Peru, Mexico, the USA, etc. After I saw these other places, I realized that Haiti is the best country.

Everything we eat in Haiti is natural. They make griyo with good pork; they make good legumes, good rice, and good pumpkin soup. I enjoy watching beautiful and fit Haitian women walking at the beach in bikinis. This is a natural gift from God to us. God gives us what he doesn't give other nations. I'm giving you a secret today. If you want to taste life's sweetness, go live in Haiti. You'll see the beauty of life, but know that once you go, you won't ask to come back.

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

Raymond les Bains

Nature is divine creation. This concept refers to the material world and ecosystems, for example. Mount Everest, volcanos, the Amazon Rainforest, national parks, and beaches. I choose the last one as my favorite place to describe. Raymond les Bains is a warm water beach found within the tropical country of Haiti. It's 13 km from Jacmel, a city in the southeast. People like to visit it for its paradisiacal atmosphere. With its giant waves, it is able to bring swimmers very far. People enjoy swimming, sunbathing, eating griot with pikliz, and listening to compas music.

This is one of the best beaches in the country, and I like it. It has warm and crystal water, soft sand, and sunny weather. When you smell the air of the sea, you smell a mix of vegetation and the environment. There is a clear sky and a blue horizon when you stare far over the sea. Coconut water is the natural water to drink. The constant sound between the strong waves and the wind does not disappear. Finally, Raymond les Bains attracts many tourists for its location and beauty. I hope to return there some day.

Wesner Pierre Jacques is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. His teacher is Siena Mayers.

So Far Away – A Wonderful World

I first heard about this wonderful country from my geography teacher when I was in 6th grade. At that time, due to the isolation policy, people in my country were unable to travel around the world. Only a few were able to visit foreign countries and share their impressions. My teacher was one of them.

Then, change happened in my country, and I had the opportunity to go to Italy with my grown-up daughter. I will never forget the first charm of the rocky shores washed by the gentle Adriatic Sea, the smell of pine trees, and the smell of olive oil with garlic from every restaurant. I'll always remember the visits: Rome with the Colosseum; San Peter's Basilica with Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel inside and a wonderful view of the antique city from the dome; Florence with Santa Maria de Fiori and the Uffizi Gallery with my beloved Simonetta Vespucci as Botticelli's Venus; Venice with the Grand Canal and San Marco shining with gold mosaics; and Milan with Leonardo's Last Supper. When I returned home, I began studying Italian history, reading books about Italy written by Stendhal and Muratov, and watching movies. My daughter began studying Italian.

It has become a tradition to go to Italy for every vacation, first with my family, then with my friends and coworkers, and then with my grandchildren. We have traveled almost all of Italy and all the seas surrounding it—Adriatic, Tyrrhenian, and Ligurian—and tried the cuisine of many regions: pizza in Naples, pasta with porcini mushrooms in mountainous areas, and wines in Tuscany; and, of course, we have seen many sights. I even met my university friend who I hadn't seen for 30 years. She lives in the beautiful old city of Bari, where one of the most sacred Christian relics is kept in the Cathedral of St. Nicholas. I was so happy.

Some time ago, thanks to a lucky chance, I came to the USA. Now I'm studying the history of America, as well as the language, and I am very grateful to the Clearview Adult Center's teachers who help me with this. I am traveling around the country. It is very interesting for me. I've already seen the grandiose buildings of Boston and Chicago and the peach and peanut farms in Georgia. I hope America will become my favorite country too.

Now everything has changed again, and most people from our

country don't have the opportunity to travel around the world. Perhaps right now one small schoolgirl is sitting and dreaming about wonderful countries in geography class like I did. I believe that the time will come when every person will be able to choose their favorite place to live.

Nina Popova is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Nina Popova.

My Favorite Place

My favorite place is New York City. I like New York because they have better food there. I like their pizzas, calzones, and salads. The calzones are my favorite; they're the best. I also like New York because it has more places to visit. I like Manhattan because there are places to shop. I like buying expensive clothes. In addition, I like New York because it is my hometown. I was born there and lived there when I was little. I visit every year to see my family. In conclusion, I love New York City, but I also love Jacksonville, and I want to stay here.

Gilberto Ramirez has been with the Literacy Alliance on and off for a few years and is looking to improve his reading and writing.

The Sanctuary of My Memories

I have a favorite place, do you? Perhaps it's a place from your childhood, like mine, or from your adult life. I believe it should be a place where you can relax, feel calm, enjoy beauty, and improve your mental health.

I would like to share my story. When I was a child, every summer my parents and I visited my grandparents. They lived in a village. Their house bordered a magnificent nature reserve. There was a landscape defined by emerald meadows, a tall, dense forest, and a crystalline river rushing over rapids. My grandmother and I would go to graze the goats. We woke up early and walked through the morning dew to the meadows at dawn. While the goats ate grass, drank cool water, basked in the sun, and rested, I could swim, chase butterflies, eat wild strawberries and bird cherries, and pick hazelnuts in the forest. My

grandfather would take me fishing, and we would glide along the river in his boat. The water was so clear that you could see many different fish. Bank swallows nested in burrows on the steep banks. In those distant times, I didn't realize the full charm of this place.

Now I've grown up and recognize that it's very difficult to find a place where you feel truly calm and comfortable. I cannot go to that place now because it's too far away from me, and I think it has changed a lot. The trees are not as tall, the grass is not as lush, and the river is not as fast and clean. But when I feel very sad and melancholic, or when I suffer from insomnia and feel restless, I always imagine this place. I go back to my childhood and remember that serenity, that carefree time, and the incredible beauty of nature. It always makes me feel better.

Natalia Rybalko is an advanced-level adult ESOL student from Russia at CAEC, Oldsmar. Her teacher is Angela Faiola. Natalia is consistent with her English studies and is very kind and helpful to all her classmates.

My Cozy Place

I would like to talk about my room because it is the only place I feel happy and comfortable. My room is beautiful and comfortable. For example, my bed and my TV are two things I like the most in my room because they help me to reach myself and relax the best. I can also say that my room is my personal refuge because I feel better resting away from the noise, etc. That is why I always keep my room clean with heavy colors like blue to attract positivity and a sweet sleep. And sometimes for resolving problems, explaining the concerns of my private life, or calming my children, I choose my room as the best place to discuss because it is a less frequented and respected place. For me a room is the best place (after the church) where a person can feel better and secure.

Nadine Saint Louis is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

My Dreamland

My favorite place is my house in Jordan. Everything is different there: the family, the food, the language, and the weather. Relationships with people are easy there because we had the same language, and the beautiful memories of the past are there with my husband and children.

Our house was the first proof of our successful life. I miss everything, especially my bed and sofa. But life is not easy. I gave up everything beautiful I had built for a better future for my children.

The dreamland is the United States. The most beautiful and safe land in the world. I'm grateful to my Lord for letting this happen. I moved to the United States, but my home sickness is difficult sometimes. I think about going back home, but I'm afraid that going back is just a trick and will confuse me even more.

God help me in my new life in my dreamland.

Naia Shammos is from Jordan and now studying English at Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

My Favorite Place in the World to Relax

It's a pleasure for me to talk about my favorite place. My favorite place is my home, where I spend time with my family. I have two siblings. I love them. We often study together and play games. We make some jokes, we go shopping, and we love to eat together. I feel very comfortable when I am with them.

I love when I lie down in my bed with my phone. I text with my friends, listen to music, and watch some videos on TikTok. I do some research about the new words I hear in the videos. I relax at night and sleep well and wake up when I want. My home is very calm. We have a huge kitchen. When my mom makes some food for us, we are so happy. We sing every song we know. I feel like a princess. Our house is the best. I have not found a place more comfortable than my house. My home is a perfect place for

me whenever I feel stressed or tired. That is why I like to stay in my house.

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

My Special Room

My bedroom is a place I like so much. It is so quiet, clean, and beautiful. Most of all, it smells good too. My bedroom is my private space.

When I am in my bedroom, I like to think about my future. It is where I can quietly think and make sound decisions for myself and about my life.

When I have a problem, I go to my favorite place where I can think and find a solution. I am so happy to have this special place to pray and connect with my God.

It is in this special space where I like to read books, listen to music, relax, and have a lot of fun. I believe that everyone should have a favorite place that only they can retreat to when they want solitude.

I really like my bedroom. This is where I feel comfortable and safe. That is my favorite place.

Fara Wendjina Telfort was born in Haiti. She is learning English, attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is working to improve her skills in English to later enter the field of health science.

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

Driven to Immigrate

We immigrate not because we want to leave our country, but because there is no freedom. Living under a dictatorship means people cannot express themselves freely, and having a different opinion can lead to serious consequences. In that kind of system, it becomes very difficult to live the life we truly want.

In my country, hard work does not always lead to a better life. Even if you study and work hard, there are very few opportunities to grow or improve your future. Many people are willing to work for their dreams, but the system does not allow it. This lack of opportunity is one of the main reasons why many people decide to immigrate.

Immigrating is not an easy decision. It is not only about money. It is about freedom, stability, and the chance to build a better future for ourselves and our families. Many of us leave thinking about our children and wanting to give them opportunities we never had.

At the same time, immigration brings many sacrifices. It means being far away from our parents, children, and loved ones. We miss important moments, family celebrations, and simple things like hugs and conversations. Distance is very painful and becomes part of our daily life.

When we arrive in a new country, we also face many challenges. We must adapt to a different culture and a new way of life. Learning a new language is one of the hardest parts. Sometimes we know what we want to say, but we do not know how to say it. This can make us feel insecure and frustrated.

Even with all these difficulties, we keep moving forward. We work hard and stay strong because we believe the sacrifice is worth it. Many immigrants ask themselves the same question: What would have happened if my country had been different? If there had been freedom and opportunities?

Maybe many of us would have stayed. Maybe our families would be together. But that is not our reality, and for that reason, we continue fighting for a better future, even far from home.

Liliana Almaguer Carbonell is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Change Has Come

My life changed when I came to the United States. When I was living in my country, there were many things I could not do. I depended on my parents, and they paid for my schooling. Because of insecurity, I could not attend school safely or continue my education as I wanted.

After coming to the U.S., my life began to change. At first, I could not find a job, but I stayed patient. I searched and applied many times, and eventually I found a job. When I started working, I became independent. I no longer depended on my parents. I worked and continued my English classes at the same time.

I worked hard at my job, and my efforts paid off. I received a promotion and became an assistant manager. This made me very proud because it showed how much my life had changed. Now I can take care of myself and make positive decisions for my future.

When I arrived in the U.S., I could not speak English and did not understand the culture. Enrolling in adult education helped me a lot. Through adult education, I learned English, understood the culture, and felt supported. The teacher treated me well and taught me with patience and respect. After almost one year, I was able to speak English and communicate with people at work and with my teacher.

I continue attending classes almost every day. In 2024, I received a certificate, which made me very happy because it showed the progress I had made. Adult education has been one of the best experiences of my life. I am thankful for adult education programs that help immigrants learn English and build a better future.

Edna Bruny attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

From Spanish Cobblestones to Florida Palms

Five days ago, looking through a plane window, I realized my life had changed forever. Things that felt normal in my home country suddenly felt different in the United States—the way people speak and how they spend their time. While these changes were initially overwhelming, they helped me see how deeply culture shapes us. Though my life in Spain and my new life in Florida differ greatly, both have changed how I understand the world.

A Setting Rooted in Tradition. Living in Bollullos de la Mitación, a small town near Seville, Spain, meant living where time stands still among whitewashed walls. The town is rooted in deep tradition and faith. Its cobblestone streets—ancient stones that force you to walk slowly—always lead to the central plaza. The heart of the town beats loudest every October for *Romería*. During this religious festival, the entire community pilgrimages to the countryside, and the air fills with the vibrant colors of flamenco dresses. In Lake Worth, Florida, that fervor transforms into the quiet of golf courses and modern shopping centers. Here, history isn't felt in ancient stones; it is built anew every day.

The After-School Social Hour. In my village, school pickup is the great social event of the afternoon. Parents don't just grab their children; they linger at the gates for an impromptu gathering, chatting about life while children play nearby. It is a moment of pure community. In Lake Worth, that human warmth is replaced by long car lines. Each parent waits their turn with the air conditioning on, limiting social contact to a brief wave through a window. This was the biggest culture shock for me.

The Pulse of Everyday Life. The “sound” of life also marks the distance between these two realities. In Bollullos, life happens “outwardly.” The noise comes from people, church bells, and crowded squares. You might run into a neighbor and end up having a coffee spontaneously. Florida, while vibrant, is a place of long distances. Encounters are usually planned, and the silence

of residential neighborhoods is broken only by traffic.

Living in Lake Worth allows me to embrace the efficiency and beauty of a modern, tropical environment. However, my heart still seeks the echo of cobblestones and the murmur of parents at the school gate. These are two different worlds: one offers space and a future, while the other reminds me that true wealth lies in those small moments of connection that only happen when life is lived without hurry.

Yusimi Carbonell is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

The Strength of an Immigrant

Life in Peru is hugely different from life in the United States, and my experience as an immigrant has shown me both the obstacles and the opportunities of living between two cultures.

Life in Peru:

In Peru, people are very friendly and social. It is common to greet others with a hug or a kiss on the cheek, even when meeting them for the first time. Families spend a great deal of time together, and traditions such as Christmas, New Year, and Independence Day are celebrated with music, food, and large gatherings that last late into the night.

Daily life can be busy and sometimes chaotic. Traffic is often heavy, with many buses, taxis, and motorcycles everywhere. Public transportation is the most common way to get around, and many people do not own cars.

Education in Peru also presents challenges. Public schools often have fewer resources, and many families try to send their children to private schools when possible.

Work life can be difficult as well. Salaries are generally lower, and it can be hard to find well-paying jobs. Nonetheless, people work extremely hard, and there is a powerful sense of community and family support.

Life in the United States:

In the United States, people tend to be more independent and more respectful of personal space. Most people greet one another with a handshake rather than a hug or a kiss. Holidays and celebrations such as Thanksgiving and Halloween are exceedingly popular, though they are celebrated in ways that differ from Peruvian traditions. For example, most celebrations end earlier in the evening, unlike in Peru.

Transportation is more organized, but people often depend on having their own car. Public transportation exists, but it is not as commonly used, especially outside of large cities.

Education in the United States is typically better equipped with modern facilities and advanced technology. However, universities are extremely expensive. On the positive side, there are many opportunities for scholarships, loans, and programs that help students continue their studies.

Work life in the U.S. is demanding, but there are also more opportunities for professional growth. People often work long hours, yet they can usually earn enough to live comfortably and plan for their future.

Life in Peru and the United States differs in many ways, including culture, education, and work. These differences can be challenging, but they also offer opportunities for learning and growth. Migration is not only about adapting to a new country; it is also about demonstrating courage and determination. My experiences have taught me that migrating requires strength and hope for a better future. Adapting to a new culture can be difficult; however, the resilience of immigrants proves that seeking a better life is always worthwhile.

Juan Luis Castillo likes practicing sports, going to the beach, and playing video games. His dream is to have his own business. He is an ESOL 5 student in Professor Carmen Whu's class at Miami Dade College, Kendall.

Differences Between Haiti and the United States

Life in my country, Haiti, is very different from life in the United States. Although both countries value family, hard work, and faith, daily life is not the same. From my personal experiences, these differences are clear in the economy, education, healthcare, and lifestyle. Likewise, comparing these two countries helps me better understand how the environment shapes people's lives.

One major difference is the economy. In Haiti, finding a stable job is very difficult. When I lived in Haiti, I saw many adults working long hours but still earning very little money.

My family depended on small jobs and help from relatives. Sometimes, even basic needs like food and electricity were not guaranteed. In the United States, I noticed more job opportunities and better pay. Although life is expensive, people have more chances to improve their financial situation through work.

Education is another important difference that I have personally experienced. In Haiti, families have to pay for school fees, uniforms, and books. There are times when students miss school because their parents cannot afford the cost. Some classrooms are overcrowded and lack supplies. In the United States, public education is free; students receive books, meals, and access to technology. I have seen how these resources help students focus more on learning and planning for their future.

Healthcare also shows a strong contrast. When someone in my country gets sick, it is often difficult to find a nearby clinic with medicine or doctors. People have to travel long distances or use home remedies because medical care is too expensive. However, in the United States, hospitals and clinics are easier to access, especially in emergencies. Even though healthcare costs can be high, quality of care and availability of services are much better.

Finally, daily life and culture are very different. In Haiti, life feels slower and more community-centered; I remember neighbors talking outside, sharing food, and helping each other without being asked to. In the United States, life moves faster. People are busy with work and schedules, and social activities usually

need planning. However, I have learned to adapt to this lifestyle.

In conclusion, life in Haiti is very different from life in the United States. Based on my personal experiences, the differences in economy, education, healthcare, and lifestyle are significant. While the United States offers more opportunities, Haiti is rich in culture, strength, and community.

Filaine Charles moved to the United States two years ago. She is learning English in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College-Kendall. She is working hard to improve her education, support her family, and build a better future for her and her loved ones.

I Am Not Exaggerating

When I talk about how different Panama is from the United States, I am not exaggerating. One major difference concerns laws and civic responsibility. In the United States, laws are enforced very strictly. For example, when driving, people tend to follow traffic rules carefully. In my country, although laws exist and are generally respected, they are not always strictly enforced, which often leads to problems.

The education system also differs greatly. In the United States, students can choose classes that align with their future goals. In contrast, in Panama, schools establish a fixed schedule for the entire academic year. Students typically take 11 or 12 subjects throughout the year, which means they may have 7 or 8 classes in a single day.

Gastronomy is another area where differences are noticeable. In the United States, many people rely on frozen or prepared foods that only need to be heated or fried. Traditional dishes are not as clearly defined. However, I do appreciate the wide variety of foods available here that I did not have access to in my country. In Panama, there are many traditional dishes such as chicken and rice with potato salad, sancocho, and puff pastry with chorizo. Most people there prefer homemade meals rather than frozen or prepackaged foods.

The entertainment industry also reflects a strong contrast. In Panama, limited budgets and support restrict the growth of film,

music, and television. In the United States, large investments allow entertainment to reach global recognition through major awards and media exposure. Despite these limitations, Panama has produced well-known artists such as Rubén Blades, Eddy Lover, and El General.

Another noticeable difference is punctuality. In Panama, punctuality is often a challenge. When a party or event is scheduled, it usually starts later than planned, and people tend to arrive late. In the United States, however, I have observed that people are very punctual. In the activities I have attended, everything starts on time.

Finally, the climate is also different. In Key West, the weather is generally hot, but it is not as humid as in Panama, which has a more tropical climate with constant heat and high humidity. Additionally, around October, temperatures here begin to drop slightly, making the weather cooler. This seasonal change does not occur in Panama, where it remains hot year-round.

Jeisel Gonzalez attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

From Russia to the United States: A New Way of Life

My family and I moved to Florida around three months ago from Moscow, Russia. We have been living in our country for almost forty years. Here we have a lot of different habits that we need to adapt to for our new life, some of which we can easily adapt to and some we may be able to improve. Climate, cost of living, and finding high-quality goods are the major differences I see, and I would like to share some striking examples.

First, climate is a huge change for us. Now we are happy to spend the wintertime here because the warm and mild climate is comfortable for us. We can spend hours sitting on our patio, breathing fresh air, and enjoy talking to each other. Also, we can go to the beach every day. We really like visiting different beaches all over the state. If we have any opportunity to spend time together, we always go to a new place. This can be a national park, a theme park, or an entertainment area, or perhaps the beautiful natural Florida springs, rivers, or any place in nature; interest-

ing cities; or cultural destinations. It is very important for us to have these new acquaintances and to familiarize ourselves with our new surroundings.

The second difference I noted is the cost of living. The prices here are too high for us! We cannot get used to this yet. In our country we spend two or three times less money on living expenses. I find services are very overpriced, in my opinion. But I understand. If we find a job here, it would probably not be a problem. In comparison with salaries here, the prices don't seem that high. Now, we know what we are striving for. It is another goal to achieve. I believe, if we have the financial freedom in the United States, we can have it all over the world. Because of this, we must spend a lot of time here to set up our career paths. We spend hours every day applying for many jobs and finding out ways to earn money.

Another complicated thing for us is finding high-quality goods at reasonable prices. Food quality was a terrible issue for us at first. It is unusual for us to spend a huge amount of time to find quality groceries and not go bankrupt. I hope it is only because we don't know a lot about how to shop here. In Russia, we had plenty of convenient and cheap delivery services with already highly rated groceries. Before, we spent very little time for everyday shopping. Despite everything, we are full of optimism and enjoying our new life here in Florida, USA.

Evgenii Ivanov is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. His teacher is Angela Faiola.

Haiti vs. the U.S.

Life in my country, Haiti, is very different from life in the United States. The two countries differ in culture, lifestyle, and education. In Haiti, life is simpler, and people live more in the community. People are welcoming to their neighbors, and families are very close-knit. We spend a lot of time together talking, sharing ideas, sharing food, and helping one another, even when life is difficult. People are kind and supportive, but many work very hard and still struggle to earn a good salary.

In the United States, life is faster and more organized. People

are often busy with work and school, so there isn't always time to socialize. However, education is more accessible, and there are more opportunities for personal and professional growth.

Thus, life in Haiti and life in the United States are very different. Haiti has a strong culture and values family, unity, and courage. The United States offers more opportunities, stability, and comfort.

Guelmonde Jean attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Cultural Differences and What Connects Us

I moved to the United States from Ukraine a little more than three years ago. Yes, everything around me felt different compared to my home country. It felt like I had not moved to another country but stepped onto another planet. I began to notice things I had never questioned before: the different tastes of bread or yogurt, the ability to walk to places like coffee shops or grocery stores, the pace of daily life, and the simple rules that shape what people find important.

What stood out the most was communication. In Ukraine, people are usually more reserved with strangers and rarely smile without a reason. In the U.S., politeness follows clear social patterns. Friendliness is seen as normal, not special. At first, it felt insincere and forced on me—Ukrainians value honesty, even when it is direct. We say what we think, without sugarcoating. Over time, I realized that polite and structured communication often works better, especially at work. Staying calm and respectful, even under pressure, helps solve problems and makes people more willing to help.

Differences became noticeable in daily life, especially in attitudes toward appearance. In Ukraine, many women believe that looking well-dressed shows respect for themselves and others. One example is my aunt. She is elderly, and in all her years she has never left the house without being well dressed and wearing lipstick, even if she is just going to the supermarket. In the United States, I noticed a different attitude. Comfort is often more important, and people feel free to choose it. These are only a few

examples, but there were many others.

For a long time, I thought that adapting to this new “planet” would always be difficult or even impossible. But slowly my attention shifted. I started to see similarities that felt deeper than habits or traditions.

While walking my dog in the park, I noticed how kind and attentive people are toward their pets, treating them with love, care, and affection. This care felt familiar to me. I saw the same values in how people care for children, support friends, and respect older generations, just as they do in Ukraine.

Last year, after a hurricane damaged the home of a family member of my colleague in the Tampa Bay area, my coworkers and I came together to help. Moments like this showed me that empathy is not different from country to country.

The longer I live in the United States, the more I understand that differences exist, but they do not define us. What once felt like another planet no longer feels so distant. Under these differences, I see shared values that connect people everywhere. What matters most is how we treat each other in everyday life and in difficult times. This is what makes us human, regardless of nationality or geography.

Julia Korevo is a student in the English Language Learners program at Largo Adult Education. She focuses on improving her English writing skills and reflecting on cultural differences through personal experience.

How Life in My Home Country Is Different from Life in the United States

My home country is different from the life in the United States because it is all new to me and to my family. I moved from Nicaragua to the U.S.A. in October 2024. My family includes a husband, two daughters ages 9 and 14, and my beloved mother.

When we arrived in the United States, I discovered a different way of life. Here, there are more opportunities to study and work, but everything is faster, and I see a faster way of living

than in my country. It forces me—I tell myself I must be more independent. In Nicaragua, we are more relaxed. It is like they are in their own world. Nicaraguans are candid and loving, and family ties are very close. When we left, we had to say goodbye to our customs, our families and friends, our beaches, and our delicious food. Life in Nicaragua was peaceful; I remember that I had a happy childhood.

Moreover, my daughters left the school that they loved. It has been sad for them. In addition, I left my job, where I was dedicated and highly valued. As of right now I'm unemployed and searching for work. My budget is tight. The good thing is that I'm learning to save money. I'm becoming a savvy shopper, always looking for the supermarket sales in order to save money. I realize that the change was not easy. My daughters had to adapt to a new school and improve their English, and I faced the frustration of not being able to communicate well and get a job.

Furthermore, I had the opportunity to enroll in the adult ESOL program. My hours at the ESOL are from 8:30 to 1:00, and I was told that I have perfect attendance in my class. I realize that I'm not alone in the English learning journey. I see how the rest of my class comes every day and is ready, and that gives me encouragement. At first, speaking English was very difficult, but with effort, I have improved in writing and understanding more. This experience has helped me grow, adapt, and dream of a better future for myself and my family.

Living in another country is not always easy, but it has taught me to value my family and everything I have. I have learned that although material things can be replaced, the love and warmth of my family can never be replaced. Family is the most important thing to me, and that is something I will always cherish.

Barbara Largaespada is a 47-year-old adult learner from Managua, Nicaragua. She moved to the United States with her family more than two years ago. She is currently studying English through the adult ESOL program and is committed to improving her language skills to support her daughters' education and build a better future for her family.

I Did Not Plan On Staying

Hello, my life in the United States was not how I thought it would be. When I was young, my dream was to visit the U.S., not for a prolonged stay, only to visit. To my surprise I met my husband; he had told me he lives in the U.S. He asked me to marry him. I said yes, and therefore, I did not have a choice but an obligation to leave here.

I was remembering when I was in my country, Haiti; I and all my friends talked a lot about the U.S. Even my last teacher in Haiti said that the U.S.A. is the most powerful country in the world. When I came, I stayed too long in this country. I had an enjoyable experience but also an unpleasant experience. You know what that means; this is life for some people.

First of all, this culture is different; that is ok. For the good things, this country offers good opportunities, although you work extremely hard to get them. Because they do not have anything for free in the U.S.A. If they give you something they say is free, it is not. They will take the money for the things they give you, for example, food stamps. Money is a reason. Before they give us something, especially immigrants, they make sure how long you have been living in the U.S. and also your status or where you work. In the end, they will take the money or food stamps they gave you in a way you cannot imagine.

The good thing I like is the law that everyone respects the other person; nobody can disrespect someone for any reason. People are supposed to respect other people. The things I do not like in this country are the bills; they put too much stress on people. If you did not pay your bill exactly on time, or if you forgot, they have one or two days to charge you to pay more. I know that's the reason more people have more diseases, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, etc. Too much pressure. Also, education for children here in the U.S. is extremely hard; it's hard to give your kids a good education. I have a lot of things to say, but I will stop! Life is difficult regardless of the country.

Michel Ange Pierre Leneus was born in Haiti and is currently attending an ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is working to improve her English to later obtain certification in business administration.

Life in China is Different From Life in the United States

Life in China and life in the U.S. are separated by an ocean and have distinctly different daily routines.

In China, going out is extremely convenient. You can handle payments with just a phone, and transportation is well-connected subways that reach everywhere, and even small towns and villages have vegetable markets and food stalls.

School life also differs greatly. In terms of study time, American students typically study 12 to 20 hours a week, while Chinese students face heavy homework and exam pressure, often devoting 40 to 60 hours weekly to their studies. When it comes to extracurricular activities, American students participate in a wide range of clubs and sports, and Chinese students also engage in after-school activities, but academic performance usually takes priority.

Another difference is school uniforms and part-time jobs. Chinese schools require students to wear uniforms. While American schools generally have no such dress code. Additionally, American students often take part-time jobs during their free time to gain work experience, whereas Chinese students rarely do so, as their parents prioritize academic achievements.

In daily life in the U.S., there is a greater emphasis on independence and leisure. Most people travel by car, and there are fewer bustling food stalls. Shopping centers are large and often equipped with self-service checkouts, and interactions place more importance on boundaries, respect for privacy, and not casually interfering in others' lives, though this also means less of the warm, lively human connection found in China.

Another striking contrast lies in the difference between a sense of belonging and resilience. In China, I was rooted in a familiar, steady daily routine. Whenever doubts arose, I could always count on those around me to say, "This is just how everyone gets by," a simple phrase that softened my anxieties. Yet in the U.S., it was like being dropped into a world with no preset roadmap and no one to fall back on. Whether figuring out the ropes alone in a busy supermarket or subway or sitting with my thoughts in my room late at night, I had to face loneliness and

ambiguity by myself. This enforced independence and made me tune into my genuine needs more clearly, but it also meant I often had to carry every challenge alone, without the instant backup of family and friends back in China.

Jiayi Liang is a student in the STAR program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teachers are Mandi Groshans and Keir Borresen.

New Vision

I was born in Haiti, and I immigrated to the United States of America. As I see it, life is so different between both countries in numerous ways. In Haiti, life is more traditional, and families are remarkably close, and people often support each other in the challenging times. They buy food at local markets, cook at home, and spend time with neighbors. However, the country faces several challenges, like political conflict, instability, and lack of accessible healthcare and education.

However, in the U.S.A., life is more modern. There are more opportunities for work, education, and personal development, and the lifestyle is faster. People often buy food in the supermarkets and eat out more regularly and have private lifestyles.

Both countries have good and bad sides, but coming to this new country has inspired me to work hard for a better future.

Chrysmar Lorgiste was born in Haiti and is attending the Pre-College ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is working to improve his skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of technology.

Different Worlds

It is with great pleasure that I can make a small comparison between my country of origin (Haiti) and America. It is a beautiful experience. To begin with, I want to explain some facts about the country I love so much.

Haiti is a country that welcomes everyone regardless of race, etc. It is a tropical country that many foreigners love. It

is a country where you don't have too many requirements. For example, when I was in Haiti, I didn't have to pay for electricity or water. I always got them for free. I never slept with an alarm clock to wake me up because I woke up when I wanted. All food and drink are natural.

I had never been sick enough to go to the hospital. But when I came to the United States, it was different. I got sick all over here. Now sometimes I sleep for only 5 hours at night. It was a really hard experience for me to leave my country to stay in America.

While life is challenging in the U.S., more people have access to technology, education, and a steady job. I love it because it is good for me. I have some opportunities that I never had in Haiti. The United States gave me the opportunity to work for myself and to know life even more.

To conclude, when someone is not born somewhere, it is really difficult when you come into it. There are many great opportunities to explore here, but for some people who don't have legal status, it is more difficult. Anyway, Haiti is the country in this world that I love the most despite everything. Dear Haiti, I miss you.

Clairmanie Lormand Jean Baptiste is an ESOL student at Village Readers Family Education Program in Delray Beach. Her teacher is Siena Mayers.

Life in my Home Country Differs From Life in the U.S.

“Home is where you live; country is where you learn.”

America is a charming, multicultural country. It is creative, diverse, and full of opportunity, but adapting to a new culture can also be a significant challenge. I would like to share the biggest differences I have noticed, especially regarding food, language, and education.

Dining and Food Culture

If you want to open a restaurant in the U.S., you first have to understand American culture. The first time I ate at an Amer-

ican restaurant, I thought the portions were huge! Americans love fast food, fried dishes, roasts, meats, and sweet-and-salty combinations. They enjoy drinking wine or juice during a meal, often including ice water or iced tea year-round, even when the weather is cold. Also, they generally avoid eating animal organs, heads, or fish bones; they expect all meat to be filleted. I was also surprised when the server brought the bill before I had even finished eating!

The Challenge of Language

Learning the language has been the most difficult part for me. My accent, incorrect grammar, and mispronunciations have caused many misunderstandings and jokes.

One day, a woman asked me, “Are you ready to play pickleball?” I replied, “Please give me a break!” She looked embarrassed and walked away. I realized later that I must have sounded rude or dismissive.

Another time, a lady asked me if I wanted to “warm up.” I replied, “Whatever.” She then shouted angrily to the players on the opposite side, “She said whatever!” I knew then that I had said something wrong.

Once, I had to read the sentence, “A boy ran into a room,” but I mispronounced “room” as “womb.” The teacher laughed and explained that nobody could run into a womb and then corrected my pronunciation. Although Americans are generally tolerant of mispronunciations, I feel I should try my best to improve and learn to prevent further embarrassment.

Education and Parenting

I admire American educational styles. They are creative and encouraging, emphasizing critical thinking and “soft skills” rather than just memorizing information. I also appreciate how American parents teach their children with patience, support, positive communication, and a focus on independence. Furthermore, children are encouraged to do volunteer work from a young age.

Conclusion

Living in America has taught me many lessons. Cultural differences sometimes confuse me, but every experience helps me grow and makes life interesting. I am grateful for what I have learned. I truly appreciate every volunteer who has helped me improve my English, especially Helene, my wonderful tutor and friend.

Yee Shan Ma is 50 years old and was a nurse for 25 years in Hong Kong. She has been living in Florida for 3 years and is learning English at Palm Harbor Library with Carol Mercier. She is also working as a caregiver at a senior living home.

My Heart Remains in Haiti

For me, adapting to a new country was not easy, especially when someone comes from a different culture.

When I was a teenager, I heard people from my county say that the United States of America (USA) is “heaven on earth.” Now I live in this country, and I realize that it’s pure private enterprise.

I will tell you a significant difference between my country and the USA. In my country, Haitian people do not pay bills every month like we do here in the USA. They pay bills once a year. If you have a decent job in Haiti, you live like a millionaire. In America you pay for everything; even though you have a decent job, you still worry and are stressed out about these bills.

The access to education in Haiti is limited, with many children unable to attend school due to financial constraints, whereas in the USA there are several opportunities to study and continue one’s education.

Another disparity is healthcare. In Haiti it is not easy to access and utilize the medical facilities. In the USA, healthcare is not only more accessible but also far more advanced.

I was raised in Haiti, specifically Port-au-Prince, and I see that life in Haiti is based on economics, culture, and education.

I miss my country, but I am happy to have an opportunity to live in the USA.

Jefson Marc was born in Haiti and came to the USA 3 years ago. He is now enrolled in Ms. F. Johnson's Intermediate ESOL class at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is working hard to improve his English skills to obtain certification in the HVAC program.

Two Systems of Medical Care

Of course, life in my country, Russia, differs from the one in the USA in many aspects: education, medicine, state structure, etc. I plan to write about medicine. The medical system in the USA has a very complex structure. You need to choose your medical insurance company and pay some money to this company. In Russia I receive medical insurance free because I am a citizen of Russia. All people have this medical insurance and can use it throughout the entire country, not just where you live.

This insurance is called compulsory health insurance. We also have additional health insurance. Usually your employer pays for this kind of insurance. Another difference—people in Russia must pay for all medications prescribed by the doctor. Sometimes it can be very expensive, and people cannot afford it. In the USA, medications are paid for mostly by the insurance company.

US medicine is very highly technological. If you need a surgery, no matter how complex it is, you will get it. In Russia it depends on what region you live in. If you live in a big city, it is much easier than if you live in a small town or rural area. Hospitals in the US are equipped with the necessary equipment and specialists.

In my opinion, USA Medical provides scanning exams for you, but the prevention system is not sufficient enough. In Russia there are many sanatoriums and clinics where you can get a lot of treatments, especially physical therapy. The patient could get magnets on any part of the body and baths such as radon, hydrogen, iodine-bromine, mineral, herbal, etc. It could be mud therapy, electrotherapy, salt rooms, and many other therapies. It would be great to connect these two systems: the high-technolo-

gy system of American medicine and the serious prevention one of Russia.

Svetlana Maslova is a student at Clearview Adult Educational Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Life in Haiti vs Life in the US

Life remains a natural but complex phenomenon, as it is linked to everything that conditions human existence on Earth. The life of a people and its culture are closely linked, because culture represents the way of life, values, and beliefs that shape the identity, history, language, and interactions between the inhabitants of a given country. I am from Haiti, where life was once characterized by friendliness, brotherhood, and solidarity. Haiti was known as a hospitable country that welcomed many tourists. However, life in this country has changed completely in recent years due to political instability and rising violence. How does life in my country of origin differ from life in the United States?

Life in Haiti is extremely different from life in the United States. First, economically speaking, the United States is considered the world's largest economic power, while Haiti is the poorest country in the Americas. Today, the cost of living is very high in Haiti, with unemployment reaching over 25% according to the latest surveys. The poorest households struggle to survive, and half of the population faces a food crisis. In the United States, however, the unemployment rate is estimated at less than 5%, which has made life easier in that country.

On a socio-political level, Haitians face enormous difficulties: a lack of basic infrastructure such as electricity, drinking water, healthcare, education, etc. There is a lack of commitment on the part of Haiti's leaders, which affects the country's development and the quality of life of its citizens. In contrast, in the United States, basic infrastructure is accessible to all. There is a clear commitment on the part of officials to the American people. In terms of security, Haiti is facing a security crisis due to political instability that affects the entire population. In the United States, the political situation is more stable, and people's security is guaranteed by the state.

Culturally, Haiti remains an exceptional and rich country. Its culture is the result of a unique blend of African, French, Spanish, and indigenous influences. This culture, marked by naive painting, popular literature, music (Compas and Rara), and voodoo traditions, constitutes the Haitian identity. This culture is centered on solidarity and shapes Haitians, making them strong and joyful, even in the most difficult circumstances. In contrast, American culture is a mix of ethnic diversity focused on much more individual and fundamental values (freedom, democracy, etc.) and certain holidays such as Halloween, Thanksgiving, and Independence Day.

In conclusion, life in Haiti is different from life in the United States in many ways. However, life in a country is very dynamic and constantly evolving. Furthermore, the quality of life deserves to be constantly improved for the well-being of all.

Jean Claude Maurice is an ESOL student at Village Readers. His teacher is Siena Mayers.

Two For One

I want to highlight a few points about how life in my country differs from life in the United States. First, in my country, life moves more slowly, and people are very close to their families and neighbors. People spend more time together, support one another, and share daily life.

In the United States, life is much faster. People are often busy with work and strict schedules. Many people live independently and value their privacy. At first, this way of life was difficult for me to understand, but over time, I learned how to adapt.

Another important difference is work and opportunity. In the United States, there are more job opportunities and more chances to improve your life through education and hard work. These opportunities give me hope and motivation for the future.

Although life in my country feels warmer and more familiar, life in the United States offers me the possibility of a better future. Both places are important to me, and each has taught me valuable lessons. Living in two different cultures has helped me

grow, become stronger, and stay open to new experiences. I will use what I have learned from both countries to build a better life for my family and me.

Naika Merisier attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Difference I Endure

When I learned that my visa to the United States had been approved, I felt like a door was opening to a future I had imagined for years. Saying goodbye to my family at the airport was one of the hardest moments of my life. I will never forget my mother trying to smile through her tears, pretending to be strong for me.

Stepping off the plane in Miami, I was immediately overwhelmed. The airport felt endless, loud, and unfamiliar, and I felt incredibly small and lost. No one smiled or offered help as I struggled to find my way, and in that moment, I deeply missed the warmth and protection of my family. That was when I realized my journey had truly begun and that I was on my own.

One of my first culture shocks was the food. Back home, meals are fresh and full of flavor, and fruit tastes sweet and vibrant, carrying memories of my childhood. In the United States, I was surprised to find that even the fruit tasted bland and spoiled quickly. Eating frozen meals made me feel especially homesick; every bite reminded me of what I had left behind.

Language soon became another challenge. Before coming to the United States, I had studied English for three years and felt confident in my abilities. However, once I arrived, that confidence was tested. People spoke faster than I expected, pronunciation varied, and accents made communication difficult. There were moments when people could not understand me, and I could not understand them. Each misunderstanding chipped away at my confidence.

Housing was another difficult adjustment. In my country, living spaces are larger and more comfortable. In the United States, rooms are smaller and far more expensive. Sleeping in a small bed and sharing limited space was uncomfortable at first, but it

taught me how to adapt and rebuild a sense of home with less.

Holidays were especially painful. In my country, they are frequent and always celebrated with family. In the United States, celebrations feel fewer, and as an immigrant, I often worked during holidays or spent them alone. My focus shifted from togetherness to responsibility and survival.

What I miss most is the warmth of my community. Back home, neighbors celebrated birthdays together, hugged one another, and treated each other like family. In the United States, people tend to be more distant. Nevertheless, I have come to appreciate how deeply affectionate my culture is. It has left an indelible mark on who I am.

Lisbeth Morales attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Life in Vietnam and Florida, USA

I am from Vietnam, and I have been living in the United States for a few years now. There are many cultural differences between the U.S. and Vietnam. In comparing the two countries, I will try to describe the differences in terms of language, weather, housing, transportation, and education.

The first obvious difference is the language. The Vietnamese alphabet—influenced by the French—has 29 letters, while the English alphabet has 26. Many sounds do not exist in either Vietnamese or English, so learning English has been a challenge for me, especially as far as pronunciation. The foods are similar in that here in the U.S. one can easily find rice, vegetables, fruits, etc., but the cooking methods and spices used are quite different. Vietnamese cuisine includes a lot more vegetables, and tea is the main beverage as opposed to coffee and carbonated drinks like in the U.S.

One of the biggest differences is the weather. Vietnam has a tropical monsoon climate featuring distinct regional patterns. There are four seasons: cool, dry, hot, and rainy. The most similar state in the U.S. to Vietnamese weather would be the sub-tropical Florida, but Vietnam has more hot and humid days

with a longer monsoon season.

Homes and the availability of housing are quite different. There is a scarcity of homes in Vietnam because it is a communist country, so there isn't as much money there. People that lived in the countryside made houses out of bamboo and used coconut leaves as the roof. Walls were made of sticks and clay. Much of the furniture was also made of bamboo and calamus, reflecting a closeness to nature. In the U.S., most homes are made of brick, concrete, and wood. Leaves are not used in homes, and the size of residences is much larger and roomier than in Vietnam.

Attaining an education is more difficult in Vietnam due to the problem of transportation. There was no transportation for the students, in fact. The parents had to pay many costs and fees from kindergarten all the way to university. When I arrived in St. Petersburg, Florida, I was able to enroll in adult ESOL classes, first at Tomlinson Adult Center and then at Lakewood Community School. Our student ID also served as a free bus pass. I also learned that K-12 students in American schools have special school buses or train or bus passes at no cost to the families.

Despite all the cultural differences between Vietnam and the U.S., I have been able to adjust and take advantage of all the opportunities in my life. My English is getting better each day, and I am grateful for all that life has offered.

Quang Nguyen is a student at Lakewood Community School. His teacher is Ivette Waller.

My Life in Spain and in the U.S.

My life in Spain was quite different from my life now in the United States. In Spain, I lived in Tenerife, in the Canary Islands. Life there was calm, and I was familiar with everything. I knew the streets, the culture, the people, and, of course, the language. I felt extremely comfortable because I had grown up there. I spent a lot of time with my family and my girlfriend. In October, my girlfriend and I will celebrate three years together. Being with her and with my family made me feel supported and happy.

My daily routine in Spain was simple. I went to school, studied, and had a normal life surrounded by people I already knew well. The school system was familiar to me. I also helped my parents with their restaurant. I understood everything without problems and felt confident because I knew how things worked there. My friends were also an important part of my life. I could meet them easily, and I never felt alone.

The reason we moved to the United States was unexpected. In August 2024, we came here just for a vacation. My father liked Miami so much that he decided to make a substantial change. While we were still on vacation, he sold our house and cars in Spain without even telling my mother at first. We returned to Spain in September, but in November of the same year, we moved permanently to Miami. It all happened very quickly, and it was a shocking surprise for everyone, including me.

Life in the United States is quite different. Miami is a big city, full of people from many cultures. At first, everything was new and sometimes difficult because of the language. Even though I understand English well, speaking it every day is not the same as studying it in school. It is a challenge, but little by little, I am improving. I am taking ESOL classes at Miami Dade College and preparing for the GED.

This is something I did not imagine while living in Spain. My goals are different now. In Spain, I only thought about finishing my studies there, but here I want to build a future, go to college, and study electricity. Another difference is the rhythm of life. In Spain, life was calmer, but here in Miami, everything feels faster. People are always working, moving, and trying to improve. Sometimes it is stressful, but it also motivates me to keep going and fight for what I want.

Even though I miss Spain, my girlfriend, and my family there, I believe moving to the United States was a good opportunity. It changed my life completely. I left behind many things, but I also found new opportunities here. Now I have new goals, and I want to take full advantage of everything this country can offer me.

Dario Rodriguez is a talented but introverted 19-year-old young man from Spain. He moved to the U.S. one year ago for a better life opportunity and to achieve all his dreams here. His instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

Small Things Make Big Changes

When I was 20, I never thought of coming to the US, but suddenly everything changed, and the opportunity to come to this country appeared, so I took that plane, and in a couple of hours my reality changed.

My name is Angel. I'm 23 years old now, and I am from Venezuela. I see a lot of differences from my country. I get surprised when walking on the streets of the US. Why? I don't see anyone outside walking! In my country, everyone talks to everyone, and here sometimes you don't even know the name of your neighbor! That was interesting for me.

Another difference is comparing democracy to a dictatorial government. For those who don't know, in Venezuela there is no democracy, and the government is not a government. There is just one man, a dictator! He rules. When I was in high school, I studied all the resources that Venezuela has, and I couldn't understand how a rich country was so deep in poverty. Personally, I agree with the idea of a government system that works in all aspects. In other words, a country where even the simplest things, such as stopping at a "stop sign," are respected. This alone was a huge difference to me. It shocked my mind initially.

In addition, speaking of traffic rules, the differences there between Venezuela and the US are enormous. In Venezuela we don't use seat belts, people don't respect stop signs, and everyone jaywalks wherever they walk! But here, people wait for green light at the pedestrian crossing. Wow! Maybe for other people these things aren't important, but these are the small differences that make nations organized and make them prosper.

In conclusion, don't get me wrong, I really love my country, but in this essay, I want to demonstrate how an organized and efficient government system can develop and improve a country. I think when the people turn their back on God, everything gets worse, and we lose our good behaviors.

"If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and I will forgive their sin and will heal their land." (2 Chronicles 7:14)

Angel Eduardo Rojas is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. His teacher is Angela Faiola.

Two Lives, Two Countries

Life in my home country was happier and more familiar because I was surrounded by my family. I felt supported, and life was simpler. When I found out I was pregnant, I decided to move to the United States to give my daughter a better future and more opportunities, even though it meant leaving my loved ones behind.

Life in the U.S. has been more difficult and demanding, but it has also helped me grow stronger and more independent. I learned that not everyone is kind, but I also learned to value honesty and true friendships. Today, my daughter is happy, and I am proud of the path I chose. Both places have shaped who I am, and I am grateful for everything I have learned.

Nosleiny Saez, from Cuba, is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College Hialeah Campus. My teacher is Ernesto Juan.

Living in the U.S. but thinking in Colombia

When I arrived in the U.S., I never thought that I would be here for a long time, but I am here. In the U.S. there are more opportunities to have a better life because you can get more and better jobs with high salaries, and it is also easier to create small businesses.

Life in the U.S. is a little hard because people spend a lot of time far away from their family and friends due to their work, sometimes until 12 hours, and often it takes them up to three hours or more to get to work and get back home, and usually they drive alone. Some native Americans do not talk with people that they do not know.

In my home country, Colombia, things are different. Finding a job is not easy. Many graduate students are forced to work in fields unrelated to their studies because they cannot find employment or the wages are too low.

Others with little education spend their entire lives working in factories with low salaries and meager benefits. A high percentage work in the informal sector, which means they do not receive social security and will not be able to retire.

Despite the above, people have more time for family and friends. Most citizens do not own a car; therefore, they must take a bus, where they can talk with other people even if they do not know them.

You can find gatherings of friends on almost any street corner where they discuss any current event. They do not need much money or a big reason to start a party.

The problem with Colombia is that if you go, you want to stay.

My name is Guillermo Vasquez, I am from Colombia, and I have lived in EEUU since 1999. I currently work as a building manager and study English at Miami Dade College.

Someone I Admire

My Inspiring Cat

My cat inspires me because he is the only creature who has mastered the art of doing absolutely nothing and still being admired. First, he sleeps around 18 hours a day, proving that laziness can be a lifestyle. Second, he looks at me with pure judgment, as if he already knew I'd fail in life before I even tried. Third, he's survived falls, fights, and eating things that probably should have killed him, which makes him stronger than most humans. An example is how he always lands on his feet; if he can survive chaos, then maybe I can too.

My cat shows me that life is short, naps are important, and if all else fails, just scratch someone and walk away.

But the biggest lesson my cat taught me came when I moved to the United States and had to leave him in Cuba. I miss him every day, even his dramatic meows and his "I'm better than you" attitude. Sometimes I think he is probably living like a king without me, judging new people and sleeping even more. Missing him reminds me that even when life changes, the love we have for the ones we leave behind stays strong, almost as strong as his attitude.

Katherin Alonso Aldir was born in Cuba and is a student at ELCATE Academy at Lorenzo Walker Technical College. Her teacher is Lisa Wroble.

Wonderful Woman

The person I describe in the following lines is someone I deeply admire for her resilience and strength. Her name is Mrs. Libia Ferrer, and she is 90 years old. Born in Havana, Cuba, in 1936, she earned a degree in art and taught history and geography. She is the mother of three daughters and endured the painful loss of a son when she was only 50 years old. Despite this profound loss, she continued to move forward with remarkable courage.

At the age of 52, Mrs. Ferrer immigrated to the United States,

arriving in Key West, Florida, in 1988. There, she worked in housekeeping and spent many years caring for more than three generations of children as a nanny. Her life has been one of service, sacrifice, and quiet perseverance.

I had the honor of meeting her in 2019, during the pandemic. From the moment I met her, she welcomed me with kindness and generosity. She opened the doors of her home to me and made me feel loved and protected, even though my real home is more than 15,000 miles away in Buenos Aires, Argentina. With her, I found comfort, warmth, and a sense of belonging.

Mrs. Ferrer's joy in life is extraordinary. She survived two heart attacks at the age of 89 and has lived for over 40 years with only one kidney. Every morning, she wakes up grateful and happy. She turns the television volume up loud because her hearing is limited, but she still fills the house with Cuban music. She dresses elegantly, wears colorful lipstick, loves perfume, and faces life boldly—before life can challenge her.

She loves deeply, especially her family, and she lives with purpose and grace. If I had to describe her in just a few words, they would be love, unity, and hope. Always moving forward, always smiling. That is how I will always remember her—Mama.

Sabrina Armanini attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Special Gift

I have a person that I admire so much in my life. This person is my son!

My son is a gift of God because I got him after 6 years of marriage. I thank God for him.

My son is everything to me because I love him so much. He is very handsome, smart, respectful, and affectionate.

My son loves me so much; he is my best friend. When I feel sad and tired, he always gives me courage, strength, and affection. He is my reason for living. The reason why I work is to

make him happy during his life. I hope he succeeds in his life in every way. May God protect and bless him.

I do not know if God will give me another chance to have a son like him again, but for now, I admire my gift from God.

Issoule Baptiste Mathurin was born in Haiti. She is studying in the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is working to improve her skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of health science.

My Sister Isabel's Journey

In the 1980s, my sister Isabel and her young son fled El Salvador in the dark of night, terrified they might be next. Isabel was a schoolteacher. Only days earlier, members of La Mano Negra—the Black Hand, men trained and authorized to kill—had come to her school. In front of students, they shot and killed a male teacher in the classroom next to hers. Many teachers belonged to a teachers' association, and membership alone was enough to make one a target.

When Isabel's eldest son, who was studying in Germany, learned what had happened, he was overcome with fear for his mother and younger brother. He quickly arranged for them to leave the country, believing that delay could cost them their lives.

They arrived in Germany in the middle of winter. Isabel later told me how desolate those first days felt. The cold was relentless, the language unfamiliar, the landscape unforgiving. She feared they would not survive. But kindness found them. Her older son had previously met a generous couple who offered help, and with their support, Isabel and her younger son slowly began to rebuild their lives. Over time, they found stability, safety, and a sense of belonging.

Three years ago, I learned that Isabel had been diagnosed with an incurable illness. Recently, I visited her and her family. Her younger son is now grown, married to a wonderful woman, and together they are raising two sons of their own. Life, despite everything, had continued.

Today, Isabel lives with Alzheimer's disease and dementia. She has nearly forgotten her native language. Widowed at a young age and forced to abandon her homeland with nothing, she endured loss after loss. Her eldest son once wondered aloud whether her illness was her mind's way of easing the weight of so much trauma. He also noted how well she adapted to Dutch culture, guided by her deep understanding of social, economic, and political realities.

One evening, we sat around the dinner table. Isabel sat at the head, quiet, her face softened by lamplight. We teased her eldest son, saying that since he was retired, he should stay longer to care for her. Suddenly, Isabel looked up. Her eyes cleared, and in Spanish she said, "Mi hijo tiene responsabilidades que debe atender"—"My son has responsibilities he must attend to."

Her voice was firm, dignified—unmistakably hers. In that moment, I saw my sister again: the woman who had faced death and exile, who had taught generations of children, who had begun anew in a land of snow. Though her memory faded, her strength endured.

I dedicate this essay to my sister Isabel, who passed away on December 8, 2025.

Maria Elena Blanco Hart was born in El Salvador, Central America, in 1947 and emigrated to the United States in 1972. She wanted to learn English, so she attended night school for several years and obtained a bachelor's degree in human resources. Before retirement, she worked as an employment coordinator for a transit company for over twenty years. She loves to write and hopes that someday, her confidence will grow, and the words that flow in her mind will come out in her writing. She is a student at Mandel Public Library - ESOL and her instructor is Henry Jacobowitz.

Why I Admire My Family

My family is originally from Colombia, and today, while visiting a museum, I found myself thinking deeply about them. I even imagined having an oil portrait of my mother displayed someday. She deserves recognition for her lifelong dedication to social work and for the love she gives so freely.

Family is one of the most important parts of my life. My father passed away about four years ago, but his influence remains strong. He was an extraordinary man who devoted himself to helping others. He worked on meaningful projects for low-income communities, helped build homes, and supported the creation of organizations that defend human rights. His generosity and commitment to service continue to inspire me.

My mother is warm-hearted, creative, and full of kindness. She makes beautiful feather crafts, tells wonderful stories, and still looks for new things to learn. Right now, she wants to take tango lessons. She also takes care of my grandson and loves feeling useful and active. My parents taught me empathy, compassion, creativity, and, above all, the importance of having a good heart.

I also have a daughter, one brother, and one nephew. Each of them brings something special to our family. My daughter keeps me company and faces life's challenges with courage. I know it is not always easy, but I am proud of the woman she is becoming.

My family is incredible in many ways. Their strength, love, and dedication shape who I am. They remind me every day of the values that matter most: helping others, staying connected, and living with purpose.

Rosa Castro Jaramillo is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Someone I Admire

One thing I have learned is that in life no one is perfect! But if there is someone I admire, it's my father. He is kind, brave, strong, smart, and loving. He has always been there for me. From my best moment to my worst. I hope to do better and make him proud.

Have you ever had a moment where you do not feel the brightest? I know I have.

My father has always been there to cheer me up, give me advice, and help me feel that everything will be all right. We go

to church together, and he always reminds me that “we aren’t alone; God is with us.” He reminds me, “The choices we make are important and can start a ripple effect.”

Jobs are not always easy. My father is a tow truck driver. Repossessing a car due to nonpayment or flipping an accident vehicle both require significant courage and effort. His hours are sometimes very late. I can only imagine how tiring that can be. I really admire his work ethic.

My father has four daughters and seven grandchildren, who all love him very much! He always brings us snacks like blueberries. Yummy! I love blueberries. He loves making and bringing us food. His BBQs are the best; just the thought of it makes my mouth water. God knows I miss his food as well as him.

I pray I get out of jail and make better choices to make him proud. I would love to be like him one day, loving, kind, hard-working, and just all around inspirational.

Kiara Colon is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Kiara’s teacher is Kimberly Gaskins.

I Admire My Parents

I admire my parents because they are my models and my motivation. My parents work extremely hard to give us the best education. We are three children, and I am the oldest.

My parents are an example for me. I remember a day when my sister, my cousin, and I said that we had never seen them argue. We were always trying to overhear them talking when they were in the same room, and now we realize that they always strive to be a good example for us, no matter what the situation.

My parents are very dedicated workers. My dad is an accountant at MSPP (Ministry of Public Health and Population). He works extremely hard, and every day is a challenge for him. Despite this, when he comes home tired, he helps my mom with the business, and everything works fine. He always has time to help me with my schoolwork. My father is also a producer of ‘Natural Product Agro-Alimentary,’ and my mom is always his business

partner. I have seen how they help people in their community and how these people look up to them as role models.

Every day they told us to be good Christians, focus on our studies, help those in need as much as we can, fight to solve any problems we encounter along the way, live in good conditions, and work to become a good person in the world.

Every time I feel discouraged, I remember the words that my parents always repeated to us: “Life is a school where we have to fall but don’t stay down. Work to rise with honor and respect, listen to good advice, don’t depend on others, work harder every day, believe in ourselves, and have discipline. Then we will succeed and everyone will be proud of us.”

I love my parents, and I admire their courage and dedication they show to achieving their goals. I would like to be as kind and compassionate as they are and have the same energy to pursue my dreams.

Ritsendy Samuela Eltine, who was born in Haiti, is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Mrs. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. She is working to improve her skills in English to later obtain certification in the field of health science.

My Favorite People

My favorite people are my parents.

She was born and grew up without the presence of a father who should have cared for her. At the age of ten, she also lost her mother. From that moment, she had to face life on her own. I am speaking about my mother.

Later, she met a man whose story was not so different from hers and who came from the same social background. From that day on, they began to write their own story together.

After their meeting, it did not take long for them to marry and start a family with the birth of my brothers and sisters. Although they never had the chance to go to school to learn how to read and write, they turned that into motivation to make a strong

decision: all of their children must receive an education so they would not grow up as they did.

This inspired both my mother and my father to work tirelessly, always taking care of us and never giving up.

My father grew up with many half-brothers and sisters, and he knew the pain of jealousy and cruelty from stepmothers. That is why he made the decision never to put us in the same situation: we all share the same mother and father.

Together, they managed to grow economically, always preaching unity, solidarity, and teaching us that when one of us suffers, we must all feel the pain. They always explained to us that only through education, work, and creativity can we gain true freedom.

Today, when I look at pictures of them as young people and compare them to now, in their old age, I still see the same love they have for their family and for us, their children.

In my eyes, my parents are heroes and the greatest philosophers I know.

I love them deeply.

Guerby Erius is a student at North Tech / Rolling Green Site. His teacher is Ms. Annie Stubbs. He is originally from Haiti. He is working very hard to improve his skills in English.

Proud of My Reflection

The person I admire most is not a famous figure but an ordinary woman who has endured a lifetime of hardships. From a youthful age, she faced profound challenges that shaped her into the resilient individual she is today. Though over 30 years old, she still possesses the soul of a child—optimistic, determined, and hopeful despite the obstacles she has faced.

Her journey began at the age of seven, when trauma entered her life in ways difficult to explain. At eight, she discovered that the people she thought were her parents were actually her grand-

parents. Despite this revelation, she continued to love them as parents. At nine, her grandfather suffered a stroke and thrombosis, worsening her already difficult life. During this time, an aunt attempted to expel her from the home, sending her to live with her biological mother. Unfortunately, the abuse she faced there led to her return to her grandparents' home.

At 13, her grandfather's health deteriorated, and financial difficulties arose. Once again, her aunt forced her to leave, sending her to live with her biological father, whom she had never met. Life with him and his family was even more challenging, especially due to a harsh stepmother. Despite running away several times, she was always forced to return. At 15, her dream of having a birthday party was crushed when her stepmother convinced her father to deny it, marking a painful transition from childhood to adolescence.

Determined to finish her high school education, she left her father's home at 15 and began working multiple jobs to support herself and help her disabled grandfather. She graduated high school at 18, but her dreams of becoming a police officer were thwarted when her father refused to fund her education.

The death of her grandfather was another crushing blow, but she remained steadfast, determined to honor his memory. She attempted to pursue a career in medicine but was unsuccessful in the admission exams. At 21, she became pregnant by a man she believed would be her life partner, only to be abandoned by him. Soon after, her beloved grandmother passed away.

Despite these trials, she raised her daughter as a single mother, working two jobs while attending nursing school. After years of struggle, she graduated as a nurse. Along the way, she met a supportive man who encouraged her to continue her studies, and they eventually married.

Her journey eventually took her to a new country, where she began a new chapter with her daughter and her husband. Today, she is a strong, brave woman who has built a loving home and raised a wonderful daughter. She embodies resilience and determination, and I admire her most because she is me.

I consider myself a symbol of strength and perseverance, and

I am proud of the woman I have become. Through all the trials, I have never given up, and I continue to strive for a better future every day.

Marisol Fajardo is an ESOL 5 student at Miami Dade College. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu, who supports her with dedication throughout her English learning journey at Miami Dade College, Kendall.

A Special Aunt

The person that I admire the most is my favorite aunt and godmother, Maritza Estela Galindo. She was a nice aunt and took care of me and my brother, Luis Arturo, when we were little kids in Panama. She was my father's big sister. I admire her the most because she raised her four children by herself. Later, she also raised her two oldest grandchildren. The last time I saw her and spent time with her was in July of 2018. Sadly, she passed away on March 4th, 2025. She was the person who taught me how to dance to any kind of music, especially Haitian and Jamaican music. Thankfully, I was able to talk to her about relationships and about what happened in school. Sometimes, I miss her a lot, and I always remember how she treated me as her baby niece in such a special, caring way.

Dilenia Galindo is a student at Miami Dade College in the Adult Basic Education/GED Prep program. Her teacher is Karin Ann Miller.

My Mother, the Angel God Chose for Me

There are beings God sends to Earth with a mission so clear that their very existence illuminates the lives of everyone around them. My mother is one of them. With her protective instinct, she can melt the strongest steel, and with her pure energy, she turns every day into a beautiful adventure. As long as I can remember, her laughter has been my compass, her voice my refuge, and her creativity the spark that ignited my imagination. If anyone asks who my greatest inspiration has been, I don't hesitate for even a second: my mother, the angel God chose for me.

My mother didn't come into this world to go unnoticed. She

arrived wrapped in light, with laughter that sounds like bells and a heart so big that, at times, I feel it beats within me too. When God chose an angel for me, He did it with humor and generosity, because mine doesn't wear wings—she displays her strength, her wit, her skills, and that inner glow that brightens everything around her.

My childhood was a parade of creativity painted over a canvas of luminous memories. While other mothers scolded, mine created songs to teach me multiplication tables, turning my mistakes into learning games. If I cried, she made me laugh with a funny imitation or by inventing magical recipes. From her, I learned that love is not imposed—it's inspired; that faith is not taught—it's contagious; and that everyday miracles hide within simple gestures: a warm soup, timely advice, or a look that says, "I believe in you."

Her gift for transforming the ordinary into the extraordinary became my first school of life. When something broke, she never lamented it—she fixed it with creativity and told me that broken things can also be beautiful when filled with patience and love. That's how I learned that true strength lies in smiling while rebuilding what hurts, that nothing is lost as long as genuine love keeps burning, and that the art of living is knowing how to add color where others see only gray.

So, when I achieved my goals and saw her there, eyes sparkling and hands trembling with pride, I understood that my success was her most beautiful creation. Seeing my reflection in her radiant gaze, holding the fruit of her effort and devotion, felt like watching heaven itself applaud us with fireworks made of gratitude.

Today, my mother remains a whirlwind of kindness, gentleness, and tenderness. Every conversation with her sparks new dreams. When she laughs, I feel as if God smiles too. And while many search for extraordinary miracles, I simply look at her—my ever-present miracle, with a heart that shines like a joyful flare.

Blanca Mercedes Gordillo Suarez was born in Venezuela and currently resides in Florida, United States. She is a medical doctor, writer, artist, and student, guided by a deep faith in God and in the healing power of love to restore the soul. She is a student of Yosbel Blanco at Miami Dade College's ESOL Program.

For My Mom

When I was given this writing assignment, I did not have to think twice. Undoubtedly, the person I admire the most is my mom. She has always been my biggest inspiration, my role model, and the one who has taught me the true meaning of love. More than just a parent, she has been my guide, my teacher, and my friend.

My mom did not just raise me; she has shown me to care deeply for others. Her love is never just words; it was shown in small daily actions such as making my favorite meal, helping me with schoolwork, or simply asking, “How was your day?” At that time, I thought these things were normal, but now I see how special they truly were. These small gestures carried big lessons: to listen, to give without expecting anything in return, and to always put kindness first.

There is one memory that always stays with me. There was a time when we did not have enough money to buy food. I remember we only had one green plantain, and my mom managed to turn it into a full meal. Then she said what she always said: “I am not hungry. You eat.” I used to believe that my mom just had a small appetite, but now I realize she was sacrificing for us. That is what true love looks like, putting others before yourself and doing it without complaining.

My mom never gives up, even when life is hard. I do not remember her ever saying, “I am tired” or “I cannot.” Instead, she has taught me that being strong does not mean hiding your feelings; it means facing life with courage and kindness, and that even the hardest struggles can be overcome with faith, determination, and a smile.

My mom can balance many responsibilities. She works, takes care of us, and somehow still finds time to encourage me to dream big. She believes in my abilities even when I doubt myself. She emphasizes the importance of education, hard work, and never losing hope.

Even though we are not together right now, her words and examples still guide me. Whenever I want to give up, I remember everything she taught me. Her influence is present in my choices,

my goals, and even when I treat people around me.

Mom, I miss your hugs, your loving words, and even those silences when just one look from you told me everything. You will always be with me in everything I do. Every step I take and every goal I chase is inspired by you. I hope you are proud of me because I am proud to be your daughter. And if I can become even half the person you are, I will consider that the greatest success of my life.

Marissa Jaramillo has been living in Miami for a year, working, and teaching dance. Her dream is to own her own dance studio in the future. She is an ESOL 5 student in Professor Camen Whu's class at MDC-Kendall.

My Parents

Everyone has someone they admire in life. For me, my parents are the people I admire the most. They inspire me and motivate me. My parents are amazing. They were always taking care of me. They are parents who wish me more than they wish for themselves. They are parents who worry about what I eat today, what I will eat tomorrow, and what I wear, even when they have nothing to eat themselves. They are my mother and father, who spend their lives thinking about how their family will live when they are gone. Sometimes when I see my parents working so hard, I don't understand why they are always so strict. Or why they have always told me to do better. But now I realize it is because they want me to have a better life than they have. They want me to rise higher. When I was sick, they weren't sleeping at night; they were praying and asking God to help me. Also, although I am not living with them anymore, I have the best parents in the world. Thank you a million times, Mommy and Daddy, for taking care of me. God bless you.

Badria Kabor is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Kettelene Duperval

Today, it is a pleasure for me to talk about someone I deeply admire and care about. Her name is Kettelene Duperval, and she currently lives in Haiti. She is a kind and loving person with a strong character. She communicates well, respects everyone, and has a unique beauty. During difficult times, she gives me advice and always checks to see if I am okay. We share our dreams, projects, and plans for the future, and I am very proud of her.

Kettelene supports me in everything I do. She always shares her ideas, encourages me, and gives me good advice, especially when I feel sad or discouraged. Even though we do not live in the same country, she always finds a way to make me feel better. She stands by me in hard moments, and her support gives me strength and confidence. To me, she is not only my partner but also my best support and my motivation.

We share many dreams together. Our greatest wish is to live in the same country, build a home, travel the world, and create a stable and happy life. We also dream of helping others, especially the most vulnerable, by opening an orphanage to help children living on the streets. We pray that God blesses us with health, patience, wisdom, and success so that our families can be proud of us and we can make a positive difference in the world.

Kettelene is a beautiful person inside and out. She is respectful, positive, and full of love. She has a warm smile, a kind voice, and a good heart. She respects others and treats people with dignity. To me, she is my love, my future, my strength, and my happiness. Kettelene, take care of yourself. You are one of the most honorable and important people in my life.

Jean Maxon Libera attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Mom

Throughout life, we all encounter people who inspire us and help shape our values. These individuals can be famous figures or someone close to us who has a positive influence on our personal growth. In my case, the person I admire the most is

my mother, because she has been a constant example of effort, responsibility, and unconditional love. The way she faces life challenges has taught me important lessons that have shaped who I am today. I admire my mother because, through her perseverance, sacrifice, and dedication to her family, she has taught me the importance of hard work, resilience, and human values.

The main reason I admire my mother is her ability to overcome obstacles without giving up, always thinking about the well-being of her family. From an early age, my mother had to face many financial difficulties, but she never allowed those situations to define her future. Despite working long hours, she always found a way to fulfill her responsibilities and make sure our family had what was essential. This constant effort taught me that success does not come easily but instead requires sacrifice and discipline. In addition, my mother has always shown great emotional strength. During difficult moments, when others might give up, she has maintained a positive attitude and looked for solutions instead of excuses. For example, when we face family problems, she is the pillar that keeps unity and calm in our home. Because of her example, I have learned how to manage stress and face problems with maturity.

Another aspect I deeply admire is her dedication to education. Although she did not always have the opportunities she wanted, she made sure that I did. She motivated me to study, to work hard, and to believe in my abilities. Her advice and constant support have been fundamental to my academic and personal development.

All these experiences have helped me understand the deep impact my mother has had on my life. Her actions have influenced not only my character but also the decisions I make every day. Because of her guidance, I have learned to value effort, patience, and perseverance in both personal and academic situations. As I continue growing and facing new challenges, the lessons she has taught me remain present and guide my behavior. For these reasons, her influence goes beyond the past and continues shaping my future.

I admire my mother because she represents everything I aspire to be like as a person. Her perseverance, strength, and love have been a constant guide in my life. Thanks to her, I have

learned essential values such as responsibility, respect, and the importance of never giving up. Her example continues to inspire me every day to become a better person and to face challenges with determination and confidence.

Mia Marcone is a motivated student who values education, personal growth, and responsibility. She works hard to improve her skills, overcome challenges, and achieve her academic and professional goals. She is an ESOL 5 student in Professor Carmen Whu's class at MDC-Kendall.

A True Friend

There is one person I deeply admire, who has been present in every phase of my life as a faithful friend, especially during the most difficult moments, marking my existence in ways I will never forget. On the hardest days, He has brought me joy, comfort, and support, sustaining and providing for us even when it seemed there was nothing left. Without Him, I cannot imagine how I would live, for He has made my days more beautiful, filling them with joy, security, and peace in both times of difficulty and happiness. No matter the season of life, I am confident that He remains by my side, unwavering and constant, strengthening me each day. Through the book He left for us—His story, His example, and His words—He provides direction and guidance, offering a true manual for life that transforms, exhorts, and calls us to follow Him.

Writing about Him brings me great satisfaction, for my life was completely transformed through Him. When I first encountered Jesus at the age of thirteen, He revealed Himself to me in a precise and loving way, providing timely and essential care for me and my family as we moved to a new city—an experience I will never forget. It was during that season that I learned to depend on Him and trust the plans He had for me. Jesus, my best friend, changed my life forever through what He did for me on the cross. He adopted me into His family, gave me a new identity, and introduced me to God the Father as my own Father. Despite my faults and sins, He loves me and has given me new life, helping me realize my identity as a beloved daughter. Though my earthly father failed me, my Heavenly Father has never failed—He has always cared for me and welcomed me into His family.

He gave me a family where I found my purpose while living out my identity and teaching my children about the love I found in Jesus, the fatherhood of God, and the sweet companionship of the Holy Spirit. The Trinity is the One we can turn to faithfully, with hearts at ease, knowing that They will never abandon us and will sustain us wherever we are.

Whether we are in our homeland or abroad, we can rely on Him! He is an expert in new beginnings. And in this new world where He has placed us, we continue to learn and teach as we go. Life's journey is such that, every day, we can learn something from others and teach something good from within ourselves.

I would like to share the following from John 3:16: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life."

Jessica Nascimento is an active volunteer at church. She studies English in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall.

My Sister is My Inspiration

I believe we are always inspired by someone or something. In my experience, my sister Nidia is my greatest inspiration. She has always been a strong, kind, and loving person. Nidia motivates me to be the best version of myself every day. Not only with her words but also with her examples. She has taught me that, even if life presents difficulties, there are always reasons to keep going.

Furthermore, she works hard every day and, even with her busy schedule, finds time to help others without making excuses or complaining. Her generosity and dedication inspire me greatly. Nidia's example motivates me to continue working hard on my studies. Especially in my English classes, to improve my communication and practical skills every day. She reminds me that with perseverance, patience, and a good attitude, I can achieve my goals and overcome any obstacles. In other words, dreams don't become a reality overnight.

I deeply admire my sister's determination and positive atti-

tude. For instance, no matter how many challenges she faces, Nidia never gives up. Seeing how she overcomes difficult moments with patience and faith teaches me to stay strong, stay hopeful, and believe in myself.

In summary, I am very proud to share her story with you. Because through it I have learned that love, perseverance, and faith can transform any situation that comes our way. I hope that those who read about her also find the motivation to pursue their dreams, no matter which obstacles may arise along the way.

Yaritza Noriega is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Claudio.

I Love You, Mom

How could I not admire someone who is such an important part of my life? Her name is Micheline Charles, and she has been with me since the moment I came into this world. She carried me for nine months, and from that day on, she has never stopped loving me, protecting me, and helping me grow.

As I grew up, my mother was always there to guide me. She helped me get ready for school, encouraged me to learn, and supported me in everything I did. She played a huge role in shaping the person I am today. Even when life was difficult, she never gave up on me. During the hardest moments of my life, my mother became my greatest source of strength. When I faced challenges, especially because of where I lived before, she stood by my side and helped me move forward. Knowing she was there gave me comfort, courage, and hope.

What I admire most about my mother is her caring heart. She is always willing to help others, especially our family. She is kind, reliable, and selfless, always putting others' needs before her own. I love her deeply, and I am grateful for everything she has done for me. She is not only my mom but also my role model and my greatest inspiration.

Mom, I know you may shed tears of joy when you read this keepsake your child has dedicated to you. Still, I know that no words could ever fully express my love for you. No matter what

happens, I will always be by your side. I love you, Mom.

Kevin Ocean attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

For My Father

If you ask me, who is the person I admire most? I'll tell you, my father, because he is my hero.

First, I met him when I was 5 years old. He is not my biological father; however, he taught me that the most important thing in this world is family.

He's a truck driver, and he's always working out of state, and when he gets home, what he wants most is to spend time with us, and he says that we are his most valuable treasure. He works so hard so that my sister and I can have a better future. He's always exhausted, even though he shows a smile to my sisters.

I'm the oldest brother; for this reason, I decided to do everything in my power to get ahead. From him, I learned the meaning of sacrifice, and my dream is that my family can live together and be able to reward my father for all his effort. I want to be a great person, like my father. Above all, I want to be strong like my father. In other words, I will not give up!

I'm Luis Arturo Orato Zapata; I'm from Mexico, and I'm 19 years old. I have been living here in Miami for six months, and I'm studying English at Miami Dade College.

Thanks, Hilda Ulloa

My mother was born into a farming family in Boyacá, Colombia. She was the seventh of eight children. My grandfather was a very strict and stingy man, despite owning a lot of land, crops, and money. Her childhood was not easy—they didn't have many luxuries, and she had to help with the typical tasks of the countryside: working in the fields, feeding chickens, and bringing food to those helping with the crops. She grew up in a family that was not affectionate and lived with few comforts.

My mother worked in the fields but saw her siblings leave to study and seek a better future. So, she made the decision to move to the city, where she studied diligently and worked to earn her degree as a nursing assistant. That's where she met my father, in a town called Guadalupe in Santander. They fell in love and got married. My mother was 25 years old at the time. I was her first daughter. She had my sister 1 year and 3 months later, and then my second sister 6 years and 10 months after I was born.

Today, I give thanks and recognize so many things my mother has done. She is a woman who did not have an easy life and who faced a difficult marriage. She has always been extremely organized, worked hard to move forward, and was known for her punctuality, cleanliness, and dedication. She taught us to be organized and keep a clean and tidy home. She has a gift for painting that has blossomed in recent years—she's painted beautiful canvases. She knows how to crochet, cooks wonderfully, and has taught us everything we know about cooking. She is joyful and loves dancing. She went through breast cancer, received chemotherapy, and had one breast removed. It was a very difficult and painful process, but she is incredibly brave, a warrior. Despite everything, we give thanks today because she came through it and manages the best she can. There was a time in our lives when, as daughters, we were very hard on our mother. Today, we have a different perspective on everything she did for us. Time has allowed us to understand things better and change our minds.

I want to leave these words as a heartfelt thank you, Mom, for everything you did and for everything you continue to do for your daughters and grandchildren. Personally, I also want to thank you for everything you did during my own health journey. Today, I see a different woman—one who has grown in many ways. I appreciate and value so much more about you. Thank you for praying for us, for your sons-in-law, and for your beloved grandchildren. There's no way to repay you. A thousand thanks for giving me life.

Slendy Ramirez Ulloa is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

The Mindset I Want

My name is Jorge. I am from Venezuela, and I strongly believe in growth and perseverance.

Someone I admire for his mentality and mindset is Eladio Carrión. He is a Puerto Rican singer. He inspired me because of his story and how he achieved what he was dreaming about. The people around him thought he was crazy. They said he was bad at music and that he wouldn't make it. Everybody thought he was a complete joke—and guess what? He did it!

He never listened to them. He never gave up. He is still there, trying one, two, three times until he makes it, no matter what. You shouldn't stop trying. I want to be like that, always trying to reach my dream. It doesn't matter if I make a mistake; I will keep trying.

They will tell you that you're crazy until you reach your dream.

Jorge Rondon is a student at Miami Dade College. His teacher is Juan Ernesto.

Mother, My Queen

My mother's name is Zoila. For me, she is the best mother in the world. She grew up with her mother and grandmother in Arequipa, Peru. She always remembers those nostalgic childhood years with happiness and love. However, she also had moments marked by sadness because she never got to know her father.

Since she was very young, she learned to value family, effort, and the strength of the heart. Like all teenagers who dream of a better life, she wished to help her mother. She had to leave behind the happy childhood days on the farm, her family, and friends to travel to the city with her sisters. There she began a new stage of her life. She found work as a nanny and discovered her great talent for cooking, a passion that has accompanied her forever.

It was precisely on that path where she met my father. They fell in love, and together they started a family. It was necessary to keep working and save money for their own house and the future. She established her store, which became popular in the neighborhood, and she always helped all her customers with care and affection. My mother always found time for everything. She worked in her store and did all the household chores and, above all, gave us love, attention, and a good example. She always has been and continues to be an enterprising woman.

Thanks to her, we learned these virtues: to study, strive, and become professionals. I remember that on every birthday or special day she would prepare her best dishes with so much love. Our favorites were the short cake, the roasted turkey, the hot chocolate, and the panettone at Christmas or New Year. On these occasions, the house would be filled with family love.

Now it is our turn to take care of her and follow her example—her love, her strength, and her joy are treasures that we carry in our hearts. She always said, “Stay together, with the same motherly love.” She is THE QUEEN of our house. We call her The Queen of Pampacolca because it is the place where she was born.

Rosa Ypanaque is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Personal Stories

Life is Unpredictable

In 2017, I graduated from high school and began university the same year. I enrolled in dentistry at UNIFA, an internationally renowned university. I was confident in my studies and committed to completing my assignments on time. Through hard work and determination, I was admitted into my second year and continued striving for success.

In 2020, I lost my father, and my life changed completely. I was no longer able to continue my university studies and was forced to close my academic file to learn practical skills that would help me support myself. During that time, I also took on the responsibility of supporting my family.

In 2023, one of my cousins initiated legal proceedings that enabled me to travel through Nicaragua and eventually enter the United States. After arriving in 2024, I began working and remained employed for one year. That experience taught me an important lesson: life does not always turn out the way we expect.

However, I did not lose hope because I remained focused on my goals. Through that job, I invested in myself by learning the country's laws, improving my English, and continuing to support my family.

The moral of my story is that not everything in life comes easily. Sometimes we must fight, persevere, and remain determined to achieve success. One day, I hope to become the dentist my father dreamed I would be and to honor his memory through my dedication and hard work.

Jean Roobens Alfrede attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Embracing a New Language

One day I decided to go to my dentist appointment because I thought I could fend for myself, but the experience wasn't what I expected. The doctor didn't understand me, and neither did I understand him. Thank God, the doctor was very kind to me and found an interpreter in the office.

I am not going to lie, that day I felt so frustrated that I decided I had to learn to speak English. I found this wonderful school, Learn to Read (LTR). There, I met Joseph, who made me feel comfortable and started working with this wonderful group of teachers, who taught me and helped me on my journey to learn to speak English.

I also lost the fear of going out and communicating with my limited English and learning from my mistakes.

At that moment in my journey, I can say that my life changed. I stopped to think and connect with myself, and I imagined myself wearing my "Spanish outfit" and trying to speak English. Obviously this didn't make any sense—it didn't fit—but then I imagined myself wearing my "English outfit" and trying to speak English, and I could see that it did fit and everything flowed more easily.

This process led me to change my personality, embracing and living the American culture, allowing me to move forward, get a job, have a social life, and be part of the community.

Patti Miller gave me the emotional support I needed at that time and always believed in me that I could do it. Megan Swift is my current tutor, with whom I always learn new things and who continues to motivate me to improve my English every day.

And last but not least, my husband and my children, who have always been there to support me and not let me fall when I felt like I couldn't do it and was about to give up.

Sandra Alinur is a student at Learn to Read of St. Hon's County. Her teacher is Mimi Ensley.

Alicia in Miami

My name is Alicia Alonso; I am fifty-four years old. I came from Peru to the United States when I was nineteen years old. As many people do, I came here as an immigrant to follow my dreams by working hard. I had two dreams in mind: to learn English and photography. Along the way, I got married and unexpectedly had the opportunity to study gemology.

I came to the United States to live with my aunt and her family; soon after my arrival, I studied gemology, the study, identification, cutting, and valuation of natural and synthetic gemstones, and began working as a jewelry maker.

I also began to attend church regularly, and two years later, I got married to my husband. I gave birth to two beautiful boys; I dedicated my time to being a stay-home mom until my sons began school.

Once they began school, I retook my journey to learn English. I obtained a job at Loft, a women's clothing store. This job gave me the chance to practice my English that I had slowly learned throughout the years. I also had the opportunity to dress my clients with my fashion influence.

Although I have enjoyed these fifteen years of working at Loft, I left my job recently to pursue my dream of learning to better speak, write, and read the English language by taking classes at Miami-Dade College.

When I achieve this goal, I will follow my next dream, which is to learn photography.

I am very grateful for this country and all the opportunities it has provided for me. I have made a life with my husband and two sons. I will continue to follow my dreams by perfecting my English and then learn photography to take amazing pictures, because it is never too late to learn anything you dream about.

Alicia Alonso is a dedicated gemologist who studies ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College on the Kendall campus in order to search for better opportunities. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

What is Life?

Many times, I ask myself, “What is life?” and now I have found an answer: “Life is a sweet wait.” We wait nine months for our children to be born. This is so sweet that it makes us dream, think, and even anticipate the moment of birth and the responsibility of being parents.

When we were born, we had sweet waits: we waited six months to start eating different things, a year later to start taking our sweet steps, and more than a year to say the sweetest words, “Mom and Dad.”

Then we continue waiting and waiting to go to school, to have our first sweet love, to go to university, and to perhaps become a doctor and help people. We then continue in the sweet wait until we form our own home, have our own children, and continue with our different sweet waits for which we struggle with problems, but always with a positive mindset.

In short, life is a sweet wait and sometimes bitter, but the best thing is to always keep our heads held high and enjoy every step of our lives.

Now my most recent and sweetest wait is to arrive at my English class and find my sweet teachers Mildred, Naki, and Jodi and the many classmates I have met here.

Ovidio Alzate is from Colombia and is now studying English at Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

When Life Gives You Lemons, Make Lemonade

December 2012 was my last Christmas with my mom, sisters, and brother. Back in those days, my mother’s home smelled of delicious dinner and sweet chocolate cookies. We were incredibly happy to be together as a family. My daughter, Ninette, was dancing with her brother and her cousin Angel, while my husband Alex and I were singing and clapping. My mom had mixed feelings—happy for this special night, but sad because we would be moving to the USA. We never imagined we would not come

back to Chile. My husband and I were so excited to start a new life and to give our children a better future, with more opportunities.

When we arrived in Miami, we realized how important everything we had left behind truly was. Over the years we lived in Miami, we started to make new friends, some of whom were Chilean too, with comparable stories. This made me reflect on how brave we were to leave our country, our relatives, jobs, and friends to begin a new chapter for our family. Immigrants, I believe, are truly brave. They must work harder than others to adapt to a new culture and be accepted. Life is full of episodes of courage. We were surprised to see how, in difficult moments, we found the strength to move forward.

My son, Cris, grew up in this country, alone, without grandparents, cousins, or uncles nearby. I thought this would affect him, and in fact, it did. He was very shy, introverted, and struggled to adapt at school as well as in society. Then his little brother, Dan, came into the world, and the two became great friends and partners. Meanwhile, Cris continued to have difficulties socializing and managing anxiety. After seeing many different doctors, we finally received an autism diagnosis when he was 13 years old. It was difficult for the family, but especially for Cris. He fell into such severe depression that we worried about his life.

God gave us the strength and courage and led us to the right professionals to help him move forward. Now, my son is doing better; he continues with his therapy and the medication prescribed for his psychiatric issues. Despite the pain, we as a family stayed strong to support Cris. I believe this was the bravest moment we have experienced.

Dan's story is different. He is extremely sweet, but he was also deeply affected by Cris's situation. Now we must work with him to address those difficult moments through therapy and understanding how best to support him as well. Dan is navigating the pre-teen years, which is challenging because sometimes he is angry, and at other times, he is truly kind. But we know that now we are on the right path.

Our motto now is, "When life gives you lemons, make lemonade!"

Jenny Araya is a Chilean national who studies English in order to take advantage of the opportunities in the US. She has been a student in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall.

Moving Forward in the Process

Three years ago, I was cordially invited to participate by writing a short story about my life through Learn to Read, St. Johns County, for the Florida Adult Literacy program. Looking back to where I was then, I feel even more passionate about continuing to move forward and strive to achieve my goals of writing, reading, and speaking English correctly.

I am progressing in the process and trying to overcome fear and insecurity, which are very constant enemies in this endeavor. I feel more confident and less afraid when listening, and I understand a little more when reading. Speaking in English is also becoming easier for me. I notice this every time I interact with people in places like my job, the doctor's office, church, the supermarket, and with my friends.

In December 2025, I had the blessed opportunity to travel to Europe to spend time with my daughter and son. This was a wonderful reunion with my children. While in France with my daughter, I had a wonderful experience that filled me with satisfaction, joy, and, why not say it, a little pride in myself. When interacting with people, my responses were not in Spanish, my native language, but in English! This made my daughter, who is fluent in English, amazed and surprised to see my progress. She is happy for me!

It was there that I understood once again the personal challenge of speaking English and its importance in the world as a second language. In this new environment, I was able to see my progress with fresh eyes. With that same enthusiasm, I happily returned home to continue my learning.

Today I tell myself, "I have to achieve it." I must strengthen my self-confidence, and I believe that I will succeed with the help of God first and the patience, affection, empathy, and professionalism of my tutor, Barbara Horton. That's why I don't want to and can't let her or myself down. I keep moving forward!

Martha Arevalo is a student at Learn to Read of St. Johns County. Her teacher is Barbara Horton.

My Superhero

My name is Teara Carter, known affectionately as Ne Ne or Granny to my grandsons. My grandson, Cameron Jr., whom we call Baby, was born on November 30, 2016, in Jacksonville, Florida, weighing 6 lbs. 5 oz and measuring 22 inches long.

As a toddler, Baby thrived, enjoying playtime with his dog, toys, and his hands-on dad, Cameron Sr., known as Toot. However, at four years old, Toot noticed a concerning white spot in Baby's left eye. After taking a picture and discussing it with me, I urged Toot to take him to the ER. Three hours later, we received devastating news: Baby was diagnosed with retinoblastoma, a rare eye cancer typically found in children under five. To our shock, Baby's case was sporadic, stemming from an RB1 gene mutation. Faced with many questions and fears about treatment, we learned that while the cancer was serious, it was treatable.

Treatment began a month later at the Baskin Eye Institute in Miami, one of the top eye cancer centers in the Southeast. The first round involved radiation, which proved challenging for Baby, who was only 35 pounds. The doctors decided to administer treatment through his groin. After sedating him, they had Baby lie perfectly still on his back while the 30-minute radiation session took place.

For the past five years, Baby has attended treatments every three months. Remarkably, he has remained calm and courageous throughout, seemingly unaware of the gravity of his situation. As a grandmother, witnessing my grandson go through this was heartbreaking. I often found myself questioning God, asking why this happened to him. Yet, God reassured me that Baby would be fine.

Cameron Jr. embodies resilience, fighting his battle with the strength of Superman, without fear. Now ten years old and in fourth grade at KIP School, he has consistently made the A/B Honor Roll since Pre-K, and, thankfully, his cancer is in remission.

Unfortunately, he lost vision in his left eye because the retina could not be reattached; however, by God's grace, the cancer never spread to his right eye, requiring no further treatment. His next appointment is scheduled for December 2026.

Cameron Jr.'s journey is nothing short of amazing. He never complained or questioned his circumstances, a true testament to his spirit. He is my superhero because he taught me that no matter the difficulties faced, one can emerge victorious. Watching him achieve milestones fills me with gratitude, and it has shown me that anything is possible. I dedicate this story to my beloved grandson, Mr. Cameron Terrell Carter, Jr. (aka Baby).

Teara Carter is a grandmother of six grandchildren and a mother of six adult children. She is a student at South Florida State College studying for her high school diploma with the ultimate goal of pursuing a career in culinary arts.

Transition

My name is Marie Edelyne Celestin Saint Fleur. I'm from Haiti, my homeland.

I used to travel to the USA beginning in 2012 with a B1-B2 visa. I used to come here on vacation almost every year, but I never wanted to stay here on a tourist visa. The last trip I made on my visa was 21 April 2022. My visa expired in June of the same year. Although many people told me to stay because my visa was expiring, I told them no, it was a tourist visa I had. I couldn't stay and I returned.

In May 2022, I was scheduled for an appointment to renew my visa; unfortunately, it was impossible to renew because I had a date of October 27, 2022, and on the departure date of October 12 of the same year, the embassy said they couldn't receive me because they were closed.

In January 2024, my niece, Ruth R. Augustin, applied for me and my daughter to the President Biden Speech Program, and we were approved in April of the same year. We arrived in the USA in August 2024. My daughter enrolled at Eustis High School and graduated in May 2025.

On November 4th, God willing, my daughter will be 18 years old. She is currently improving her English before starting classes to enter the nursing program.

I will never stop thanking God for his presence in our lives. Leaving our country to live here was not easy, but He did not abandon us.

Before I came to Palm Coast, I lived in Eustis, and I spent a month at Lake Tech College. It was great, but when I came here, a cousin of mine went to Flagler Technical College. Here the staff is more welcoming, and I love FTC so much, and when my English is up to scratch, I will learn everything here.

I am entering the intermediate level; I love Mrs. Mullinax so much for how she makes the course understandable and for her wisdom.

I pray every single day for the well-being of the USA, because my happiness depends on its happiness. God bless America.

Marie Edelyne Celestin Saint Fleur is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Francesca Mullinax.

The Ember House

The Ember House is not merely a place where fire is held within four walls. It is a space shaped by the fire that has lived within me—persistent, searching, and deeply human. It is marked not by spectacle, but by what remains after the flames have done their work.

That fire has taken many forms over time: rage and anger, desire and longing, and a hunger for more than survival. At times it burned recklessly, fueled by pain and unanswered questions. At other times it smoldered quietly, waiting to be acknowledged. Eventually, it became a fire that stopped asking why and began asking how come—a question born not of rebellion, but of awakening.

The Ember House exists as a place of release. Within its walls, the slow and deliberate work of letting go unfolds with intention.

What once felt immovable is gently loosened. What once defined identity is carefully examined. The grip of old narratives begins to soften, making room for something truer.

There is a surrender of what has weighed the spirit down for years. There is a shedding of versions of the self that no longer align with who is emerging. There is a laying aside of roles learned through necessity—roles adopted to survive, to belong, or to preserve peace at personal cost. In their absence, breath returns.

Space opens,

Here, fire is neither feared nor avoided. It is honored for its refining power. It is allowed to burn away what was never meant to remain, not in destruction, but in restoration.

What is false cannot survive the heat; what is essential does

Consequently, when the walls finally fall, what remains is not ash.

What remains is light.

The ember endures, steady, quiet, and luminous beneath hardened surfaces. It carries a warmth that has always existed, even when buried beneath shame, fear, or silence. It does not demand attention, yet it refuses to be extinguished.

The Ember House holds stories with reverence. Stories of childhood violations. Stories of addiction spanning adolescence and early adulthood. Stories of self-harm, secrecy, and isolation. These stories are not shared for shock or spectacle. They are held with care and offered as truth, honoring both the wound and the resilience that followed.

Nevertheless, transformation weaves through each one. Redemption appears where despair once lingered. Healing takes root in places long neglected, growing slowly but steadily.

These stories are not mine alone. They are stories carried, witnessed, and stewarded stories that may feel familiar to those who have quietly borne their own.

Recognition may surface. Comfort may follow. A sense of being less alone may begin to take shape.

The Ember House stands as a reminder: fire does not always destroy. Sometimes, it reveals what has been there all along.

Sara Chaule is a student at Family Support Services Network Inc. Their teacher is Lashan Crumpler.

My Life and Art

My story begins in my childhood, a stage marked by happiness and the unconditional love of my parents, who instilled in me fundamental values such as respect, education, perseverance, and the importance of dreaming big, always believing that anything I set my mind to can be achieved.

From an early age, I was a shy and introverted child, but within me there was a special force, something magical that needed to be released in order for me to express myself and break my own limits. That impulse was art. Through drawing and painting, I found a way to communicate my emotions, using vivid colors to create landscapes, nature scenes, and characters that reflected my inner world. My teachers recognized this talent, and my parents, especially my mother, were a fundamental pillar, constantly supporting me and accompanying me with effort and dedication to my painting classes. Thanks to them, I learned to express my feelings on a blank canvas in a creative and authentic way.

A large part of my childhood was surrounded by brushes and colors, until a new passion appeared that transformed my life: aerobic gymnastics. Through it, I discovered abilities I never knew I had and came to understand that art and gymnastics had much in common. Gymnastics is a deeply artistic sport, where the body becomes a tool of expression capable of conveying elegance, fluidity, and emotion, combined with discipline, risk, and adrenaline.

I began practicing gymnastics at the age of 14 as an athlete, performing routines on the mat to the rhythm of music within a limited time frame that demanded endurance, strength,

coordination, body expression, and a confident attitude before the judges and the audience. Through effort and consistency, I became a national champion on multiple occasions and represented my country in international competitions and world championships.

Thanks to the art of gymnastics, my life took a transcendent direction, allowing me to live legally in this country and become an American citizen by obtaining a visa for artistic talent. Today, I remain connected to gymnastics from a different perspective, no longer as an athlete but as a coach, guiding boys and girls to believe in themselves, express themselves through their bodies, and pursue their dreams.

Gymnastics helped transform my shyness into strength and confidence. Although I remain introverted, every time I stepped onto the mat, I experienced an inner transformation that allowed me to feel secure and fulfilled. Today, I consider myself a happy and confident adult who continues to express his emotions through art and gymnastics. “I dedicate this journey to my parents, to art, and to gymnastics, the essential pillars of my existence.”

“I define myself as a being who can express art in two ways: one with my hands and the other through my body, always guided and driven by love and the heart.”

Lenin Chavez is a Venezuelan athlete and artist who has lived in the United States since 2016. He works as a gymnastics coach and graphic designer. He is currently an ESOL 5 in Professor Carmen Whu's class at Miami Dade College.

When you Work Hard, you Can Achieve your Dreams

When I think about what my life was, I can remember many different situations—especially when I was a little girl. When I was younger, I was always trying to memorize different melodies and songs. In my house, my mom didn't like listening to music, but I loved it. My dream was to be a singer and a musician. It was complicated because I didn't have a father, and my mother was always working to take care of me and my siblings. How could I get an opportunity to learn? It seemed impossible.

One day, a person at my mother's school told her about my musical talent. He helped me prepare for the admission exam at the Vicente Emilio Sojo Conservatory in Barquisimeto, Venezuela. I didn't pass the first time, and I remember feeling so sad. But everything changed when my mom talked to the administration, and they gave me a second chance. I was surprised because my mom hated music—but I realized some parents do the best they can for their children.

My first year was normal; we learned music theory and solfeggio before choosing our instruments. When it was time to choose, I thought I wanted the piano. But one day, while walking down the stairs, I heard a classical guitar for the first time. My life changed in that moment. I met the professors and couldn't even speak—I just listened. I felt peace and certainty that this was my instrument. I was 11 years old.

My teacher was Arturo González Quintana, a classical guitarist from Chile who had moved to Venezuela after Pinochet. He changed my life because he became more than a teacher—he became like a father to me. The first week, there were 35 students in his class. By the end of the first year, only two of us remained. I practiced every day, even without my own instrument. My teacher saw my dedication and one day gave me a guitar. He said, "This is temporary—when you can buy one, you'll return it."

I was so happy. My mom told me, "You can buy your own guitar because your teacher trusts you, but it won't be forever." That Christmas, she took me to work with her to earn money for my instrument. Another teacher offered to sell me his old concert guitar—one that had history and had been played by an exceptional guitarist. My mom secretly paid for it and returned my money to me. That was one of the best moments of my life. She taught me that when you work hard, you can achieve your dreams.

She never showed affection with words, but her actions spoke louder than anything. I believe God sent His only Son for everyone, the perfect example of love. I deeply admire my mother—she sacrificed so much for me and my brothers. Today, I am a musician with a bachelor's degree in music education and a specialization in composition. I live in Miami and continue working toward my goals. But the most important thing for me is

to praise the Lord with the talent He gave me.

Alexandra Chourio is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Perez Lapeira.

What I am Grateful For

What I am grateful for is God, my children, and grandchildren. First, I am grateful to God because without him there would be no me. He is the head of my life and keeps me going each and every day. He gives me the strength I need to keep going on a daily basis. When I am feeling down, I go to him. As a matter of fact, I go to him for everything now and see why He sat me down in this place. It was so I could rebuild my relationship with him, and I now see that I should never have strayed from him. I am back, and I am never letting anything take me away from Him again.

Next are my children and grandchildren. I am so grateful for them because they keep me going. They are the reason I am fighting so hard; I want to get back to them. It is harder for me because I've never spent one single day away from them, especially the holidays.

I am away from my grandchildren, as well, who are toddlers, and I am missing out on precious moments with them. I will never be able to get back the time of them growing into the people they are going to become. Soon they will be big kids, teenagers, then young adults. I won't be able to go through those things with them. I have a new bundle of joy being added to the family soon. I really want to be there for the birth of my grandchild. I am grateful for them all.

Last, I am grateful that I still have my life because there were a lot of people that didn't get a chance to wake up this morning or spend time with their family or get to see their children. So yes, I am grateful for my life as well as to God be the Glory.

Latorray Collins is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. His teacher is Kimberly Gaskins.

My Personal Story

On July 17, 2025, I went to have my mammogram, and that is when I found out that I had breast cancer. It was in stage 1, which is a small cell that had not started growing. They started to do an ultrasound on me to see what size it was and where it was. They told me that someone would get in touch with me. When they told me to wait in the waiting room, I knew something was wrong. I felt like it was cancer because I have cancer in my family. I was a little nervous but did not panic. I knew that my doctors would take good care of me. So I went home and waited for them to call me with the results, and they called me the next week. I had to do another ultrasound, and it showed that I had stage 1 breast cancer. Then they scheduled my surgery to remove the bad tissues and a little extra, just to be on the safe side. I was not worried at all. On the 18th of August I had my surgery. Then I was placed in the recovery room, and I heard the nurse Marcus call my name. That's when my doctor came in to tell me how everything went. She told me everything went well. She told me that I would have to rest for two weeks, and then I would have to have radiation treatments every Tuesday for five weeks beginning in October. I never felt anything during the radiation treatments. I had my last treatment in November. I also have to take a hormone-balancing pill for five years. With the radiation and the pill, I have a 98% chance that it will not spread in my body. I will see my cancer doctor again in March. I am hopeful that they got it all, and I feel great. I never let it kill my spirit or shake my belief in God.

Marilyn Courtney is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida with Lisa Montgomery. She is working towards her GED. She would recommend the Literacy Alliance to anyone that is trying to get their GED, as they have wonderful, caring teachers.

A New Chapter in My Life

The bravest day of my life was when I decided to come to the United States. I will never forget the day I said goodbye to my parents at the Mexico City airport. I felt sad and wanted to cry, but I had to be strong so my parents wouldn't feel the same way. I knew that coming here was a great opportunity, but most importantly, the person with whom I had decided to share my

life was waiting for me. Now, my husband and I are building our own family together.

Before coming here, I felt scared and sad about leaving my home and being separated from my family. Then my father said, “We all have to leave home to start our own families; now it is your turn.” His words comforted me, and I knew that he understood my decision.

During my first days here, I felt nervous going to shops or restaurants. I didn’t understand the language, and when cashiers or waitresses asked me something, I froze and hid behind my husband. In Mexico, I had studied English, but I was better at reading comprehension than listening. Three weeks later, I enrolled at Clearwater Adult Education Center to learn English. At first, I felt like I didn’t understand anything, and I was discouraged, but as the days went by, I started to understand little by little.

Now I don’t feel lost anymore. I enjoy going to school, I go to the store by myself, and I feel brave and happy with my husband. I miss my family a lot, but I know I will go back home soon. I am currently working on my first goal, which is to improve my language skills and become fluent in English. Later, I am going to plan for my future career.

Life here is very different, but the important thing is to never give up.

Angelica Cruz Heras is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Their teacher is Yllka Bejo.

A Journey of Courage and Hope

Life is full of challenges that test our strength and shape who we become. My journey from Venezuela to the United States has been marked by courage, sacrifice, and hope for a better future. I was born in Caracas, Venezuela, on February 2, 1995, and as the oldest of four siblings, I learned responsibility at an incredibly early age. When I was ten, I began cooking to help my mother, and over the years I became an excellent cook—at least according to my family and my husband. My experiences in Venezuela, my

role as a mother, and the decision to rebuild my life in another country have shaped me into the strong woman I am today.

Growing up in Venezuela taught me the values of family, hard work, and resilience. I completed my studies at Universidad Andrés Bello in Caracas, earning a degree in human resources. At the age of twenty-three, my life changed when I became pregnant with my son, Matías. I decided to move to the United States to create better opportunities for him. However, after giving birth, I returned to Venezuela for a brief period. The political and economic situation in the country was extremely difficult, and opportunities were rapidly disappearing under the dictatorship. Therefore, after only eight months, I made the difficult decision to return to the United States, determined to build a stable life for my child. I arrived in January 2020, full of dreams, unaware that the world was about to face one of its greatest challenges: the COVID-19 pandemic.

The pandemic struck shortly after my arrival and became one of the most challenging periods of my life. Being an immigrant with a baby during such uncertain times was frightening. However, like many strong mothers, I refused to give up. A generous Venezuelan family welcomed me and helped me regain stability. I often say that my son was born with an angel by his side because God placed the right people in our path at the right moment. I began working in various jobs—as a server, in factories, and even at a cookware parts company. Eventually, I was given the opportunity to work in an office, an experience that made me feel proud and grateful. Later, I met my husband, who encouraged me to continue growing. He motivated me to study English, explaining that it would open many doors for our family. Today, I am studying at Miami Dade College, improving my English with dedicated professors such as Professor Eduardo Lejardi and my current instructor, Professor Carmen Whu.

In Venezuela, Georgina De Requesens was not interested in studying English because she did not need it. Nowadays, she is at Miami Dade College, Kendall campus. She is a student in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5.

The Day Everything Broke — and the Man Who Didn't

Júlio César was born on March 23, 1989, in a humble Brazilian neighborhood surrounded by simplicity, family, and hard work. From an early age, he learned the value of responsibility: selling homemade popsicles to neighbors, helping his father build houses, and even collecting payments for phone calls made on the family's landline—a small but powerful example of how life taught him discipline and courage from the very beginning.

As a teenager, he balanced school, internships, and technical courses, always driven by the desire to grow. He earned opportunities in several companies, moved to São Paulo to study aviation, and fulfilled his dream of becoming a private pilot, commercial pilot, multi-engine pilot, IFR pilot, and flight instructor. His life was rising fast, and every step seemed to lead toward the future he had envisioned. But everything changed in the blink of an eye.

On a Saturday morning on Avenida Bandeirantes, a car ran a red light and crashed directly into Júlio's motorcycle. The impact shattered not only the motorcycle but also his spine—along with, for a moment, his certainty about the future. At the hospital, he faced a harsh diagnosis: a fractured spine requiring surgery and metal screws. His world collapsed. Two years of pain, physiotherapy, and reconstruction began that day.

It was in this lowest valley that Júlio discovered his greatest strength. He rose from adversity, transformed suffering into gratitude, and began to see life through a new lens—more human, more present, more aware. What could have been the end became the beginning of a new version of himself.

Determined to rebuild his life, he came to the United States with faith, courage, and the desire for a fresh start. He began from nothing—working as a driver, learning English on his own, facing new challenges, and eventually founding his own business, Magic Cleaning, in Florida. Together with his partner Talia, he built a company rooted in honesty, dedication, and genuine care for each client.

Today, living in Clearwater, Júlio has found peace, purpose, and a new path. His story is not about an accident — it is about

someone who refused to give up.

Julio Cesar De Souza is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

How Music Affects Our Emotions

Music is part of our daily lives, even when we do not notice it. Sometimes it is not a full song but a simple melody that stays in our mind while we walk, drive, or do normal activities. This shows that music is more than entertainment. It has the power to affect how we feel, how we think, and how we manage our emotions.

Listening to music can influence our mental health in many ways. Different kinds of music can help us relax, improve our mood, or help us focus. For many people, music is a safe place where they can release stress and process emotions. Music can also bring comfort during difficult moments. Some people feel such a strong connection to music that it becomes an important part of their emotional life.

Relaxing music, like instrumental or classical music, can help reduce stress and anxiety. Soft melodies calm the mind and help release tension after a long day. Even when it plays in the background, this type of music can create a peaceful feeling. When relaxing music is combined with natural sounds, such as rain or wind, it can help people feel even calmer. Many people use music as part of their daily routine to feel more balanced and relaxed.

Happy and energetic music can also change our mood quickly. Songs with fast rhythms or positive sounds can give us energy and motivation. This kind of music helps people face challenges with a better attitude. Music can also help us feel connected to others. Sharing songs or remembering moments linked to music can make us feel less alone.

However, not all music has positive effects. Listening to too much sad music can increase negative feelings, especially when someone is already feeling emotional. Songs about pain or loss can keep a person focused on sadness. This is why it is important to choose music carefully and understand how it affects our emotions.

Music is more than sound. It can bring comfort, support, and emotional balance. It helps us relax, feel motivated, and remember important moments in our lives. At the same time, we must be aware of how music affects our feelings. When chosen with care, music becomes a helpful tool for emotional well-being and mental health.

Amanda Delgado Rodriguez is a student at Miami Dade College Hialeah Campus School of Continuation. Their teacher is Miguel Balerdi_Dubrocq.

The Dawn With Hope

My life changed a lot after I came to live in America. I remember that in the first month, I did not know many things, such as driving a car, going to school, going to the supermarket, or going to the park. Sometimes I was homesick for my country. I grew up in a small town. I was not used to living in a big city. I didn't even have any friends, and I felt really lonely. It was hard to continue living there. But things have changed for the better. Nowadays my life is very happy and exciting, and I have confidence.

When I learned how to drive a car, I could start going to school. I study English at the Clearview Adult School. After school I go to work. I have finally made new friends. On the weekend, I volunteer in the nursing home for older patients. I visit the patients in the nursing home or their house. I think I am trying to help everyone, but I am also receiving their spirit of mercy.

When interacting with older people, I say a few words to encourage them, and we do simple physical exercises. On Saturday, August 2, 2025, I went to visit Nguyen Thi Thanh. She had had an accident. After that she could not move half of her body. When she met me, she cried very much. I knew it was difficult for her. I helped her stretch her hands and shake the weak foot, and it helped her feel better. Today she can walk slowly around the house. The perseverance helps her see the light forward. It is the same dawn in her light with the hope of a better life.

I find happiness in the world, and I go through the difficulties with calm and peace. Life is better with perseverance and opti-

mism. Empathy and sharing are two extremely important and necessary things to form a civilized and compassionate society where everyone can enjoy good things and live in love.

Teresa Tram Thi Thuy Dinh is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Why I Study

My name is Maria. I am 69 years old and originally from the island of Cuba. I am a medical doctor specializing in internal medicine, with a subspecialty in intensive care in my native country. Three years ago, I arrived in the United States, where the official language is English. At the beginning, not knowing the language filled me with frustration. However, I decided to take this challenge as a new opportunity to learn something extremely useful in this country.

The most important thing I recognized was the value of mastering the official language. Despite my age, health problems, and many people who doubted me, I chose not to give up and enrolled immediately in the ESOL program at Miami Dade College. Some close friends made fun of my decision to return to school at my age. For example, some joked with phrases such as “An old parrot does not learn to talk,” or “You’re going to school because you’re feeling depressed,” and even, “You just want to socialize.” Despite these comments, I never took them seriously, and they did not affect my goals or interest in continuing my English studies.

As a doctor, I passionately believe that one should keep the mind active and continue learning, no matter your age. This is a valuable tool to avoid dementia, Alzheimer’s disease being the most common form in our society. Therefore, I committed myself to studying English and doing my best. However, I recognize that technology is one of the main obstacles people my age face, especially those who come from developing countries like mine. The fast pace of technological development, combined with my lack of knowledge of English, represents a real challenge. In the past, I studied from books instead of advanced computers with complex software. Back in the 1970s and 1980s, we only had mechanical typewriters, and one of the most famous brands was Remington.

Learning English is not only a necessity but also a privilege. It is a goal that gives me strength and motivation every day. One of my plans is to become an American citizen, which will require learning about the history of the United States and its political institutions. I am deeply grateful to this wonderful college and to the excellent professors who guide us with dedication and patience. They provide an excellent curriculum, and in general, they are well-prepared and possess extensive knowledge of the language.

My greatest ambition is to continue learning, overcome every obstacle, and prove that it is never too late to grow. Additionally, learning the language can help me follow courses related to the field of medicine in the future.

In summary, despite the obstacles I have mentioned, my desire is to successfully complete all the required English courses at the college. That is my objective, my dream, and my mission.

Maria Yara Franco is a medical doctor from Cuba. She loves to learn new things; therefore, she is an MDC-Kendall student in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5.

Music... My Inspiration

To me, music is the echo of the heart... it's the wine that fills the cup of silence when we're alone and the cup of joy when we're together.

Without a doubt, music has been my inspiration, my peace, my companion, and my magic!

Since I was a little girl, I have loved listening to the songs my father used to play. I learned to hum them, and those melodies are etched in time. Today, when I listen to them, they take me back to those memories of green landscapes, the countryside, the fresh air, sincere smiles, and loving hugs.

Music has also been my companion in sad and difficult times. It has been my balm to forget my wounds and the strength to rebuild myself.

There is nothing more pleasurable than enjoying music in company. I enjoy it so much! Singing and dancing with family and friends...those moments remain in the soul as sweet dreams. There's nothing better to uplift and inspire than harmonious melodies.

The sounds of strings are my favorites. How could I not enjoy the sound of the acoustic guitar, the “requinto” that tells a romantic “bolero” from years ago? Without forgetting the soft notes of the harp that take me back to fresh valleys with blue skies and songbirds.

In summary, music has been that generous ally that always reminds me life is beautiful despite the difficulties and problems; all pain has a beginning and end, dreams can come true, and love truly exists! But above all, it always reminds me that life is a beauty.

Rebeca Galarraga is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Travis Thomas.

A Journey of Sacrifice and Strength

Life has taught me that perspective shapes everything. Behind every smile were silent tears, unspoken worries, and sacrifices I chose because I believed goodness returns in time. That belief guided me through every chapter of my life.

I left home young and worked far from everything familiar, doing labor that wore down my body but strengthened my spirit. My goal was never comfort—it was to help my family breathe easier. Even when exhaustion broke my health, I returned to helping because that is who I am.

For years, responsibility defined my life. While others my age lived freely, I held a family together across an ocean. People saw my happiness and thought it came easily, but behind every smile were dreams I quietly put aside. Still, I kept going, believing light comes after the darkest sacrifices.

And then, light found me. I met the man who became my best friend, my peace, and my husband. What began as two

tired souls talking through a screen grew into love that felt like destiny. When we met, his smile felt like home. Soon after, I left everything again and began a new chapter in the United States.

Our shared journey of sacrifice began. He worked nonstop, supporting his family, while I cared for our home and others out of love. But in doing so, I often felt absent from my own children. Some nights I cried quietly, but we never gave up. We believed our sacrifices would be worth it.

Years passed, and somewhere inside those years, I lost my voice. Surrounded by people, yet unable to express myself in English, silence became my second language until I decided to change that. Learning English at Clearwater Adult Education Center (CAEC) was one of my hardest struggles, but it gave me confidence, freedom, and friendships. My teachers gave me courage and a space where I felt safe to speak from my heart.

Today, life is gentler. My children are surrounded by love, and our family is united and blessed. Perspective taught me this: Sacrifice does not weaken you. Love does not drain you. Giving does not empty you. They shape you, refine you, and prepare you for blessings after the storm.

Now, when I smile, it is not to hide pain but because I finally feel the life I prayed for.

Jonida Gjinaj is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Mirela Dimo.

Nature is My Inspiration

My name is Dieuda Goettie Louis, and nature is my greatest inspiration.

It opens my eyes to the things that are wrong and helps me understand the true meaning of life. Through nature, I can see beauty, love, and the breathtaking landscape that surrounds us.

When you stand in a place where the wind is strong, close your eyes and let nature guide your thoughts. In that moment, you will begin to find the answers you've been searching for, and

you will feel inspired. Full of ideas, questions, and understanding.

Nature as a Source of Emotions and Sensations

Nature inspires because it provokes powerful feelings. The majesty of a mountain, the immensity of the ocean, or the complexity of a tiny insect raises a sense of respect and admiration.

The rustling of leaves, the sound of flowing water, or the silence of a snowy forest can inspire meditation, inner peace, and renewal. Mystery and creation are the cycles of life and death, perfect forms of spirals, fractals, and raw energy storms. Volcanoes inspire a sense of creative force and underlying order.

In other words, nature is not just a setting but a teacher or a library of solutions and the source of innovation. Natural systems are used as inspiration to create sustainable solutions for our environment. For example, the structure of a leaf for a solar panel or shark skin for swimsuits.

Harmony and aesthetics use colors, textures, bark, rock, water, and other organic forms. Serving as models that artists and designers seek to reproduce or interpret. The fact that life always finds a way, that a seed grows in concrete or a forest is reborn after a fire, inspires strength and hope. In simple words, nature serves as a mirror to the soul and life itself.

Time and Change

The seasons, the rebirth of spring and the decline of autumn, become metaphors for life, youth, old age, and inevitable change. The poet can feel alone in the face of the immensity of nature. Or, in contrast, feel deeply connected to something greater than himself: the universe, the living.

In summary, the inspiration of nature is often described as an inexhaustible force that nourishes the senses, the intellect, and the human soul.

Dieuda Goettie Louis is a student at Flagler Technical College, whose teacher is Travis Thomas.

Internal Strength

In 2021, I was living in my home country, Venezuela, amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. Unfortunately, both of my parents became infected with the virus. At that time, I faced the most terrifying experience of my life. I never imagined that this challenging situation, which affected my family deeply, would also become the experience that would teach me about my own strength and resilience.

Those days were extremely difficult, as little was known about the illness and its transmission. However, all that mattered to me was taking care of my parents. I did not focus on the possibility of getting sick myself or on how tired, sleepy, or hungry I was. I only wanted to ensure their well-being and to know that they would be okay. I was alone in this situation, and I took full responsibility for it. I even decided not to let my sister visit us, fearing that she might also get infected. I committed myself entirely to caring for my parents without considering anything else.

I recall how the first few days quickly turned into a non-stop daily routine. I took my parents to their doctor's appointments, cooked meals, cleaned the house, and closely monitored every detail of their symptoms. When night finally came, and I could go to bed, I was able to reflect on how exhausted I was. However, I believe that being immersed in this situation was what gave me the strength to endure it all.

The most challenging days came when my father had to be admitted to the hospital due to respiratory complications. He remained there for a week, and it was an incredibly difficult time. We were unable to visit him, as the COVID ward was completely restricted. Not knowing what was happening with my father caused a great deal of stress and anxiety. The only updates we received about his condition came from the nurses and the doctor. As the days went by, we were informed that my father would need to leave the hospital with an oxygen concentrator to help him breathe. At the time, I didn't fully understand the process, but we continued to move forward, and my father eventually completed his recovery at home, under my care. I managed his exercises, monitored his treatment with great attention to detail, and ensured he received all necessary medical care.

Looking back now, I often wonder how I was able to find the

strength to endure such a challenging time. Where did that strength come from? Today, I am grateful for the experience, even though it was one of the most stressful situations I've ever faced as a daughter. I now realize that it was love—the love I have for my family—that helped me get through those difficult days. I have come to understand that love is, indeed, our greatest strength.

Veronica Gonzalez is a student in the ESOL program at Miami Dade College. She has been in Professor Carmen Whu's class.

Between Roots and Borders — Darwin's Odyssey

Darwin's story echoes the voices of thousands of Venezuelans who have left their homeland searching for a life with dignity. The political and economic storm forced him to abandon Barinas, leaving behind his family, his streets, and the fragments of a hope that once felt unbreakable.

His journey began in uncertainty, wrapped in fear. After selling what little he owned, he set his eyes toward Colombia and then Panama, where the Darién jungle rose before him, wild and merciless. There, nature became both judge and executioner.

Raging rivers swallowed paths, endless rain erased footprints, and insects stung like reminders that he was trespassing through a place where survival itself was a privilege.

He remembers the screams of those who got lost... and the silence of those who never made it. Yet, amid the chaos, strangers became brothers, sharing a sip of water, a piece of bread, or a few words of courage.

Each step was a battle against exhaustion but also a declaration of faith: a refusal to surrender.

When the jungle was finally behind him, the struggle didn't end; it only changed its shape.

Borders became walls of bureaucracy and waiting. Nights were cold and uncertain. Some eyes met him with kindness; others with rejection. The word "immigrant" followed him like

an invisible tattoo, a label, a wound, and a new identity.

He learned that migration is not only a physical crossing but an emotional pilgrimage through loss, adaptation, and resilience.

Darwin carried the weight of discrimination and the burden of informal work. But the heaviest pain came when his mother passed away, just days before he could hold her again.

Still, he found strength in the migrant community in the hands that reached out to help, in the voices that refused to be silenced. Through them, he understood that resistance is not only survival; it's love turned into movement.

And so, he rose again.

From the ashes of fear, he rebuilt his life step by step, job by job, dream by dream. The jungle of the Darién still lives inside him, not as a scar, but as a reminder of what it means to endure.

He now knows that migration is not just an ending but also a rebirth of a new beginning written in the language of hope.

Today, even far from home, Darwin carries the certainty that his story belongs to many.

Because every migrant is a heartbeat that crosses borders, a soul that refuses to be erased.

Migration, in the end, is a journey that never truly ends; it begins with the act of leaving, continues in the art of adapting, and renews itself with every dream rebuilt in freedom.

Darwin Gonzalez Arteaga is a student at Miami Dade College. Their teacher is Yosbel Blanco.

The Echo of a Voice That Stirred My Senses

Learning a new language is not a neutral or sterile process. It does not occur solely in the mind, nor is it limited to memorizing words or grammatical rules. Learning another language is,

above all, a sensory and emotional experience, one that moves through the body long before it settles into thought.

Even before I understood a single word, my senses had already been summoned. My ears tensed in response to unfamiliar sounds; my throat tightened as it attempted to reproduce phonemes that did not belong to it. Breathing became conscious, awkward, and restrained. What was taking place was not study, but exposure. My entire body reacted to the presence of change.

The first time I tried to speak in English, I did not feel ignorance; I felt vulnerability. My voice, the one that for years had been firm and confident in my native language, withdrew. It became small and hesitant, as if it feared disappearing. I realized then that learning a new language involves not only acquiring linguistic structure but also accepting a temporary loss of identity.

The frustration was real and tangible. I knew exactly what I wanted to say, yet I could not say it. Complete ideas remained trapped inside a voice that had not yet found its path. My native language seemed suspended in time, watching from a distance as I attempted to exist from a place I had never inhabited before.

Alongside frustration came fear.

Fear of making mistakes.

Fear of sounding childish.

And, above all, fear of not being taken seriously.

Each error spoken aloud was not merely an academic mistake but an intimate exposure. Learning English meant, for me, learning how to fail in public.

Still, between discomfort and hesitation, something else began to emerge: a persistent intuition that the very language that initially unsettled me could also help me grow. Behind every unfamiliar sound, there was a door; behind every silence, a possibility.

With time, I came to understand that learning does not follow

a straight line. There were days of enthusiasm when a well-formed sentence brought a quiet sense of satisfaction. There were also moments of emotional fatigue, when the new language felt heavy and the language of my roots became almost a physical ache.

Learning another language also awakens an inner process: the experience of not feeling myself within new words and of being unable to express humor, irony, or tenderness with precision. Rather than stopping the journey, that experience becomes part of the transformation.

Gradually, the language ceased to be merely a cognitive challenge and began to feel like a place I could inhabit. I was not replacing my voice; I was expanding it. I learned that identity does not break when it stretches and that a new voice does not silence the original one but accompanies it and makes it more conscious.

Blanca Mercedes Gordillo is a Venezuelan physician, surgeon, and author based in the United States. Her writing reflects a deep sensitivity to the human experience and explores emotional fragility, the search for meaning, and the inner light that emerges even during moments of profound silence. She is currently a student in the ESOL program at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus, where she continues to refine her voice in English while expanding her academic and literary formation.

Asking for Help in a New Country

In 2022, the full-scale war started in Ukraine. My husband and I faced a very difficult decision. We took our children and moved to the United States. We did not move because we wanted a new life. We moved because we needed to protect our children. It was forced immigration. We left our country, our family, our friends, and the home we had just built. When we arrived in the United States, we did not know anyone—not one person. Everything was new and scary: a new country, new rules, and a new language. My English was very poor. Sometimes I felt lost. Sometimes I was afraid even to go to the store. I did not know how life was here.

First, I understood one important thing: if I wanted to survive

and adapt, I had to ask questions. I started asking about everything: where to buy food and what food people eat here; where people go to the doctor and how medical insurance works; what schools children attend and what documents they need. I asked other parents what they do with their children here. I asked about banks, phones, transportation, and many simple daily things. Very often, the internet did not help me. The information was confusing. Rules are different in different states, and many things were too complicated. Because my English was very poor, I used a translator on my phone. Sometimes I felt shy. Sometimes I felt uncomfortable. But I still asked—in stores, in schools, on playgrounds, and at sports classes. I asked parents, neighbors, and other people who were so kind. Thanks to people who helped me.

Next, I understood another important thing about America. This is a country of immigrants. Many people here also come from other countries. They remember how hard the beginning was for them as well. They remember the fear, confusion, and language problems. That is why many people here are kind. They explain. They support. They want to help. Every answer helped me a little. Every small conversation gave me more confidence. Step by step, I felt less scared. I began to understand the lifestyle here—not because my English became perfect, but because I was no longer afraid to ask.

Now I truly believe that when you move to a new country, you should ask for necessary information. Even if your English is bad, you need a translator, or feel shy; asking is not a weakness. Asking questions is how you survive, how you learn, and how you build a new life.

Finally, I would like to dedicate this essay with special thanks to Saida Fisher, my first friend in the United States, and my first English teacher, who supported and encouraged me with free English lessons. I would also like to thank my English teacher, Yllka Bejo, at the Clearwater Adult Education Center, who continues to help and support me to improve and master my English.

Anastasia Gurylenko is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Their teacher is Yllka Bejo.

Pronouncing My Life into Words

I am aware that living in the United States means I must learn English, and this is what I have been doing since the moment I arrived in this beautiful country. Living now in St. Augustine, where we finally bought a house and where I will most likely spend the rest of my life, I need to continue improving my skills every day to communicate in English, and I found a place called “Learn to Read” online. I attend classes four times a week.

The teachers are American. They volunteer to teach English to immigrants from around the world. This is a wonderful gesture, meeting Americans who are interested in us as immigrants, helping us learn the language, learn more about their culture, and have the tools to adapt to the American lifestyle. In each class, I’m improving my reading, listening, writing, and pronunciation skills. At Learn to Read, they’ve also given me the opportunity to have a tutor. My tutor’s name is Patti; classes are every Thursday. Classes with her are a lot of fun. Patti also donates her time to teach me. With her, I feel confident speaking English, and she corrects me.

I’ve had to work hard to improve my listening and speaking skills. To listen, I’ve had to practice not translating word for word what my interlocutor is saying but rather abstracting the main message, and when I put this into practice, it works for me. Speaking in English has been more difficult. I think it’s because I’m ashamed of making mistakes, although that’s more on my mind. Those beliefs—“What if I make a mistake? “Or they’re making fun of me”—have paralyzed me, and on more than one occasion, I’ve remained silent, and this has been truly embarrassing. I’ve probably blushed, and I’ve also felt frustrated and angry with myself. I see some of my classmates who take risks and speak up; they express themselves poorly, they’re not ashamed of themselves, and I truly admire them; they’re brave.

“I will always have time to study English, because I am alive.”

Sandra Guzman is a student at Learn to Read of St. John’s County. Her teacher is Mimi Ensley.

The Silence of Three Generations

Real events inspire this story. It takes place in a remote village, a mountainous region far from cities and the reach of justice. In this land, tradition speaks louder than compassion, and women grow up knowing that their lives will be decided by others.

First Generation: The First Woman. She was a young woman when fate turned cruel. Her husband died unexpectedly, leaving her with a little daughter who was almost three years old. In that village, a widow's tears carried no value. A woman without a husband was seen as a burden—something to be removed. The elders of the family decided on her future. Without her consent, she was given to another man in exchange for money. No one asked her what she wanted. Her daughter was left behind, crying and reaching for a mother who was already forbidden. The woman was sent away and warned never to return. From that day on, she lived with only memories. In the house where she was taken, her life became a cycle of fear and humiliation. Violence was constant. Kindness did not exist. Within a few years, her body weakened, but it was her heart that failed first. She died slowly, consumed by longing, carrying her daughter's name in her final breath.

Second Generation: The Child Who Survived. The little girl grew up without parents, raised by relatives who treated her more like a responsibility than a child. Love was rare, and safety was unknown. When she was still young, her marriage was arranged. Her husband was harsh and controlling. Beating became routine, silence necessary. She became the mother of three children, two girls and a boy. For a brief time, motherhood gave her purpose. Then history repeated itself. Her husband died, and she found herself alone once again. Despite the cruelty of life, she endured. She raised her children through poverty and exhaustion, holding herself together for their sake. As the years passed, her son and elder daughter were married. All her hope remained with her youngest child.

Third Generation: The Youngest Woman. The youngest daughter's marriage was decided quickly and quietly. She was married for financial reasons to an older man whose illness was hidden from her. Only after the wedding day did she learn the

truth—her husband was already close to death. Within weeks, he died. Before she could understand marriage, she became a widow. Soon after, she was pressured into a second marriage within the same family. She had no voice in the decision. Years passed. She remained childless, trapped in a relationship without affection or respect. Her life became a quiet continuation of the suffering she had inherited.

The Inherited Silence: Three generations, different lives, the same pain. This is not the story of one village or one family. It is the story of many women whose suffering remains hidden behind closed doors and unspoken rules. This story is told so that silence does not win. So that pain is acknowledged. And so that, one day, the cycle may finally be broken.

Noorzia Hashemi is a student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Ledina Sheqi.

Learning a New Culture & Language

I'm Marc Helene Vernal; I'm from Haiti. I was born December 1, 1973. I came to the U.S.A. in December 2023; this was almost two years ago. For the first six months, I didn't feel good at all. I missed my country and my friends. I cried all day. I wanted to come back to my country because everything was different in the U.S.A. Rules and culture are not the same in my country. It is difficult for me to pay bills every month because I didn't work for six months.

One day someone asked me if I understood and spoke English; I said no. She said, "I got a job for you if you understand when the patients talk with you." It was my first job. I wasn't coming to FTC yet at that time. I was thankful to God that I got the job. Now I'm always working at a job doing patient care.

I hope to soon speak more English and understand more because I'm at FTC. I have a good teacher. I'll have to work more. I have a lot of things to do. I want to change my life after a few years. I hope to visit another country in the future.

Marc Helene Vernal is a student at Flagler Technical College. His teacher is Francesca Mullinax.

Seattle

The first time I met this girl, we only exchanged greetings. I was so impressed that I said to myself, “I have to find a way to get to know her even better. But how can I approach her if my English isn’t that good? Will she understand me?” Fear ran through my head because I was afraid she wouldn’t understand me. Although I attended English classes at the adult education center every week, I still didn’t feel confident enough to speak fluently with a native speaker.

Many ideas ran through my head about how to approach her, but the fear was still there. However, I was determined to talk to her. Around that time, I had seen an advertisement for a theater company that would be performing very soon, and I said to myself, “This is my chance.” Almost two months had passed since we met when I finally found the perfect opportunity to talk to her alone.

I approached her and said with a smile, “Hi, I would like to invite you to the theater this weekend. Would you like to go?” From the look on her face, it was clear that she didn’t understand. She looked at me seriously and said, “Seattle? Are you inviting me to Seattle?” It was as if she were thinking, “No, that can’t be what he meant.”

At that moment, all I could think was: “All the time I spent practicing my pronunciation of the word ‘theater’ was destroyed in a second.” “No, no,” I quickly said. “It is to the theater that I want to invite you.” The expression on her face still hadn’t changed. I took out my phone and showed her the advertisement, and she started laughing. “You mean the theater!” she said. I didn’t dare say the word again. That show was just the beginning, and Seattle is waiting for our next adventure together.

Elain Hernandez Lee is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Their teacher is Inguna Ozols.

Moving Forward

Everything began to change in December 2020. At that time, I was living comfortably with my family. I am the youngest of three children, and we lived a peaceful and happy life until my

father fell ill. At first, his condition did not seem alarming. He was still able to work, drive, and live a normal life. We believed he was recovering.

That belief was shattered on the night of December 29th. His fever suddenly spiked in the middle of the night, and despite the insecurity in the country, we rushed him to the nearest clinic. The next day, we were told that he had not survived. The news was devastating. Our family was in shock, struggling to understand how life could change so suddenly.

At the time, my older sister was in her final term at university, my younger sister had just finished high school, and I was in my first year of medical school. I was studying remotely while waiting for my visa, which had been delayed because of the coronavirus pandemic. I was full of hope and excited about continuing my studies abroad. Overnight, those dreams felt impossible. My mother worked as a laboratory technician, but her salary alone could not support our family or cover the cost of my education as a foreign student. I was forced to put my studies on hold.

Not long after, another tragedy struck. My younger sister became seriously ill. This was the darkest period of my life. We moved back and forth between the hospital and home, clinging to hope. One week, she could talk to us; the next, she was in a coma. We cared for her constantly, praying and believing she would recover. I played music for her—especially songs by Dadju, which I knew she loved—hoping she could still hear me.

On Friday, October 7th, I told her we would see each other the next day. That night, around 4 a.m., she passed away. I did not want to believe it. The pain was overwhelming, but I had no choice but to accept the truth.

After her death, life became uncertain. We moved to the Dominican Republic, then a year later to Mexico, and finally, I arrived in the United States. This journey was not what I had imagined, but I am learning to adapt. I am taking classes, building a Shopify business, and learning new skills. Though shaped by loss, my story is also one of resilience, survival, and the determination to keep moving forward.

Anaika Hores attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Turning Adversity into Purpose

My life changed in 2001 when my father passed away. I was sixteen and had just started university in my hometown in Venezuela. Accepting his loss was one of the hardest things I have ever faced. Still, I knew I had to keep moving forward, both for myself and for my mother, who had never worked outside the home and was just as heartbroken.

During that uncertain time, I decided I would not give up. I started working while studying computer engineering, and I learned that perseverance and education were my best tools for building a better future. Those years showed me that strength means moving forward even when you are afraid.

As time went on, I continued to advance academically, completing a postgraduate degree in telematics in 2011, followed by a doctorate in science, with a specialization in management, in 2018. Each achievement meant more than a title—it was a tribute to my father’s memory and proof that dreams can survive even in the most difficult times. Through every challenge, I learned that progress is not always fast or easy, but it is always possible when driven by purpose and faith.

Nevertheless, Venezuela’s social and economic situation worsened until it became impossible to stay. Therefore, in 2019, I made the decision to relocate to Chile, where I had to start again from scratch. There, I found a country full of opportunities and people who believed in my potential. It was then that I discovered my passion for helping other women find their place in technology.

I joined AWS Girls Chile, first as a volunteer and later as a leader, a role I have proudly held since 2022. Through this initiative, I have promoted learning, inclusion, and community among women in tech, creating safe and supportive spaces where they can explore their interests, gain confidence, and grow professionally. These experiences taught me that leadership is not about titles—it is about serving, uplifting others, and opening doors that once seemed closed.

After six years in Chile, I decided to take another step forward—this time toward the United States—through an EB2-NIW application based on my project, “Facilitate the Inclusion of

Women in the World of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT).” My goal is to continue developing programs that encourage female participation in technology, contributing to diversity, equity, and innovation across communities.

Above all, this story is a reflection of how education can transform lives, open borders, and turn adversity into purpose. Learning English and adapting to a new culture has become another chapter of growth—one that reminds me that it is never too late to learn, rebuild, and inspire others. Ultimately, every challenge has shaped who I am today: a woman who believes that perseverance, compassion, and knowledge can truly change the world.

Odina A. Jacobs, originally from Venezuela, is enrolled in the ESOL English Program at Miami Dade College. She holds a Ph.D. in science and leads AWS Girls Chile, supporting women’s participation and growth in technology.

My Life in the United States

My name is Xixi Jiao. I come from a small town in China, and I have been in the United States for a long time. I study in the Adult Education ESOL Level 5 program at Miami Dade College, and my professor is Ms. Whu. She is extremely responsible and patient. I will always remember that in January of this year, she came to wish my friend and me a Happy Lunar New Year. I felt excited the entire day because, being in a different country, her kindness and warmth meant so much to me.

In reality, I am not a greatly confident person. I often worry that I cannot do things well, and sometimes I feel that my age is a problem. I think I am too old to remember a lot of English. However, my professor gives me confidence and courage. Many times, I thought about giving up, but I continued because of her encouragement. Now, every day, one of the most interesting and enjoyable parts of my life is going to school and learning new things. I hope to become a doctor in the future. This has been my dream since childhood. I have always believed that doctors are great and selfless people.

Last year, I had a major surgery. When the doctor first told

me the news, I could not believe it. He explained that the MRI showed something in my brain that was causing headaches and nausea. I was very scared. I even made the foolish decision to refuse surgery and go home because I always want to go home when I feel afraid. At the last moment, the surgeon came to speak with me. We had a short conversation, and he patiently explained the cause of my illness and how the surgery would help. He also told me that he had visited my home country. At that moment, I felt his compassion and selflessness. Because of him, I held onto my dream of becoming a doctor.

I want to be like him. I want to help people who are scared, just like I was. I want to help them make the right decisions for their health and to improve the quality of their lives. I want to be someone who brings hope.

I would like to share this with everyone: do not worry about your age, and do not worry about what others think. Hold on to your dreams and work hard for them. Your dream will come true with determination. You will succeed in the future. Believe that you can always find light along the way.

Xixi Jiao is a GED student at Miami Dade College-Kendall. Her ESOL instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

A Better Tomorrow

My name is Denys Kachmar, and I was born and raised in Ukraine. My life changed completely when the full-scale invasion began. My family and I were forced to make one of the hardest decisions of our lives—to leave our home and move to the United States. At that moment, we did not know what awaited us. Everything familiar was left behind, and uncertainty lay ahead.

Arriving in the United States was overwhelming at first. Everything felt different: the language, the culture, and the way people lived. However, from the very beginning, we experienced kindness and support from those around us. People were patient, welcoming, and willing to help. Slowly, fear turned into hope, and confusion turned into motivation.

During our time in the United States, my family and I traveled

whenever we had the opportunity. We visited different states, explored new cities, and admired the beautiful landscapes. Each place showed me a new side of America and helped me better understand this country's culture and values. Traveling became more than sightseeing; it became a way to heal, to learn, and to feel connected to our new home.

This journey taught me many important lessons. I learned how to adapt to new situations, overcome challenges, and stay strong even when life feels uncertain. Starting over in a new country was not easy, but it helped me become more independent and confident. I also learned to appreciate things I once took for granted, such as safety, stability, and opportunity.

Although I will always carry Ukraine in my heart, I am deeply grateful for the chance to build a future in the United States. This experience changed me as a person and helped shape who I am today. It taught me that even in the most difficult moments, hope, courage, and family can guide us forward. My story is not just about moving to a new country; it is about growth, resilience, and believing in a better tomorrow.

Denys Kachmar attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Lifelong Journey of Music

Music has always been at the heart of my life. Coming from a musical family, my husband, my eldest daughter, and I each hold a bachelor's degree in music. I play the piano, and both of our daughters studied at a music school. For many years, I have dedicated myself to mastering my instrument, striving for excellence and expression.

I enjoy performing works by great composers such as Bach, Beethoven, Mozart, Chopin, and Tchaikovsky, while also appreciating the creativity of new composers. Music is not only my profession but also my passion and a way to express deep reverence and worship to my Lord. Through music, one can convey profound feelings and admiration.

Teaching music has been an important part of my journey.

Working with children and young people is both rewarding and challenging. A music teacher must stay inspired, explore innovative pedagogical methods, and find ways to awaken a love for music in students. Captivating their interest is essential to nurturing their growth.

Music enriches life. It brings joy to both the performer and the listener. This calling fills me with passion and gives me the opportunity to inspire others. For me, music is more than sound—it is a source of beauty, faith, and connection.

Svetlana Khlebova is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Mirela Dimo.

My Inspiration Is Traveling

Traveling is my greatest source of inspiration. Every time I visit a new place, I feel like I'm opening another chapter in the book of my life. I meet new people, learn about their cultures, and see how differently people live around the world. These experiences make me realize how big and beautiful the world is and how much there is still to discover.

My first solo trip was to Italy when I was about twenty years old. That journey changed my life. I was amazed by the beauty of the country with its rich culture, delicious food, and incredibly friendly people. After that, I visited several other countries, and each one impressed me in its own way. For example, Turkey surprised me with its breathtaking nature, and Dubai amazed me with its unique traditions and modern cities full of life. Now my dream is to visit Japan, Australia, and Argentina. I want to try real sushi, see kangaroos, and dance tango in the birthplace of this dance.

Traveling shows me that the world is full of possibilities, and it inspires me never to be afraid of trying something new. It reminds me that life is not meant to be lived in one place - it's meant to be explored, experienced, and enjoyed.

Now my life turned out so that I live in the United States. I see it as another important step in my life. My friend recently told me that I am a person of action, and I truly feel that way. I see

this stage of my life as a huge field of opportunities for me, and I have big plans. I want to get an education that is valued all over the world. I want to validate my medical degree so that no matter how my life turns out or where I end up, I can always have the opportunity to get a good and respected job. To reach this goal, I need to have good English knowledge. For that reason, now I'm studying at FTC, and I'm working on my English skills every day.

I believe that every new place brings new energy, new lessons, and new dreams. Every journey helps me grow, and I know that as long as I keep exploring, I will continue to discover new sides of myself and the world around me.

Iuliia Korostelkina is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Travis Thomas.

Magic of Reading

Since childhood, I have loved reading books, especially historical novels. They have always had the power to transport me through time and space, allowing me to live alongside the characters in other countries and distant centuries. Each book opens a new world, full of emotions, discoveries, and lessons about life.

Works like *Jane Eyre* immersed me in the world of 19th-century England, helping me feel the struggles and dreams of people of that era. *Gone with the Wind* revealed the dramatic events of the American Civil War and the strength of the human spirit in times of hardship.

Stendhal's *The Red and the Black* showed me the complex relationship between faith, ambition, and society in 19th-century France. Through its characters, I began to understand how religion and secular life can intertwine and influence human destiny. Yet the novel that left the deepest impression on me is *The Master and Margarita* by Mikhail Bulgakov. This masterpiece intertwines centuries, fates, and elements of mysticism, creating a story that touches both the mind and the soul. Every time I reread it, I discover new meanings, hidden symbols, and reflections on love, faith, and freedom.

What unites all these novels is love—love in its many forms:

romantic, spiritual, and universal. It is love that gives meaning to human existence and connects people across time and culture.

There are countless books I could mention and even more waiting to be read. As I continue improving my English, I dream of reading English-language writers in the original. This will allow me to experience their works more deeply and to understand their thoughts and emotions exactly as they intended.

Yevheniia Kulkarni is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Francesca Mullinax.

What Inspires Me

Inspiration plays a very important role in my life. For me, the biggest source of inspiration is my professional work. I have been working as a fashion stylist for five years, and this creative job truly gives me energy and motivation every day.

I love learning new things about fashion trends, fabrics, colors, and shapes. Fashion is always changing, and this constant movement inspires me to grow and improve my skills. Thanks to my knowledge and experience, I can help people find their personal style and feel comfortable and confident in their clothes. Seeing how happy my clients become is one of the most rewarding parts of my job.

My profession also gives me amazing opportunities to meet new people and take part in fashion projects and runway shows. I enjoy creating style references for clients, doing wardrobe analysis, and helping with shopping sessions. One of the most memorable experiences for me was working as a stylist at the Mrs. Globe beauty pageant in the USA. It was a special moment that showed me how far passion and hard work can take you.

Fashion is not only my job; it is my calling and purpose. I am inspired by beauty, creativity, and self-expression. My family also supports me a lot, giving me strength and confidence to follow my dreams.

In the end, fashion is more than clothes — it is art, individuality, and emotion. This is what inspires me every single day.

Alina Kvartnikova is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Claudio.

A Forgotten Ritual

Throughout the centuries, different cultures have passed their customs and traditions from generation to generation. Some of these traditions survive today, but many others are only in history books or older people's memories, and sometimes they fall into oblivion. The following story takes place in Naxthey, San Juanico, Ixmiquilpan, Estado de Hidalgo, México.

My father's entire family comes from this place and, just like our ancestors, speaks hñahñu, known as Otomí by the Nahuas and the Spanish. Naxthey is one of the last pueblos where the entire population speaks Hñahñu, and until three decades ago, it continued practicing pre-conquest rites. It does not have a name in Spanish, although it could be referred to as the "Peregrinación (d'ethí) del cerro de la muñeca."

One or two families were in charge of preparing the pilgrimage "peregrinación." These families were responsible for hiring musicians and preparing food and drinks. If they did not have enough resources, other families would help through loans or bartering. Each family also had to bring supplies, usually flowers, candles, water, and "cuetes" (fireworks).

On the morning of March 20, the responsible family would begin preparing the food, including tortillas, chicken with mole, rice, beans, and other dishes. During the afternoon and night, a large gathering began. Food was shared among neighbors, musicians played traditional songs, and dancing and laughter were present. This gathering lasted until the early hours of March 21.

On the 21st, the pilgrimage began. The first place they reached was "Cerro Colorado de Naxthey," a mountain located on the outskirts of the community. At its summit there is a "mojonera," a rock mound, and stone seats arranged in a circle. There, everyone began to pray, light beeswax candles, and perform the first rituals. Everything was done in hñahñu. The candles were left at the top of the mountain. Afterwards the journey continued toward the "cerro de la muñeca."

During the walk, the musicians sang and played instruments. The family in charge led the pilgrimage while all carried flowers, food, water, and candles. The journey included visiting certain places and setting off “cuetes.” Upon reaching the top of the hill, “Cerro de la Muñeca,” candles, flowers, and coins were placed inside a small chapel, and everyone prayed by a tree shaped like a cross, a symbol of Catholic faith for good rain and harvests for the coming year. After praying, there was another small celebration.

After the festivities, the neighbors began the journey home, making a final stop near some cave paintings. Upon arriving home, a small “recalentado” (leftover meal) was shared, and usually there was some rainfall.

My father, Hilario Leon Ortiz, told me this story and to not forget this celebration. The last date he remembers participating was 1988, since a big part of the community migrated to other places because of poverty and looking for better opportunities.

Jonathan Leon Zenaido is a student in the STAR program at Clearwater Adult Education Center. His teachers are Mandi Groshans and Keir Borresen.

My New Life in the US

When I first came to the United States, people often said that America offers the opportunity to live the “American Dream.” It is a place where everyone can come to improve their future, which is true; there are many opportunities for a better life here.

As a child in Vietnam, I dreamed of coming to the United States. However, after 10 years, I had almost given up. I had forgotten about my American dream and was focused on working day by day. Nevertheless, that dream came true about 16 years later, though not without many struggles.

When my father and I got our visas, we had just one week to leave Vietnam. We had to pack up and leave our hometown very quickly. I was excited and happy, but also anxious and uncertain because I was not prepared for anything. I did not know how to speak English, how to drive, or even what the culture was like.

The food in the United States was completely different from what I was used to, and almost everything felt unfamiliar.

A couple of weeks after we arrived, my father had to return to Vietnam. This was when I realized I had to learn everything on my own. The first year in the U.S. was difficult and overwhelming. I was afraid of making mistakes, so I spent most of my time either at work or at home. My uncle helped me a lot, but rarely did I go anywhere without my family. I did not even know how to order at restaurants. When I interacted with customers, I simply smiled and did what they wanted, without suggesting anything or engaging much in conversation.

I tried to study English online, but I was too afraid to speak. Although I could understand a little, I could not communicate effectively. Eventually, I got my driver's license, bought a car, and enrolled in English courses at Miami-Dade College, and gradually, my English improved.

The support of my professors has been invaluable. They have helped me immensely, and I genuinely appreciate everything they have taught me. I especially admire how Professor Whu teaches. She often gives us motivational advice, which encourages me to keep going with my studies.

After six months, I began to notice real progress. My customers at work told me that my English had improved significantly. Now, I can communicate confidently with anyone.

Reflecting on my journey, I realize just how important learning English has been. Speaking the language has opened many doors for me; it has allowed me to make new friends from diverse cultures and travel more easily. Most importantly, it has given me the confidence to believe in myself and keep moving forward.

Life can be challenging, but it is crucial never to give up. Step by step, even the smallest progress adds up, and success will come.

Ten Xieu Lien (Tennie) is an artistic nail technician who loves to socialize and practice her English. She has been in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 class at Miami Dade College, Kendall.

Have Faith, Work Hard, and Carry a BIG Notebook

My hands felt cold and clammy and my stomach felt tight and achy. I had been too nervous to eat before we left. Moises and I prayed before getting out of the car.

When we walked into the USCIS building, we saw the security guards. I remembered all the rumors I had heard from friends. I thought I would be sent home if I didn't speak English perfectly or if I didn't have enough photos of my son and me together.

First, we had to go through a metal detector. The security guard said, "Put your belt and boots in the tray."

I said, "What?" I had forgotten the English word for boots. Moises translated the directions for me. Once I passed through the metal detector, the guard told me to have a good day in Spanish! I relaxed 80%.

In the waiting room, Moises sat in the sunshine near a window. I sat across the room from the sun. I looked around and saw a sign that said if your marriage is fraudulent, you are going to jail. I also saw security cameras. My stress level rose again. Moises and I had to speak loudly to talk. I thought if the cameras were on, they would think this man doesn't love his mom. "Come here!" I whispered loudly.

"Don't talk to me like that; I still have time to call ICE. Ha! Ha! Ha!" Moises joked. A few minutes later, Moises came and sat beside me. He showed me things on his phone to distract me.

When the USCIS officer called us, Moises and I immediately got up to follow her. Let me tell you, when she saw my BIG, super-organized, beautifully decorated notebook, her eyes nearly popped out of their sockets. My son looked at me and smiled. He was thinking, "This lady isn't going to ask my mom anything! She wants to get out of here by 4:00 p.m. Ha! Ha! Ha!" (It was only 8:30 a.m.)

We walked into her office and heard Christian music playing. I felt relaxed again.

The interview only lasted about fifteen minutes. She request-

ed only two documents: my birth certificate and my son's birth certificate. Then she asked me around 12 questions that I knew because I had answered them in my applications. Then the officer said, "Ok."

Moises asked, "Is she approved?"
"Yes, of course!" She said.

We walked out of the office. I felt grateful to my Lord. I felt joyful. I was victorious. I hugged my son and gave him kisses and then more kisses.

Marilhet Lopez is from Venezuela, studying at Literacy for Adults in Brevard with teacher Donna Burris. She values her faith in the Lord and her family. She is the proud mother of Moises and a new grandma! She sought asylum to escape usurper Nicolas Maduro's government; she credits her strong faith with giving her the courage to come to the United States to protect her son.

Yes, I Can

I am a young woman with a medical degree, which I earned in June 2021 in the Dominican Republic. A few months later, I moved to Ecuador with the goal of living and working there. I took the medical exam and passed, but the city was very cold, and I could not stay due to health issues.

In 2023, I came to the United States to advance my career and contribute to healthcare. I am ready to use my skills, abilities, and passion to help people who need our care and support.

Although the process may seem complicated because I am still learning how and where to start, I remain focused on my goals. Sometimes I consider taking courses in my field to strengthen my knowledge and improve my job prospects, especially since finding a job has been challenging. Even so, I am confident and positive about the future. I know what I want in life, and I believe that with determination and persistence, I can achieve it.

Johanne Lorane attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Great Heartache

In life, there are many things you don't expect, and when they happen, they leave a lasting impression. It is important to stay positive and avoid negative thoughts because you never know what tomorrow will bring. It is with deep sorrow that I share a true story that has profoundly marked my life.

On Tuesday, April 12, 2023, my family and I were sitting in our yard, chatting, joking, and enjoying time together. Suddenly, men with guns entered our yard. They shot, kidnapped people, and set fire to our house and our parked car.

For several days, we did not hear from those who had been kidnapped. Then, one afternoon, we received a phone call from them. We wanted to feel relief, but it was not complete. They told us they were being mistreated—they were not eating properly, sleeping well, or able to bathe—and that caused us immense worry and sadness.

The kidnappers also called to demand money to release them. They were not seeking justice or fairness; they only wanted a large ransom. This event left a deep scar on our lives. It is one of the most tragic experiences we have endured, and April 12, 2023, is a date we will never forget.

Guvens Louis attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Personal Story

My name is Eliezer Lucien, and I am from Haiti. I had six children: four boys and two girls. Since my oldest son passed away, I now have three boys and two girls. I live in Riviera Beach. In 2001, my wife became very ill with cancer. The doctor sent us to Santiago (Chile) so she could receive treatment.

She passed away after twenty-two days. When her mother heard the news, she also passed away that very same day. It was a tragedy; my wife and her mother died on the same day. This was a difficult time for me and my family. I went back to Haiti for the funeral, and then I moved to the United States by myself. Af-

ter four years, my children were able to join me in this country.

My children went to school here and graduated from college and university. Two are nurses, and my firstborn received a degree in administration, but he struggled with kidney problems. He got married and had one child. My other son works for American Airlines. I am a pastor in a church here called Brother Church Haitian. When I preach the Word of the Lord, my son translates for me. Everyone is happy when I preach; they all shout, 'Amen, Amen!'

There are currently 45 people in my congregation: 15 women, 10 men, 13 children, and 7 young girls. I personally lead the Bible study for them every Tuesday night, and every Sunday we have a big service for everyone. After the service, we all share a meal together. I work as a crossing guard in Riviera Beach. I am also attending night school to improve my English. I feel truly blessed by God.

My name is Eliezer M. Lucien; I am 80 years old. I am from Haiti, and I attend the Palm Beach Gardens Adult Ed school.

The Whispers from My Heart

I am from Haiti, and I would like to share my personal story. On March 1, 2023, my family and I were kidnapped by unidentified individuals. As a result, we were forced to leave our home and take refuge in Bon Repos. Due to ongoing insecurity, I lost three years of schooling. Life for my family and me became extremely difficult, as insecurity continued to worsen across the country. Each day, we lived in fear.

When we attempted to return to school, our plans were once again interrupted. Armed groups attacked the area where we had sought refuge, forcing us to flee to another location to protect our lives. We were constantly moving, searching for safety, but no place felt secure. Eventually, when the opportunity arose, we made the difficult decision to leave the country.

Living in Haiti under these conditions was not easy for my family or me. We had no safe place to stay and could not return to our original home after everything we had experienced. De-

spite all of this, I still love my country. I believe that the suffering of the people is not caused by the land itself but by the failures of those in power.

Naika Marc attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Between Life and Death

I fainted. It was a Thursday morning in May 2023. I went to the bathroom, and upon coming out, a sudden weakness came over me. I told my sister, who luckily was in the room, “I feel dizzy.” She took me in her arms, and I leaned against her chest. That was my last memory. But not hers. She later told me that for a moment she thought she was losing me, seeing me limp in her arms with a blank stare. Fear took hold of her, and who wouldn’t feel that? I woke up to her desperate screams. It was as if I had been asleep for ten seconds; I still hadn’t realized I had fainted.

Let me take you back for a moment. It had been a week since I had my little one after an induced labor that ended in a cesarean section. I remember telling the doctor that it no longer mattered whether it was natural or a C-section; after hours of trying to dilate and achieving almost nothing, I just wanted to meet my daughter. What I remember most from the surgery was my colossal fear hiding behind my husband’s words of consolation. And then came my first look at Alice. Her tiny lower lip was tucked beneath the other, her eyes closed, her face resting peacefully amid the hospital blankets. I could not help but kiss her. Those first days felt almost unreal, as if nothing else mattered: no worries, no thoughts of what was next, just surrendering to the moment and learning to be a mom. Who would have guessed that my first experience as a mother would pass through such a dark and blurry episode as the one I am about to tell you?

After I regained consciousness, we went straight to the hospital. “Go home, rest, and take iron; you have anemia,” said the gynecologist who had performed my C-section, whom we met by chance there. I could barely process his words. My body was still healing, my mind still adapting. Unsatisfied, my family urged me to go to the emergency room. After hours of tests, they were about to discharge me when, as if my body had overheard, I be-

gan to shake uncontrollably. Not once, but twice. It was enough for the doctor to say, “I am going to admit you.”

Further tests revealed two large pieces of placenta still inside me, enough to have ended my life if I had gone home. I longed to hold my baby, my breasts full of milk, but was kept away by a doctor’s negligence. A week passed; my milk dried up, and my body ached through two painful curettages. You never expect your first childbirth to end like this.

Yet through it all, I saw God’s hand protecting, sustaining, and strengthening me. I lost much, but I gained more. I gained my daughter, my family’s love, and my renewed faith. I learned, I grew, and I forgave. In the end, I won.

Adriana Marchan Hernández. A 24-year-old Venezuelan. ESOL student committed to learning English and advancing academically.

My Wish

My name is Laura Martinez, and I am from Cuba. One of my greatest wishes is to explore the world and immerse myself in different cultures and traditions. In particular, I am fascinated by Egypt and its ancient history, especially the remarkable constructions like the pyramids. I also dream of visiting places where it snows so I can experience snow for the first time. Additionally, I would love to learn how to dance tango, connecting with Argentine culture and its rich traditions.

It is very important for me to learn English, and I am very grateful to my English teacher, Francesca Mullinax, at Flagler Technical College, who has been helping me improve my skills tremendously.

I have already started fulfilling my dreams. I have been able to visit Los Angeles, known for its multicultural atmosphere, and Las Vegas, the entertainment capital of the world. My next destination is New York, the Big Apple, the city that never sleeps. I am very grateful for the opportunities that this country has given me to grow and fulfill my dreams.

Laura Martinez is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Francesca Mullinax.

Life as a Roller Coaster

Life is not always simple or predictable. For many people, it does not follow a straight path, and it does not always turn out the way we expect. When life changes, we must learn how to adjust and make important decisions.

In this essay, I share part of my life story to explain how change and responsibility affect adulthood.

I was raised in a traditional family with strong beliefs about marriage and family life. Like many young women, I believed I would marry my first love and live happily ever after. This idea came from my upbringing and from society. However, real life is often very different from stories and dreams.

I got married at 26 years old and became a mother of two children. At that time, my life seemed stable. I was married, working at a bank, and raising two beautiful children. From the outside, everything looked fine, but stability does not always mean security.

The economic situation in my country made life difficult for my family. My husband worked as an architect, but there were not enough job opportunities. Because of this, he received a job offer in Puerto Rico and suggested that we move there.

This situation made me think about my own goals. Did I have the choice to say no? Should I stay and continue working toward my career goals, or should I focus on my family's financial needs? At 30 years old, with two young children aged two and four, these were not easy questions.

Life taught me that it can be like a roller coaster, full of changes and challenges. Learning to adapt and make responsible decisions is an important part of growing as an adult.

Today, my life is very different from what I expected. I am 52 years old, I live in another country, and I am single. Even though my journey has been difficult, it has helped me grow and become stronger. Starting over at this stage of my life has shown me that it is never too late to learn or to reach new goals. Now, I am focused on my future and on achieving my own dreams.

Karen Mejia is a student at Miami Dade College ESOL-6: Advanced. Their teacher is Miguel Balerdi Dubrocq.

Personal Story

My name is Andreina Miller. I am from Venezuela, but I currently live in Palm Beach Gardens. I am married, and we have two dogs. I have one sister who lives in Chicago with my mother. I work as an assistant for a construction company, but before moving to the USA, I lived in Peru for eight years, where I worked as a systems engineer.

In my free time, I love going to the beach with my husband. My favorite foods are ceviche and cachapas, and my favorite soda is Inka Kola. When I first arrived in the United States, I worked in a factory. While it was a great experience, I only spoke Spanish with my coworkers. Now, my goal is to learn English so I can return to my professional career field.

I met my husband in 2023, and for our first date, we went to a sushi restaurant. We were married on December 14, 2024, at Christ Fellowship Trinity Church. Now, my husband and I plan to start a family. We want to buy a new house and hope to achieve great success in life. The USA is a wonderful country with many opportunities, and I am excited about our future here.

Andreina Miller is from Venezuela. She is married, and lives in Palm Beach Gardens. She is a student at Palm Beach Gardens Adult Ed with teacher Adriana Pabon.

Goodbye Key West

I am Salvadoran and 37 years old. I have been married for eight years, and my husband and I have a 7-year-old daughter. We arrived in the United States in March 2024 to serve a two-year military mission. Now, our time in Key West has come to an end, and it is time to say goodbye.

I am filled with gratitude to God and to life for allowing us to experience so many memorable moments in this wonderful

place. I take with me beautiful family memories, the opportunity to explore new parts of the United States, friendships with people from different countries, and the chance to enjoy their delicious traditional foods.

One of the things I will appreciate most is having learned English—not perfectly, but much better than when I arrived. I know this skill opens doors anywhere in the world, so I am committed to practicing and continuing to improve my speaking abilities. I am grateful for all I have accomplished so far.

At this moment, I feel mixed emotions. Key West gave me the gift of spending more time with my husband and daughter than we could in El Salvador, and I will miss that dearly. At the same time, I am overjoyed to return home to see my mother and siblings again.

I know life brings wonderful moments, and this experience in Key West was certainly one of them. I depart with great memories and positive energy, ready to continue living and creating new memories with my whole family. Thank you, Key West.

Marcela Miranda attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Into the Light

I had been trapped in darkness for years with no light to help me see anything good about myself or for my future.

I hid in this darkness. No one knew the real me. I kept hiding my secret—that I couldn't read. I tried to fake it and adapt in other ways. I lived with the shame of not knowing how to read throughout school.

I went through elementary school feeling like I wasn't getting it and no one was there to help me. I felt down, lonely, and depressed—stuck in darkness and not being able to step out.

I had been a people person, but I let the world change me. By about 5th grade I put on a disguise in order to fit in. I became tough and learned how to fight.

I was pushed through school year after year to the next grade. I was in a special ed classroom, but that didn't help. I didn't get any individual help, just kept being passed through the system. I was given endless worksheets. I would write things down but never know what they meant. I felt worthless and kept looking for other ways to adapt and fit in.

Later, after I graduated, I had a tutor but was misused, abused, and still trapped in the dark. The tutor seemed to always need me to do things for her: give her rides, clean, etc. That wasn't right.

I had been trapped in darkness for so long that I was scared to see the light, scared to step out into light. But things started to get brighter for me when I found Learn to Read. When I started, I was very nervous, but this place has been a light for me.

My life became brighter. I gained confidence. My brighter life got me to church. I got a new and better job. I was better as a person. I joined the outreach ministry at my church and go out to help feed and clothe others. Now I know I am somebody. I have goals and opportunities. Age can't stop me. I'm not left behind.

I had felt humiliated and frustrated, like I had been robbed. The school system failed me, but Learn to Read freed me. God placed an angel in front of me, whether you believe it or not. That angel is my teacher. I come to class happy each week. My future is bright.

To reach my goals, I know I need to keep pushing myself to learn to read and write better and better, but I am working in the light and can see what I have to do.

Don't ever stop. Go to Learn to Read. It is your starting point. Keep going. Your future will be bright too!

Eric Mitchell is a student at Learn to Read of St. Johns County. His teacher is Barbara Horton.

Challenges to Improve My English Where Everybody Speaks Spanish

Living in Hialeah, where almost everyone speaks Spanish, can make it really hard to improve my English. Most of the time, people around me use Spanish to communicate, so even when I want to practice, I don't get the chance. At home, at work, and even with friends, everyone speaks Spanish.

At my job nobody speaks English, so when an English-speaking customer arrives at the company, the manager sends me to talk with them. I don't feel nervous even if I make a mistake; however, I know I can improve if I keep practicing little by little.

To improve my English, I need to immerse myself by reading and listening to music, podcasts, and shows. I also need to speak daily, focus on expanding my vocabulary, and practice pronunciation by trying to speak like a native speaker. Thinking in English can help me build fluency and confidence in reading, writing, and speaking.

Jason Ernesto Montenegro Madrigal is an ESOL student at the Miami Dade Hialeah Campus (ESOL Advanced – 6). His teacher is Miguel Dubroccq.

Faith

Do you know what faith is? I asked my son, and he told me, "Faith is believing in God." I felt happy because he understands who God is. Sometimes, I wonder what other people think about God, and it saddens me when I encounter those who are indifferent or have no faith because demanding situations such as family issues, health problems, economic struggles, and many other challenges can cause them to lose their faith, or they simply do not know the power of God.

It is my wish to help you understand how great His power is. When you believe in Him, your whole life can change. Faith transforms you; it changes your mind, your heart, and your spirit, making the impossible possible and pleasing the heart of God. The Word of God says that faith is the certainty of what we hope for and the conviction of things not seen. Faith comes by listen-

ing to the Word of God.

Looking around us, we see many people suffering and without knowing where to go or what to do. Their doubts and fears separate them from their faith. Today, I want to tell you that faith gives you strength for each day, making you brave and filling you with hope. Only through faith can you see the hand of God in your life.

God is waiting for you, willing to give you the gift of faith, which is something that will change your life, something you need. He wants you to know that you are not alone. He has been with you from the beginning and will be with you until the end. He desires for you to welcome Him into your life, but for that, He needs your permission. You might ask, "How do I receive that wonderful gift?" It is simple. You just need to have conviction in your heart and the desire for Him to come and live in your life. I am sure that He walks with you every single day.

Today, I want to remind you that without faith, it is impossible to please God. Faith is like a muscle: we need to exercise it little by little. If you want to grow in faith each day, give thanks to God for everything, even if you do not yet see the results. Be grateful for both the good and the bad, because our faith will grow stronger through every situation, whether it is good or challenging.

The Word of God says that faith without works is dead. So, what are you waiting for? Put your faith into practice. Now is the time. This is the moment. Do not let your faith die. You are a brave and strong person. If today you feel weak, I want to remind you that for those who believe, everything is possible. Get up; fight with faith, resist, and persist, and you will see victory in your life.

Maria Isabel Montes studies ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

Big Change - Trust Yourself

There was a moment in my life when everything changed. It was not a single event but a deep decision. Like many others, it is a very challenging time in my life.

Moving to the United States was more than changing countries. I had to leave my family, say goodbye to the people I loved, and face uncertainty with courage. I arrived full of dreams but also with doubts, worries, and the responsibility of rebuilding my life from the beginning. It was very hard. The language, the culture, and the feeling that I was starting late made me question myself many times.

But during this process, I discovered a strength I did not know I had. I learned that starting over is not a weakness but a sign of courage. Going back to school, learning new rules, and asking for help taught me patience and perseverance. Every small success—a class completed, a conversation in English, a day done well—became a personal victory.

These small steps taught me to believe in myself again. I learned that my story is not only about what I lost, but also about what I am building every day. Today, I feel stronger, more aware, and more confident. I share my story to inspire others who are facing change, migration, or new beginnings. It is always possible to start over. Trust yourself.

Yolofy Montilla attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Friendships in Adulthood

Making new friends when you are an adult and you emigrate from your country can be a real challenge because you don't have the spontaneous and playful friends of childhood, the adventure companions of adolescence, or the special friends from college who finished growing up with you, sharing like family, but who are no longer around, so you find yourself surrounded by people from different cultures, languages, and ways of interacting, which reminds you of the importance of friendship, the sense of belonging, and the support needed to adapt to your new life.

Today, social media and technology help maintain communication with those who stay behind and also people you meet. However, it depends on genuine personal interest, shared values, quality time, trust, and empathy to sustain a friendship over time. The phrases “I don't have time” and “one of these days”

without commitment can weaken established relationships and those that are yet to come.

Throughout life, friends provide important emotional support during times of joy and celebration, during times of difficulty and problem-solving with less stress, and greater happiness. The children and the elderly appreciate this much.

As adults, showing the strength to find common interests with several people and places, for example, community activities, church, libraries, English classes, playing sports, book clubs, cooking, volunteering, going to the movies, sharing a coffee, etc., can give you a meaning and a sense of belonging in a new country.

Friendship in adulthood is a conscious choice that provides companionship as we get older; supports mental health, peace, and learning; and experiences aligned with our values and the desire for connection, allowing us to enjoy the reciprocal affection of a friend.

Mayrena Mora is a student at Adult Literacy League. Her teacher is Barbara Huddleston.

A Decision that Changed My Destiny

This is my story of how my father's decision changed my destiny and why I'm in the United States. Let's start from the beginning.

In 1983, in a small village called "El Candado" (Beni, Bolivia), the nights were darker, and the days seemed endless for my father, Adalberto. At only 23 years old, he suffered from severe bone pain to the point where he couldn't walk or move at all; all he could do was scream in pain and despair.

There was no hospital and no transportation to the nearest town, which was too far away. There was no road, no bicycle, no motorcycle, and much less a car, only a path to walk. My parents didn't have horses for transportation, so it was very difficult to find one.

He suffered so much that he considered taking his own life three times. What was holding him back? The tender gaze of his little daughter Eurania, who sat next to his bed all the time.

One day his friends came to give him some news. They told him, Beto (his nickname), some evangelists had come to the community and were going to preach for three nights and pray for healings. You had to go. (My father couldn't move a muscle to walk.) His friends carried him on a quilt to the place. The first night nothing happened, and the second night nothing happened either; he was still sick. The third night he attended where the evangelists were preaching and praying for healing, and my father said these words: "God, if you are real, heal me, and I will serve you for the rest of my life." That decision changed my destiny. Why? Because that night my father was completely healed. He got up and walked. Many years later, I, Noira M., was born. I am the fifth daughter of six children.

I saw my father fulfill the promise he made to God to serve him. His actions, his dedication, and his commitment to reflect Jesus through his life changed my destiny. I have been here in this country, the United States of America, as a missionary with my own family for three years, following my parents' example in serving a living God, the God who healed my father and many others.

Noira Mosqueira is an ESOL student at Family Literacy Impact Program, School District of Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Carolyn Deli.

Personal Story

My name is Imelda Munoz. I'm from Mexico, and I was born on May 27, 1977. I grew up in a humble little house with my parents, my brother, and my sister. I was very happy as a child because I used to play with my siblings. When I was fourteen years old, I started working because I needed money for clothes and shoes; I also wanted to help my parents. I worked very hard. When I was eighteen, I came to the United States to earn money for a better house for my parents. Thank God, I did it! My parents live much better now.

Now, I am married and have three boys. I also have two dogs. I love my husband, my boys, and all of my family. I enjoy being at home, but I also like working and cleaning houses. I like my job because I can work at my own pace. It is cool inside the houses, and the people are very good to me. I like to walk with my husband and sometimes with the kids. We go out for dinner on weekends; I love Mexican food, especially guacamole, tortillas, and hot salsa. I also enjoy going to the beach and swimming. I first learned to swim in the river back in my country when I was a child, and I loved it. I am grateful for the life I have today. I will always cherish my memories from Mexico, but I am so happy to be here, surrounded by my family, my dogs, and a future that is as bright as a summer day.

Imelda Munoz is from Mexico and is married with three children. She wants to learn English so she can communicate with other people and be able to help her kids with their schoolwork. She studies at Palm Beach Gardens Adult Ed and her teacher is Adriana Pabon.

My Inspirations

My name is Elizabeth, and I was born in Cuba, a country that is living through a very difficult political and economic situation. Every day, Cuban families face struggles that make it hard to dream of a better future. For us, being in the United States is not only an opportunity; it is a true privilege. Here, I have the chance to grow, to learn, and to create the life that many of us could only imagine before.

Because of this, I wake up every day with pride and with the determination to move forward. I am very proud to be here. I am also proud of my Cuban roots. Even though life has been difficult, I feel happy, and I feel strong enough to face any challenge. The ESOL program at Flagler Technical College is helping me build the skills I need to reach my goals, and every step brings me closer to success.

My greatest inspiration has always been my family. They are the reason I am here. They give me strength, courage, and motivation to keep going even when life feels heavy. I also carry in my heart the memory of my father, who passed away but left me the words I live by: “You must become a successful person.”

Every day I work to honor him, my family, and the sacrifices that brought me to this place.

Since I left my country, I have worked in different jobs to support myself and to move forward. Even though I have not been working in the health field yet, I carry that dream with me every day. In Cuba, I studied medicine for six years. If God allows me, I will return to the health field here in the United States. I know it will take preparation, effort, and patience, but I believe it is possible.

Even though my routine can sometimes be exhausting, I always try to make time for myself by going to the gym. I believe that taking care of our health is essential, not only for the body but also for the mind. Exercise strengthens my confidence, my self-esteem, and my inner peace. It reminds me that if I can be disciplined in small things, I can also be disciplined in the bigger goals of life.

Above all things, my faith in God is what guides me. I believe that He is the only one who truly rules and the only one we can trust to carry out our plans. His will is perfect, and He always knows what is best for us. I am a woman of faith who wants to do things right, with gratitude, humility, and strong values.

My main goal is to become as successful as I can be, while never forgetting to remain thankful, humble, and faithful. I want to inspire others, especially those who are struggling, to believe in themselves and in God's plan. No matter where you come from or what you have been through, success is possible if you have faith, work hard, and never stop moving forward. Flagler Technical College has helped me with these things.

Elizabeth Naranjo is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Davlantes.

A Journey to the Unknown

Major life changes often challenge our sense of stability, identity, and purpose. Two years ago, I was living a life that felt meaningful, structured, and fulfilling. I woke up early each day, worked at a job I loved, and followed a schedule that supported

both my personal and professional growth. I interacted with many teenagers who respectfully called me “teacher,” and each afternoon I dedicated myself to planning lessons for the next day. Teaching, advising, and guiding my students brought me deep satisfaction. In the evenings, I exercised and maintained a work–life balance that I valued. Everything felt steady and purposeful—until my fiancé told me it was time for us to take the next step, a step that required moving to another country.

Change is necessary to push us toward new possibilities; growth cannot occur without certain movements and discomforts in life. It was a major decision, but I reminded myself that “nothing good comes easy.” With that in mind, I packed my bags and decided to leave my entire life in Nicaragua behind, starting over with grand expectations for a better future for myself and my sixteen-year-old daughter.

A friend once told me, “I would not be able to do what you are doing today,” and her words made me reflect on the magnitude of my situation. I was facing a completely new world where I had no professional career, no family, and no friends, and where everything felt unfamiliar—even the language.

A journey into the unknown is an act of courage. Not everyone dares to leave behind all that is familiar: the language, the culture, the people, and the routines that shape daily life. When someone chooses such a path, it is not accidental. It is because an inner strength pushes them toward a different and hopeful future. Today, I face two major challenges that I am determined to overcome: speaking English fluently and driving on the expressway. Both goals intimidate me, yet they also motivate me to continue growing and adapting to this new chapter of my life.

In the end, leaving Nicaragua was more than a physical move—it was a transformation of identity and purpose. The challenges I face today have revealed strengths I did not know I possessed and have pushed me to develop resilience, adaptability, and determination. Although the journey has been difficult, it has also opened new opportunities for growth for both me and my daughter. I now understand that stepping into the unknown is not simply an act of bravery; it is an investment in the future. With every obstacle I overcome, I move closer to the life I envision, proving to myself that change, even when uncomfortable,

can lead to profound personal growth and new beginnings.

Karla Obando is a student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her ESOL 5 instructor is Professor Carmen Whu. Karla wants to improve her English to communicate well and have better opportunities in her future.

The Friendship and Love that Sustains our People

In Cuba, I learned that true wealth is not measured in money but in sincere hugs, the coffee we share in the morning, and the laughter that fills the doorsteps at dusk.

Cuban friendship is like the bread that is shared. Even if it's a little, there is always enough for everyone.

Something is for sure: in Cuba, love has its own essence. It's not just about nice words but about caring for others when they are weak, sharing the little things, and looking forward with hope, even when something is missing.

In the same way, in every section, town, or barrio, there are stories of people helping each other without expecting anything in return. Simply because they realize that tomorrow they could be in the same situation or having some kind of struggle.

All these things made me believe that we need to continue believing in the power of love. Also, in the power of respect and solidarity. Because when you express yourself from the heart, you inspire others. And when you inspire, love and friendship multiply.

Express yourself. Inspire others. Give. This is how we continue to grow together, as great Cuban people.

Yunior Oliva Escalona is a student at Flagler Technical College, whose teacher is Claudio.

See a Need, Fill a Need

“Mom, if you don't come and help, the little girl is going to die!” my children ran to me and said. When I woke up on that

beautiful summer day in Florida, I didn't think I would have to save a life. We were in good spirits that morning getting ready for the invite to the beach. Time away from the house was much needed.

Settling in at our destination, the children and I noticed a crowd growing around a small truck. With their curiosity taking over, they ran over to see what was going on. After understanding the situation, they came to me trying to pull me out of my seat, yelling, "Mom, if you don't come and help, the little girl is going to die!" I went over to investigate and found a small, maybe three-year-old, girl sitting in her car seat behind the passenger seat, sweating and fighting to stay awake. The dad, not speaking much English, was doing all he could to get the truck doors open because he had locked the keys inside.

With over thirty or more people standing around, it upset me that no one was doing more than calling 911, being that it was apparent that they wouldn't make it in time. All I could think to do was break one of the windows to the truck. So, I called my child that had the keys to our car and popped open the trunk. I grabbed the only thing I had that would do the job, which was a car jack. With a prayer and three hard hits to the back window of the truck, it broke. The little girl was saved! In all that happened that day, life taught me that living is precious.

Always put life first!

Narita Oliver was born into a military family. Growing up, they moved around a lot, so she didn't understand the importance of an education. Having three wonderful children of her own, it was imperative that they took their education seriously. Now that her children are grown, with their high school diplomas and exploring other avenues of development, she has decided to do the same. That is what led her to the Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida.

The Past Shaped Who I Am Today

This is a story that makes me both sad and reflective. It is about my mother and father. When I was a kid, life seemed sweet. My parents had a good business, school went well, and I had enough to eat. But then, everything changed. After many struggles, my mother and father separated. I was very young,

and despair entered my family.

After their separation, life became difficult. I could no longer eat well, and I had no supervision. I could not go out when I wanted, and I felt alone. I was 11 years old, living with my two siblings, and I did not know where my mother was. My heart was broken, and for 15 years, I did not see her. Eventually, I learned that she had passed away. That news left a bitter pain in my heart that I still feel today.

Despite these hardships, my father stayed by his children. He did not leave us; he took responsibility and guided us. He made sure all of us finished school, and that was one of the greatest gifts he could give. Because of him, I stayed on the right path. I never smoked or used drugs, even though the conditions around me could have led me in the wrong direction. My father is my hero, and I am thankful to God for having him in my life.

Now I am in the United States, and I continue to work hard to accomplish what I could not in Haiti. My suffering has made me stronger and more compassionate. I understand hunger and struggle, and I try to help others whenever I can. The loss of my mother, the challenges I faced, and the love of my father taught me courage, resilience, and the importance of family. It shaped who I am today.

Jeff Orneus attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Family

My name is Andrea Catalina Parra. I am 44 years old and have been married for 10 years to my husband, Javier Ortega. We have two children, who are twins: Juan Ricardo and Silvana, who are 9 years old. We are originally from Bogota, Colombia, before moving to the United States two years ago. We arrived in Miami seeking better job opportunities, and we also want our children to speak English fluently.

My husband, who is an industrial engineer, is currently working with a company where he is responsible for payroll. As for me, I am studying English at Miami-Dade College because I need

to improve my language skills so that I can pursue a master's degree in business administration.

My children are currently in the third grade. They have adapted very well to life in the United States, and I am proud of how resilient they are. However, this life change has not been easy for my husband and me. The most difficult moment for me was when we lost our first children, who were identical twins: Simon and Emmanuel. I gave birth to them prematurely at 25 weeks of pregnancy. After two years of grief, our twins, Juan and Silvana, arrived.

When we first arrived in Miami, the first thing we did was look for a soccer academy for Juan. In Colombia, he trained every day, and on weekends, he participated in tournaments. He was part of an academic and professional soccer program. Juan is passionate about soccer, especially playing as a striker, and he loves scoring goals. He is now playing with the One Football Club Academy and is incredibly happy with his progress.

Silvana, on the other hand, began riding horses at the age of four. She loves horses and had always wanted to compete at an elevated level. However, we had to stop this sport because buying a horse for competitions was too expensive. This was a difficult moment for Silvana, as she had to part with the horses she loved. She then switched to tennis, a sport she quickly fell in love with. Silvana trained every day at a tennis academy in Bogotá. When we moved to Miami, she was accepted into the Orange Ball team at the David Enigma Tennis Academy. She is now competing in various U.S. Tennis Association tournaments.

I feel incredibly proud and blessed by my family. Every day, I wake up with the desire to continue fighting and building beautiful moments with them. I am confident that all the sacrifices we have made have been worth it.

Catalina Parra is an industrial engineer who likes to travel and learn about different cultures, especially eating their typical food. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu in ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall campus.

The Development of SIKADERM: A Journey of Innovation and Healing

I am Alireza Rahimpour, born in 1972 in northern Iran, a region with a humid, rainy climate similar to that of Miami, where I live now. In September 2024, I moved to the United States with my wife to continue my professional and scientific pursuits.

Since childhood, I have been fascinated by nature. Thus, the forests, plants, mountains, and sea of northern Iran inspired a deep curiosity in me. During frequent trips to the countryside, I paid close attention to plants, particularly those used for healing. This early interest in medicinal plants guided my decision to pursue medicine as my profession.

After graduating, I began practicing medicine and treating patients in clinical settings. Over time, I observed that many of my patients suffered from diabetes. One of the most severe complications of this disease is the diabetic foot ulcer, which is a chronic wound that heals slowly and often leads to infection or amputation. Witnessing this condition repeatedly motivated me to search for better, non-invasive treatments that could improve healing outcomes and prevent unnecessary suffering.

My research drew on both scientific knowledge and traditional medicine. I remembered that in Iran turmeric had long been used to relieve pain and treat wounds. Investigating further, I learned that turmeric held a similar role in the traditional medicine of China, India, and Egypt. Modern studies confirmed its anti-inflammatory and antioxidant properties, which supported its potential effectiveness for wound care.

After years of study and experimentation, I developed an ointment containing turmeric. However, I encountered a critical problem: turmeric molecules are large and poorly absorbed through the skin, limiting their therapeutic effect. To address this, I utilized a nano-turmeric molecule (curcumin), which penetrates the skin more effectively and delivers stronger healing results.

The results were remarkable. I registered the product under the brand name SIKADERM, a diabetic foot cream formulated to

soothe, moisturize, and repair damaged skin. Many patients in Iran and several other countries now use SIKADERM successfully, and numerous individuals have avoided amputation thanks to its healing properties.

Encouraged by these outcomes, I am now committed to producing SIKADERM in the United States. My goal is to collaborate with a qualified manufacturing company and obtain the necessary licenses and approvals to introduce the product to the United States healthcare market.

The story of SIKADERM reflects my lifelong dedication to combining traditional wisdom with modern medical science. It represents not only a personal achievement but also a contribution to improving the lives of diabetic patients worldwide. Through continued innovation and collaboration, I hope to make SIKADERM a trusted global solution for diabetic wound care.

Alireza Rahimpour is a medical doctor from Iran who came to the US in search of better opportunities. His goal is to be able to practice medicine here. He is an ESOL 5 student in Professor Carmen Whu's class at MDC-Kendall.

My Personal Story

I came to the United States from Nicaragua with a small suitcase and a big dream. I left my family, my home, and everything I knew behind. It was not easy. I felt scared, sad, and unsure about the future. But I knew I had to be brave to create a better life for myself and my children.

When I arrived in Florida, I could not speak English well. Simple things like shopping, talking to people, or filling out forms were very hard. Many times I felt embarrassed and wanted to stay quiet. I missed my family every day and cried at night. Still, I told myself that giving up was not an option.

I decided to join adult education programs to learn English and continue my studies. The first weeks were difficult. I did not understand many words, and I was afraid to speak in class. I made mistakes, but my teachers were patient and kind. Little by little, I started to improve. Every new word I learned gave me

hope.

While studying, I also worked to support myself. Some days I felt very tired, but I remembered why I started. I wanted to be a good example for my children. I wanted them to see that their mother was strong and never stopped trying.

Education changed my life. It helped me believe in myself again. I learned not only English, but also discipline, responsibility, and confidence. Now I continue studying English and learning about business and entrepreneurship.

My journey has had many challenges, but it has also been full of growth. I am proud of how far I have come and thankful for the teachers and programs in Florida that gave me this opportunity.

My story is about sacrifice, love for family, and hope. I believe education opens doors and creates new beginnings.

María José Sánchez Mejía is an adult student from Nicaragua who currently lives in Florida. She is enrolled in Miami Dade College ESOL studying English and subjects related to business and entrepreneurship with teacher Miguel Balerdi. Her journey reflects perseverance, love for family, and a strong desire to build a better future through education.

Being an Artist as a Way of Life

Lately, I have realized that being an artist is not only about standing out or trying to look different. It is not only about creating an image. Many of us grow up with certain stereotypes about artists, but over time, I have learned that an artist is simply a certain type of person — someone who feels deeply and knows how to give form to emotions.

Yes, being an artist is a profession. It requires discipline, practice, and responsibility, and it deserves great respect. However, for me, it is also much more than a job. It is a way of existing, perceiving, and acting in the world. Everything around me can become part of this creative process. I notice light, colors, and textures even in ordinary places. I find beauty in quiet moments.

Small everyday decisions slowly turn into creative choices that shape my life.

My artistic nature shows up not only on canvas. It appears in the way I prepare meals, organize space, and create celebrations for my child. It lives in warm memories, handmade details, carefully chosen colors, and the atmosphere of my home. Creativity often reveals itself through simple, meaningful moments. Every movement and every choice become a chance for me to give form to what I feel inside.

Life can be busy and overwhelming. There are moments when I feel tired, unsure, or afraid. Still, my way of seeing things as an artist never truly disappears. I may try to ignore it for a while, but it always remains. It often seems that a person is either born as an artist or not. This sensitivity—the need to observe, to feel, and to transform emotions into something visible—becomes part of who we are. My art grows from my everyday experiences, and my everyday life becomes richer because I live it with an artist's heart.

Seeing life this way, I have begun to notice how many artists are quietly living around me, in everyday moments, in simple details, and in ourselves.

Maryanush Shahinian is a student at Jacksonville Public Library's Center for Adult Learning. Their teacher is Naommi Chase.

Land of Grace

Hi everyone, I'm Greilly Simanca, and I'm here to tell you where I come from.

I used to live in a beautiful and magical country called Venezuela with the best food, where all year is summer and the people are really kind and joyful.

One of the things I remember is the food. It is very tasty and organic. For example, the eggs, vegetables, and chickens are considered fresh. They are grown in local farms. The soil is very fertile, with a dark brown color. The desserts are tasty and very good, with natural ingredients.

I also remember the climate. It is tropical (between warm and humid) most parts of the year. You can wear summer clothes like flip flops. Also, you don't have to worry about hurricanes or tornadoes.

The most special thing for me is the people. Because they are helpful and kind. For instance, if you need help with anything, mostly everyone is willing to help. In my opinion, even if they don't have money, they are happy with the little things they have. In every house that you visit, they will offer you bread, coffee, and a nice conversation.

In summary, my country is a magical mix of beautiful people, nice climate, and delicious foods. They're ingredients that you will hardly find anywhere.

Greilly Simanca is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Claudio.

Delays in Making Decisions

Tchabbal Babo, a village perched on the mountains, is experiencing a peaceful and joyful atmosphere this rainy season, fragrant with the scents of seasonal crops, enlivened by the songs of turtledoves in the cornfields. Horses let loose in the pasture frolic through winding paths created by soil leaching due to runoff and deforestation. Tchabbal Babo, this village of nomadic pastoralists, offers the desolate scene of an isolation that locks it in a gaping obscurity.

Despite the advent of radio, television, and social media, only a few people who have frequented the surrounding urban areas have a perception of the evolution of the world. Moussa was part of this evolved segment of the population. A wealthy man in the village, thanks to his pastoral activities, Moussa had the right to live the sad experience of patrimonial life. Assabé, his beautiful and tender wife, is expecting a first birth that will make Moussa a father. One cold, rainy morning, Assabé began having contractions.

The traditional birth attendant from the village, alerted immediately, rushed to her bedside. The labor lasted a long time, an

hour, then another, then an hour. Time passed, and Assabé grew tired. A decision had to be made. Moussa resolved to take the future mother of his child to the nearest health center. Moussa had his horse brought as quickly as possible.

The journey was long and tiring. Assabé's excruciating pain caused Moussa's body to break out in profuse, icy sweat. The blue boubou he wore revealed his physique as if it were one with his skin. The pain of the contractions plunged Assabé into a coma. The driver stopped at the request of the husband, who had believed his sweetheart was dead. Then a sigh from Assabé renewed hope.

An hour later, Assabé entered the room. The center's only midwife was not at the center. He was summoned. Moussa, driven by fanatical conservatism, refused to have his wife delivered by a man. Time passed, and Assabé's case became increasingly critical. By a stroke of fortuitous circumstances, informed of the situation, Moussa's friend, who was passing through the area, rushed to the hospital. Upon arriving at the clinic, he forced his friend to follow him out of the center and give the delivery nurse a chance to do his job.

After about thirty minutes, a baby's cry pierced the heavy and silent atmosphere that had enveloped the center's corridor, which was almost like a funereal moment. Moussa was informed and returned with a broad smile, hoping to hold the mother and the newborn in his hands. No, by giving birth, Assabé spent her life in death. Moussa, with an innovative sob, did not admit to having lost this beautiful companion who left him an heir, who gave meaning to his life.

Garbe Soule is a student at Family Support Services Network Inc. Their teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

Why I Am Studying English

Since I came to this country, my goal has been to obtain a PE license in my career. What is a PE license? It is a certification that every engineer needs to practice professionally and to be authorized to sign engineering plans in the United States. This certification is granted by each state, which means engineers can

only practice in the state where they are licensed. Once you have your PE license, you will notice many differences, starting with the higher salaries you become eligible for.

If you have a bachelor's degree in engineering from outside of the United States, you can still work as an engineer. However, having a PE license makes a significant difference. To obtain this license, you must complete a process that begins with learning English—not only speaking it fluently but also writing it correctly. This is the main reason why I am enrolled in this class.

Next, you need to pass two challenging exams. The first is the Fundamentals of Engineering (FE) exam, which reviews all the courses you took in your engineering program in your home country. The second is the Principles and Practice of Engineering (PE) exam, which is specific to your area of expertise. For example, in civil engineering, you can take this exam in one of five specialties: Construction, Structural, Transportation, Water and Environmental Resources, or Geotechnical.

Once you have passed these two exams, you can apply to the engineering board in the state where you live. For example, I will apply to the Florida Board of Professional Engineers. You will also need to pass a test on the rules and regulations for practicing engineering in that state. If you pass this test and the board confirms that you have a clean background check, they will send your PE license to your home.

As soon as you receive this certificate, you will notice that your career opportunities change significantly. Salaries often double because you become more attractive to engineering companies. Additionally, you gain the legal authority to sign engineering plans. This is why I am committed to improving my English—first and foremost, to achieve my goal and provide my family with a better future here in the United States.

Jose Tamayo was born in Colombia, where he became an engineer. He and his family moved to the US a year ago searching for better opportunities. His instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

I Left Venezuela, But Venezuela Did Not Leave Me

Choosing between giving my daughters a better future or staying with my parents was one of the hardest decisions of my life. It was not just a trip; it was a bitter goodbye. It tore at my heart, made me tremble, and made my hands sweat, something I rarely do. I avoided eye contact because I did not want to cry and make the farewell even harder. It was also the first time I would be on a plane, so the emotions were overwhelming. Indeed, the goodbye was flooded with tears, long hugs, and a painful silence that words could not express. What weighs most heavily is my mother's stance. Her gaze, trying to stay strong, her voice reassuring me that everything would be fine, even though we both knew the distance would break something inside us, stays with me.

I left because my love for my daughters was stronger than my fear. If anyone was afraid, it was me. I have now lived in this country for 18 years and still do not speak English because I am too embarrassed. I know I should be ashamed of this, but my mother taught me to always tell the truth, even when it is painful. I left Venezuela seeking a better future for my daughters, one where opportunities were not a luxury but a right. We chose the hardest path, hoping they could walk an easier one in the future. Despite knowing this was the right choice, it still hurts.

It hurts not being there for every birthday and not being able to hug my mom. She tried not to make me feel her loneliness. Still, I know every sacrifice has a purpose. Every lonely night, tears and effort were seeds my husband and I planted so our daughters could have a better future. I carry my country with me in every memory, and I carry my mother in my heart, guiding me even now that she is gone. She is in a better place, resting in peace, and we will meet again someday.

Nostalgia is a constant companion but so is hope, which tells me all this pain has meaning. It transforms into a future filled with opportunities and a legacy of love and courage for my daughters. My mother always told me not to lose hope, because hope was my middle name. Now, I hold onto the hope that one day I will speak English and overcome my fear.

My mother was a warrior woman: strong-willed, hardwork-

ing, kind, and full of wisdom. Born in the Venezuelan plains, she taught me to appreciate the Earth, our home. Heartfelt appreciation for the Earth begins with understanding that its well-being is directly tied to our own. Protecting it is not just a responsibility; it is a necessity for future generations.

Marynelly Torres is an ESOL 5 student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

From Nicaragua To New Beginnings

I grew up in a family full of women. My mother worked tirelessly every day to support me and my sisters. Thanks to her hard work and God's grace, we never lacked anything. I love my father dearly, but he moved to the United States when I was just a baby. He remarried, and we lost communication for some time. Later, he contacted me, and we began a long-distance relationship.

As time passed, I became increasingly interested in becoming a flight attendant, but there are no schools offering this training in Nicaragua. So, I decided to study English instead. Then one day, a friend of my mother's visited us and asked if I was interested in pursuing a career. At first, I thought it was a joke, but I said, "Why not?" She called someone while asking me if I would prefer to study human or veterinary medicine. Without much thought, I quickly answered "veterinary medicine." I chose this path for two reasons: the pressure from those around me and my genuine interest in animals.

Despite the doubts others had about my abilities, I proved to myself that I could achieve whatever I set my mind to. Although I stopped studying English, I cherished the knowledge I gained about animals. I studied veterinary medicine for two years and even started working at a veterinary clinic, where I gained valuable experience and made new friends. I also adopted two baby cats during this time.

However, after many years of looking forward to living with my father, I traveled to the U.S. on May 15, 2024, at the age of nineteen. Although I had always dreamed of emigrating, the reality of it was much more frightening. When you have opportu-

nities right in front of you, fear often invades your thoughts, and you question whether you are making the right decision. It is a feeling I would not wish on anyone.

Starting over in a new country has not been easy. I have had to adjust to a new life, a new family, a new culture, new friends, a new language, and a completely different lifestyle. But despite the challenges, I feel that I have accomplished a lot. I am currently working and continuing my English studies, though I still do not know which career path I will pursue. Whether I study here or in another country remains uncertain, but I am confident that dreams are achievable. The experience of having a fresh start is indescribable, and the key to success is believing in yourself and trusting in God.

Now, at 21 years old, I live with my dad, who encourages me every day. I want to end by saying, “Do not give up on your dreams.”

Saying Urbina is a very talented young lady who enjoys her English classes. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall.

A Journey of Perseverance and Hope

I am a dedicated and resilient woman who believes in continuous personal growth. By balancing work, study, and personal goals, I move forward with determination and purpose. My journey includes learning English through the ESL program at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus, where I strengthen my voice and confidence to embrace new opportunities.

Family, learning, and self-improvement are central values in my life. Through challenges and transitions, I remain focused, positive, and grateful, trusting that each experience contributes to my growth. This story reflects my commitment to perseverance, hope, and the belief that it is never too late to build a meaningful future.

Flor Ysaura Velásquez Leon is a native of Venezuela and a student in the English as a Second Language (ESL) program at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus, under the instruction of Professor Ernesto Juan.

Personal Story

My name is Jintana Vidal. I am from Thailand. I'm 55 years old. I have two younger brothers and one older sister and two younger sisters. I am married and I have no children. I have worked at the Canvas company for many years. I love my job because my boss is very good to me.

I came to the United States in June 2026. Until now, I worked at only one company. My plan is to work until I get my retirement money, and then I'll stop working and enjoy my life.

In my dream, I want to travel to another country. I also want to start my own vegetable farm at my house. I love eating vegetables, noodles, and fish. I know how to make noodle soup and Thai food; everything I make is very hot and spicy because I love spicy food!

I am grateful for my life in the United States and the opportunities my job has given me. While I work hard now, I look forward to the day I can retire. Whether I am traveling the world or tending to my spicy vegetable garden at home, I know my future will be full of flavor and happiness.

Jintana Vidal is from Thailand and has been living in the United States for twenty years. They are a student at the Palm Beach Gardens Adult Education School and their teacher is Adriana Pabon..

Our Inheritance

You know that we have two parents, four grandparents, eight great-grandparents, sixteen great-great-grandparents... and so on. And you probably know the names of your parents and grandparents... but what about your great-grandparents? And your great-great-grandparents? It's unlikely, because this information fades over time... it ceases to be important. I believe it's because we're focused on the future and not the past, and we forget where we come from. Until a very important reason arises that motivates us to search for who they were, where they lived, where they died, their struggles, and their achievements.

Six years ago, my nephew called us and asked for information

about our great-grandfather, an Italian who migrated to America at the beginning of the 20th century, fleeing an impoverished Europe, and who settled on the coast of Ecuador. The nephew wanted to initiate a claim to his inheritance rights but needed information, data, documents, and history. Where to begin? Who could tell us what happened three generations ago? Although my great-grandfather made his home there, his daughter, our grandmother, moved far away, 102 miles to the south, and her descendants never knew the place where her father lived and where she and her eight siblings were born. And that's how, unintentionally, we become disconnected from our ancestors, from our identity, because we move about without leaving records, without preserving memories.

So, we got to work. We had to find that information. First, we reached out to our oldest relatives, who told us an incredible story of sacrifice, effort, and perseverance. Secondly, we called distant cousins we had never spoken to. Because they were also interested, we got to reconstruct the family history together.

Besides, we found an ancestor's website online where we created our family tree. And more surprises followed: The grandchildren and great-grandchildren of our great-great-aunts and uncles found us and contacted us. And we met the rest of our family around the world.

The best part of this experience is that as you get to know your ancestors and relatives, you feel connected to them in many ways, strengthening your sense of belonging. It's the true meaning of the word "family," and we've learned that it's the most valuable legacy we've inherited.

Today, we are migrants. We have come to this wonderful country with our children to start a new life. Now that we know the story of our great-grandfather arriving in a new, different country with other customs, we identify with him and are not afraid of the challenge. From his story, we learned of perseverance and hard work, resilience, and love for his new home. So, we are sure that we will succeed too, and we will write our story and inspire our descendants with it.

And yes, my nephew won his case and was able to claim his inheritance. ... but that is another story.

My name is Marnie Villegas Vasquez. I came from Ecuador 9 months ago. I am studying at Miami Dade College, and my teacher is Caridad Perez Lapeira.

Resilience and Recovery

Two years ago, I left my home behind, uncertain about what the future would hold. I came from a country where war was not a distant possibility, despite having a job I loved and a small business that provided stability and profit. Leaving everything I had built was not an easy decision.

My journey in the United States began with significant challenges. Many moments tested my strength, filling me with fear and uncertainty about the future. I was forced to step outside my comfort zone and rebuild my life from the beginning. Although the process was difficult, it provided me with invaluable lessons.

At first, everything felt unfamiliar and overwhelming. Language, culture, and daily life were often difficult to understand. There were times when loneliness weighed heavily on me, but I refused to give up. Persistence became my greatest strength.

Today, I am proud of the path I have taken. My story is not defined solely by hardship but by resilience, hope, and faith in myself. Through perseverance and determination, I continue to build a future rooted in growth and possibility.

Tetiana Vynnychuk attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Driving in America

“In America, you must learn to drive; otherwise, it’s like not having legs.”

When I first arrived from China, I often heard people tell me this. My mother disagreed. “You just arrived; you can’t even tell north from south. If you’re not careful, you could lose your life.” This made me very anxious.

Soon, with a friend's help, I secretly started learning to drive. This frightening experience is something I'll never forget. On the day I got my driver's license, I was determined not to touch the steering wheel for two months.

However, reality was harsh. Two days later, I had to drive to a new job location. That day, a friend accompanied me for my first drive on a highway. When I merged into the traffic, other cars flew past me, and my friend shouted, "Girl, this is the highway; you can't drive so slowly!" My hands gripped the steering wheel like pliers. I yelled, "Americans! They're all crazy!"

Every morning on the highway, I thought that I might not make it back. Getting back at night, I parked on the side of the road, closed my eyes, and lay in the car for a long time before getting out. I would touch my body to confirm that I was still alive. Fear and tension left me aching all over. A friend asked, "How can driving make you so tired? Driving is relaxing for me." Hearing this, I thought, "What? You're just bragging!"

During that time, I had many close calls, almost losing my life several times. I was afraid to change lanes and almost crashed into a wall. Sometimes I took the wrong exit and was unable to find my way home. Whenever I encountered a traffic jam, I was so happy because then I could drive slower. I swore I would never overtake another car. But my friend said, "One day you'll get impatient because the person in front of you is driving too slowly." I thought to myself, "How could that happen?"

Eventually my friend's predictions came true one by one. The first time I overtook another car, I felt I had committed a sin. Gradually, I felt that driving was a great way to relax. The hands that had tightly gripped the steering wheel began to relax. Sometimes I could even drink water and eat snacks while driving. At this point, I often reminded myself, "Don't get too complacent."

Driving and listening to music, I often thought of the difficult times when I first learned to drive. Now the backrest of the seat feels like it is massaging my back. That feeling was very pleasant. When I first drove across the George Washington Bridge spanning the bay, white seagulls flapping their beautiful wings flew beside me. Then, I asked myself, "Can I really drive now?" The answer is, "Yes."

Helen Wang is a student at Learn to Read of St. Johns County, Inc. Her teacher is Barbara Horton.

A Moment in Time

“Danielle, wake up; she’s blue and not breathing... Hurry up and get in the car; we have to go!” My mother’s voice trembled with fear while urging me to the car. “Is this an April Fools’ joke? Because this isn’t funny...” I quickly jumped up, ran to the car, and prepared myself for a loud outburst of “April Fools!!” Sadly, this was reality, not a joke, a day I would forever have replaying in my head.

I trudged through those chilling doors of the cold, moist hospital building, not prepared for what I was walking into. My four-month-old was lying on a table breathless and blue as the doctors were rushing past me trying to revive her cold, stiff body. I gasped for air. “This can’t be real,” I kept repeating to myself as my body was starting to shakingly go numb.

I called her grandmother, whose care she was in at the time, trying to get answers. She couldn’t say anything except she was so sorry. But being sorry wasn’t going to bring my baby girl back. After thirty of the longest minutes of my life the doctors came in telling me there was nothing left they could do, and it was time to say my goodbyes.

Homicide detectives pulled me away to trample my mind with questions that I couldn’t fix my mouth to answer. My brain was scrambling trying to piece everything together. I kept blaming myself for being sick and letting her stay the night at her grandmother’s house. Detectives said there were no signs of foul play; they described it as sudden infant death syndrome. But how? She was perfectly healthy when I dropped her off. Nothing was making sense.

Devastation written all over my face, I had to pull myself together. I needed answers, and there was no way I was getting any without talking to the people who were responsible for her while I was trying to get better. So I finally took myself to the place I had been dreading going to, the place where she took her last breath.

Her grandmother couldn't face me, so much guilt was on her conscience for falling asleep next to her in bed. My daughter's crib was two steps away from that bed; two steps and she'd still be here with us. I've always heard co-sleeping is dangerous but never anticipated that would end up being the outcome, as many women don't. Now April Fools' Day would be a day of remembrance, a moment in time that would forever torment my heart.

Danielle Wright is 26 and the mother of three amazing children, one angel baby in heaven, and two boys. She takes the most pride in being a loving mother, a trying daughter, and a great role model to her siblings. She studies at the Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida with instructor Jason Michael.

My Beautiful and Crazy Family

My family has many members, including my mother, father, grandmother, grandfather, my siblings, and me. They are all kind and friendly in their own ways. My mother is my favorite person because she is always smiling, creative, and smart. My father is polite and very hardworking. My brother and sister, on the other hand, can be a little lazy and do not really enjoy studying. Every Sunday, we get together to talk about our week, share a meal, and enjoy spending time together.

I appreciate my family every day because they support me during difficult moments and always help me when I need it. They like to joke and say that I am spoiled, but I know they love me. They see that I am hardworking, mature, and dedicated to them. They are proud of the way I face problems, even when they are not around.

In the end, family is very important for everyone. It is a strong feeling that lives in the heart. Even though my family is full of different personalities and can sometimes be a little crazy, that is what makes us special. More than the jokes or our differences, what truly matters is the unconditional support we give each other. My family is my safe place, my greatest pride, and the motivation that helps me stay grateful and committed every day.

The author wishes to remain anonymous.

My Favorite Day

Christmas: A Time of Tradition, Family, and Gratitude

Of all the special dates I celebrate throughout the year; none fills my heart quite like Christmas. For me, it is not just a holiday; it is a deeply personal moment filled with memories, scents, and emotions that come alive only during this season. Christmas is my favorite time of the year because it offers me the opportunity to reconnect with my family, honor traditions passed down through generations, and experience moments that I treasure deeply. Every year, Christmas reconnects with my roots and reminds me of the importance of appreciating the people who have always stood by my side.

I am from Guatemala, and in my family, we have a beautiful tradition: we all gather at my grandmother's house to celebrate Christmas Eve. From early in the morning, the atmosphere changes as we engage in conversations, laughter, and the excitement of preparing everything for the celebration. My grandmother's home, which feels especially magical during this season, slowly fills with the arrival of my cousins, aunts, uncles, and other relatives. Every corner feels familiar, warm, and full of stories, making the space feel alive with the spirit of the holiday.

One of our most cherished traditions is the preparation of tamales. Every year, my grandmother and aunts prepare them with so much love and care. Watching them work together in the kitchen—moving in perfect coordination that only experience and affection can bring—never fails to move me. The aroma of the recado, the smell of the maxán leaves, and the sound of their conversations as they cook create an atmosphere that is difficult to describe. It is a blend of nostalgia, home, and love that I look forward to all year long.

When night finally arrives, we all sit together to enjoy the meal. That moment—surrounded by the people I care about the most—is what makes Christmas truly special to me. Beyond the food, what matters most is the time we share: talking, laughing, recalling family stories, and simply being present with one another. It feels as if time slows down, and everything becomes peaceful and joyful.

For all these reasons, Christmas is my favorite day of the year. It is not only because my family gathers together, but also because each year it revives traditions that connect me to my Guatemalan heritage. It is a day that encourages me to appreciate what I have, be grateful, and enjoy the presence of those I love. The warmth of my grandmother's home, the preparation of tamales, and the joy of being united as a family make this day unforgettable. Even though Christmas passes quickly, the happiness it brings stays with me, accompanying me until the next holiday season.

David Alvarado knows that English is particularly important for his future. He is an ESOL5 student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. His instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

The Day of the Little Candles

The night of the little candles is celebrated on December 7 and 8 and is one of the most beloved traditions in Colombia. It marks the beginning of the Christmas season in the country. It is a tradition that dates to the mid-XIX century when Pope Pius IX proclaimed the dogma of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin Mary on December 8, 1854. Faithful Catholics celebrated the announcement.

It became a tradition, and it consists of lighting small candles and lanterns in the streets, homes, and businesses.

Each lit candle represents a wish, a memory, or a promise. It is a way to illuminate the path of the coming year and give thanks for what has been experienced in the past. It is also an opportunity to disconnect from daily routines and reconnect with loved ones.

We then continue celebrating the day of the little candles all month long. December is a lot of fun in Colombia.

Myriam Alzate is from Colombia and is now studying English at Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

Beloved Christmas

When I think about my favorite day, I do not imagine my birthday, New Year, or Easter. Instead, I think about Christmas, which I do not think of as a holiday on the calendar; it is an experience surrounding everything with light, joy, and peace. That is why I consider Christmas to be my favorite day. Christmas brings families together. Every day, people are busy with school, work, or other responsibilities. However, on Christmas, everyone tries to gather.

In my family, we spend time in the living room decorating the tree and sharing stories. These moments make me feel part of something important. I feel close to my family and happy to be together.

Likewise, Christmas creates a joyful atmosphere. Streets and houses are decorated with lights, music is played everywhere, and people often seem happier. Even though the weather is cold, the decorations and songs make everything feel warm. When I walk in my neighborhood during this season, I feel like I am walking in a story full of joy and celebration. The beauty of this environment is one of the reasons I love Christmas so much.

Food is also a special part of Christmas. My family prepares meals that we do not usually eat during the rest of the year; they are traditional foods from my country. Sharing food at the table is more than eating; it is a way to show love and to continue traditions. Every dish reminds me of my culture and of the people who came before me. That makes Christmas feel like a time of connection.

Christmas is also meaningful because of the values it teaches. It is a time when people remember to be kind, generous, and thankful. Many people give gifts to family, to friends, and sometimes to those in need. These actions remind me to think about others and to share what I can with those less fortunate. Christmas teaches important lessons that make the world feel more positive, even if only for a brief time.

Christmas gives me peace. Life is usually stressful, with problems and responsibilities that are difficult to manage. On Christmas, I feel calm when I sit by the tree or look at the lights.

Something as simple as listening to music or spending time with my family recharges me with energy. For a moment, time feels slower, and I can enjoy simple things in life without stress.

Christmas is my favorite day because it combines family, atmosphere, food, values, and peace. Every year, when Christmas comes, I feel like I arrive at a place full of love, light, and happiness. For me, Christmas will always remain the most special day I know. This season creates memories that stay in my heart, and it reminds me that true happiness is not found in material things but in the moments that we share with the people we love.

Alison Amador is a student who loves writing about meaningful moments, enjoys learning English, and expresses her feelings through essays. She has been in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 at Miami Dade College, Kendall.

My Birthday

My favorite day is my birthday, December 9. I always wait for this day with great excitement because my family and friends celebrate with me, which makes me feel special. It is the only day that truly feels all about me, and I enjoy every part of it.

We celebrate even before my birthday. On December 8, my family and I wait until midnight, so they are the first to wish me a happy birthday. We usually cut a small cake, sing, and laugh. It is a simple tradition, but it makes me happy. Sometimes, we play music and dance for a few minutes just to make the night more fun. After that, I go to sleep feeling loved.

If I have school on my birthday, like last year, I attend classes and my friends congratulate me. Sometimes they bring small surprises, or they just say kind words. If I do not have school, I stay home, and my parents make a special breakfast. They always ask me how I want to celebrate. I like the fact that they ask me, and they make me feel special all day. It feels as if the entire day is planned just for me, and that makes me smile.

Last year, I had school on my birthday. When I got home, I was incredibly surprised because my parents had decorated the house beautifully. There was a lot of food, and my favorite was

sushi. Some friends from school came with me, and we spent a great time together. Then I opened my gifts, which is my favorite part. I love gifts, especially when I do not expect them. That makes me feel incredibly happy and thankful. I usually take pictures of my gifts so I can remember them later and say thanks again.

When there are no classes, the celebration is bigger. Sometimes we have a party at home with friends and fill the house with decorations, food, music, and laughter. I enjoy birthdays like that because I like to celebrate with many people, not only my family. For me, the more friends, the better—a house full of life and everyone smiling.

Likewise, the calls I receive from far away, Cuba, make me feel close to loved ones. Additionally, Facebook messages are special. All of this makes me feel remembered and loved. Even when I am far from my country, this day connects me to my roots and my family.

At the end of the day, I always go to sleep feeling very happy. My birthday has food, music, gifts, and love. It is not only about cake or decorations; it is about how my family, friends, and relatives make me feel. That is why December 9 is my favorite day. I feel special, loved, and thankful, and I always look forward to celebrating it again.

Lilieska Batista is a student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu in ESOL 5.

A Special Day

I am Magalie. I was born in Haiti. I was a teacher from 1983 until 2021. Things changed then because the gangs prevented everyone from going to their activities. I remember June 7, 2017, when I was working, and it was my birthday. When I returned home, at the entrance, I saw decorations with balloons from left to right that said, “HBD Auntie Maga.” I said to myself, everyone went to work; my niece went to school. Who organized this surprise? I went inside and started to see the neighbors who were preparing food in the kitchen, but I didn’t see the person who organized the surprise. When I got to the living room, it was my

sister and her children who shouted, “Happy Birthday!” Her children didn’t go to school so they could help prepare the surprise. That day was a big day for me. I celebrated with my husband and my three children after I had rested, but it wasn’t a big party. That same day, my sister invited other people to join us. When the party was about to end, I stood up to say a big thank you to everyone who came together to make my party a success, and I gave my sister a hug to thank her especially.

Magalie Belice is a student at Clearview Adult Education Center. Her teacher is Inguna Ozols.

New Year’s Eve

New Year’s Eve is my favorite day because it represents a new beginning. I feel that I can reset my life and start again, even if it is only symbolic. The New Year gives me hope and motivation to improve and set new goals.

On December 31st at night, my family and I have dinner together. We talk, laugh, and spend quality time together. This moment is very special to me because we are all together, sharing memories, playing some games, and talking about our plans for the future.

At midnight, we do our traditions. One of them is eating twelve grapes, which symbolize twelve wishes for the New Year. Another tradition is taking our suitcase, because people say that if you do this, you will travel. These traditions make the night fun and exciting.

For these reasons, I love New Year’s Eve. This day combines family, hope, and fun. It reminds me that no matter what happened before, I always have the chance to begin again.

Liu Ling Chik was born in Caracas, Venezuela, and she is taking advanced ESOL classes at Miami Dade College Hialeah Campus. Her teacher is Juan Ernesto.

My Favorite Day

It is Sunday. It is relaxing after a long week. In the morning, having breakfast with my family is a very special moment. I love cooking food from Venezuela for my family: arepas, tequenos, and empanadas. After 10 am, going to church for us is a refreshing time, reconnecting with my peace and strength. Then we go to the park or restaurant to have lunch and talk to each other, smiling, playing, and organizing the week. At night we watch a movie, and we give thanks to God, we pray, and then we go to bed.

Sunday is the best day!

Leidis Corredor is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. Her teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

Glorious

My favorite day is Sunday. Sunday is very important for me, my body, my mind, and my family. After a long week of work and stress, Sunday feels like a reward and a blessing.

I love Sunday because it is my day of rest. I work a lot at Home Depot during the week, and my job is very physical and requires a lot of focus. Sometimes I come home very tired. Sunday is the day I relax, rest my body, and get ready for the new week.

I also love Sunday because I spend more time with my family. During the week, everyone is busy with work or school. On Sunday, we sit together, talk, laugh, and share good moments. Sometimes we watch TV, tell stories, or remember happy memories. These times make our family closer.

Sunday is also the day I cook special meals for my family. I like preparing food that everyone loves. Cooking is not only about food but also about love and sharing. Seeing my family happy while eating gives me great joy.

On Sunday, I also sleep more because I don't need to wake up early. Good sleep helps me feel healthier and ready for the week.

I also go to church to pray and learn about God and the Bible, which gives me peace.

Finally, Sunday is the day I clean my house. I tidy my room, wash clothes, and organize everything. When my house is clean, my mind feels calm and light.

Therefore, Sunday is my favorite day because it gives me rest, family time, good food, good sleep, and peace of mind. It helps me start the week with strength and happiness.

Rose Darius attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

A Day of Peace

My favorite day begins by waking up early and going for a light run, accompanied by the symphony of birds and the gentle sway of the wind. I give thanks without haste, without needing to know where I am going—simply for the joy of being alive. I listen to my inner rhythm, breathe the pure air that nature offers me through photosynthesis, and welcome another day. This simple variety of moments fills my day with meaning and quality, connecting me deeply with nature and allowing me to savor it just as it is.

The art of living is a rare skill. It means knowing how to sleep deeply and laugh freely, without burdens or fear. In this world, nothing truly belongs to us. The less we attach ourselves to things, the freer we become. When we leave this life, we take almost nothing with us—not even the clothes we wear are chosen by us. Freedom begins when we learn to live with only what is essential, in harmony with the simple things in life.

It is in small details that the greatest differences are made: a child's smile, a strong hug, a sincere handshake, a quiet look that speaks without words. These moments hold the deepest meaning. My favorite day is not defined by events or possessions—it is a day of peace.

Darley Silva de Souza attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Celebrating a New Life

My favorite day for the past five years has been my daughter's birthday, as I believe she was born on a special, magical day, 02/02/2020. We waited a long time for her, and her birth was a great miracle for us.

This day is always special to me because it is filled with love, happiness, joy, and my daughter's endless smiles. I try to make it magical, not only for her but also for myself.

On her birthday morning, the atmosphere in our house feels brighter, warmer, and happier. It smells like the cake that I'm baking for her the night before. Usually, I stay up until morning to finish all the preparations and the last details, decorations, balloons, flowers, and lots of confetti. When she finally sees the surprise, she runs to me and hugs me tightly. This hug is the best gift I could ever receive. Seeing her smile in that moment is priceless.

After breakfast, we spend the day together as a family. Sometimes we go out for a small trip, like visiting the park or new places. She likes it so much. Other times, we invite her friends to play, laugh, and enjoy the day together. I love seeing her happy with her little friends. Her laughter is so pure that it is the greatest happiness for me. It is a reminder that the small moments in life are often the most beautiful.

The cake is always one of the highlights of the day. I try to make it special each year, decorating it with her favorite colors or characters. Watching her eyes sparkle when she sees the cake is unforgettable. We sing the birthday song; she closes her eyes and makes her special wish and blows out the candles with excitement. This is her favorite part of the holiday; she loves blowing out the candles a million times.

I also love seeing how much she has grown in the past year. Every birthday reminds me how precious time is and how fast she changes. I feel grateful that I can be a part of her life, watch her grow, and celebrate every important moment. Her birthday is more than a celebration; it is a celebration of life, love, and family.

That is why my daughter's birthday is my favorite day. It is full of emotions, love, and memories. Every year, it becomes a story to remember, a day that stays in my heart forever, and a celebration of the most valuable gift I have—my daughter.

Anastasiia Domuschi is an ESOL student at Clearwater Adult Education Center, Oldsmar. Her teacher is Angela Failoa. She is from Ukraine and was an accountant and an entrepreneur with an online business selling items for children and is a passionate photographer.

My Favorite Day

My name is Maribel. I am from Ecuador, and I am 42 years old. I am married, and my favorite food is seafood. I like to run, and I want to learn English so I can communicate with people in different places. I have been living in the United States for four years. I arrived at the Miami airport in October 2021. I believe there are more job opportunities in the United States of America.

My favorite day is Saturday because I wake up late. I take a shower after breakfast, and then I go for a walk on the beach. I drink iced coffee and read a book; I like it because it relaxes me. I also watch TV. I like Netflix, and I can watch my favorite series for a long time.

My life in the United States is a journey of seeking new opportunities and enjoying the simple moments that make me happy. Between my goal of mastering English and my relaxing Saturdays by the ocean, I am excited to see what the future holds.

Maribel Herrera is a married 42-year-old from Ecuador. She has one son, three sisters, and two brothers.

I Love Sunday

My happiest and most beloved day is Sunday. It is the day when my family comes together to talk, share our goals, and discuss what we hope to become in life. It is also a special day when we thank God, and each person does so in their own way.

Sunday has a deep impact on me, especially because it is the

last Sunday of every month when we gather. Everyone is happy eating, talking, and sharing the things we love. Seeing the smiles on my grandparents' faces fills my heart with joy. My parents are happy to see the whole family together, and I feel happy in a different way, seeing it as a blessing from God that our family can gather and reflect on our lives.

On this day, we also talk about anything that may have caused tension or misunderstandings. If someone was hurt or offended, we take the opportunity to apologize to one another, both young and old. We choose unity over conflict, humility over pride, and forgiveness over anger. By asking for forgiveness and accepting one another, we strengthen our bond and remain united as a family.

Sunday is a day of rest and joy for me. I choose it to relax, laugh, and enjoy time with the people I love. That is why Sunday is my favorite day. It fills me with peace and happiness.

Marie Nerlanda Joseph attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Quality Time with My Son

My favorite day is the one I spent with my son. His name is Artem. He is twelve years old, full of energy, curiosity, and a big heart. Spending time with him is always special, but one day stands out for the laughter, fun, and memories we will never forget.

The day started on a sunny morning. I woke him up, and we had a big breakfast together. He loves pancakes with honey and strawberries, so I made them for him. During the meal, we talked about school events. I love hearing his laughter and seeing his excitement over simple things. It makes me happy and grateful.

After breakfast, we decided to go to the park. We played soccer and ran, enjoying the fresh air. He is very competitive but also very encouraging, and it was fun to see him challenge himself and cheer for me when I scored. We also went on bike rides together. I remember feeling the wind on my face and smiling at how much he loves being outdoors. Spending time in nature with

him makes the day peaceful and joyful.

Later, we went to the library because my son loves reading about science and animals. He chose a few books about space and dinosaurs. We read together, discussing interesting facts and asking each other questions. I enjoy these quiet moments because they show his curiosity and desire to learn. Seeing his eyes light up when he discovers something new is priceless.

In the afternoon, we returned home and cooked dinner together. He helped me make his favorite pasta with shrimp and cheese. He carefully chopped the shrimp, and I was impressed by his patience and focus. We laughed a lot when some sauce spilled, but it made the perfect way to bond and create memories.

In the evening, we watched a movie and shared popcorn on the couch. He leaned his head on my shoulder, and I left, happy and peaceful. Before bedtime, we talked about our favorite parts of the day and what we want to do next time. He hugged me tightly and said, "This was the best day ever." Those words stayed with me and made me realize how important it is to spend quality time with him.

This day is my favorite because it was full of love, laughter, and connection. It reminded me that the most valuable moments in life are the ones we share with the people we care about. Spending a day with my son makes me feel happy, proud, and grateful. That is why this day will always be my favorite day. I hope we will share many more days like this and create even more beautiful memories together.

Uliana Kachmar attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My Joy is My Family

My new life began in America. I fell in love with it like I love my home country. My new life was not easy at first; I had to learn a whole new language! My first steps learning English were in Largo Library. Thanks to the caring and attentive teachers, I feel very confident.

Now I help my family and my grandchildren. Now that the holidays are coming again, I am getting ready for the worries of how they will go.

Usually, I will be very busy cooking for everyone. We all clean the house and put up the Christmas tree. It's a lot of work. Usually, my family visits our friends in Tampa for Christmas. Their neighborhood is always very decorated. All the houses there shine with colorful lights. There are also a lot of reindeer and Santa Clause decorations. It is a very beautiful neighborhood, and it fills me up with joy every time. The neighbors there are all very friendly, and I love seeing the lights with my wonderful family and friends.

Finally, my daughter, my granddaughter, and I always go to see a concert or play of some kind. This year we went to see a Christmas ballet.

The holidays are always very busy and there is a lot of work, but I can't wait to spend that special time with my amazing family again!

Natalija Kasirkina is from Latvia and now studying English at the Clearview Adult Education Center, Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

Christmas in Venezuela

For me, Christmas in Venezuela is the best. In my house, we started celebrating Christmas earlier, in December, sometimes even in November. We all helped my mother and aunt decorate our two houses. We loved decorating them. What I liked most was that, as December 24th approached, we would make hallacas, a traditional Venezuelan dish prepared differently depending on the region. That day was great: my mother organized everything.

Everyone had their role: some cleaned the banana leaves, and others cut the vegetables: carrots, onions, and peppers. Everything was cut into strips. Meanwhile, my aunt cooked the garbanzos and looked for the green olives, capers, and raisins. My mother and my older cousin prepared the chicken with the

seasonings. The most important ingredient was the flour dough; my mother prepared it to her liking and said it was her secret. It was yellow and delicious.

My uncles played salsa and Christmas music and served beer, and we laughed, chatted, and talked for hours until dawn. When all the ingredients were ready and organized, we would all assemble to prepare the hallacas. One of my cousins rolled the clean banana leaves; my aunt placed the dough and stretched it on the banana leaf. Sometimes a friend of my mother's would come to our home, and she would add the annatto oil. My mother added the vegetables and the chicken, then the olives, capers, and raisins. And finally, I would fold the leaves to tie them together. That was almost always my job.

I miss those days with my family, everyone laughing, talking, and dancing. Thank you, Venezuela, for such wonderful memories.

Linda Miranda was a dentist in Venezuela. She is the proud mother of her young son and now works in an English-speaking dental practice in Lakeland, Florida. She plans to attend college to receive her dental certification. Her tutor is Neal Steiger at READ Lakeland.

I Wish Every Day is Sunday

My favorite day of the week is Sunday because it brings peace, gratitude, and renewal to my life. After a busy week filled with work and responsibilities, Sunday gives me a chance to pause, recharge, and grow closer to God. I usually wake up without rushing and begin my day with prayer, thanking God for my life, protection, and blessings.

After prayer, I go to church. Attending church is an important part of my Sunday because it strengthens my faith and provides spiritual guidance. The sermons, hymns, and fellowship help me reflect on my life and remind me how to continue growing and becoming a better person each day.

After church, I enjoy spending time with my family, especially when we share a meal together. Sunday meals are always special because they nourish not only our bodies but also our hearts. We

talk, laugh, and share our experiences, strengthening our bond as a family.

In the afternoon, I take time to rest, reflect, and prepare myself for the week ahead. Sunday fills me with inner peace, spiritual strength, and balance. That is why it will always be my favorite day.

Syliana Posia Vil attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. Her teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Sometimes the Common Things Are the Healthiest

My favorite day is Sunday because it is the day when I can relax and do what I enjoy, such as waking up late because there is no school or work. Sometimes, I sleep until ten o'clock. When I wake up, I feel happy because the day is just for me and my family.

After waking up, I go to the kitchen, where I eat breakfast. I usually eat bread with butter and drink milk. Often, my brother makes pancakes. My mom reminds me to eat quickly, or the food will get cold, but I like to eat slowly. While I eat, I watch cartoons or funny shows on TV. My cat comes and sits on my lap. It is funny because he looks at my food as if he wants to eat as well.

After breakfast, I go outside and walk in the streets near my house. The sun is warm, and the birds sing. On certain days, I meet my friends, and we talk and laugh loudly in the park. After playing, we sit on the grass and drink water. The wind feels nice and makes me feel relaxed.

In the afternoon, I go home to watch TV or play video games. My favorite game is a Barbie fashion game. I am not exceptionally good at it, but it is fun. After playing, I help my mom make lunch. I like cooking with her because she teaches me new things about food. I have learned to make a simple salad with tomato and cheese. It is not always perfect, but it tastes good.

After lunch, I usually take a nap, which makes me feel better. My cat comes again and sleeps with me. It feels cozy and comforting. When I wake up, I feel much happier. Sometimes I listen

to music. I like songs with happy melodies. I dance a little in my room and do not care if I look silly. Music makes me feel good and free.

In the evening, I visit my grandparents. They live not far from my house. I love talking with them because they tell me stories from long ago. We laugh a lot because the stories are funny or strange. My grandma always hugs me and says, “You are growing so fast,” and I smile. After visiting them, I return home to my family. We eat dinner together and talk about our day. Before going to sleep, I read a little or watch TV. My favorite stories are about princesses. Then I brush my teeth and go to bed. I feel happy and calm. I think about my day and feel lucky.

Sunday is special because I can relax, play, eat tasty food, and spend time with the people I love. I enjoy every Sunday because it makes me feel happy and refreshed.

Elisabet Pratts is an ESOL 5 student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. Her instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

My Most Special Day: Maria Eduarda’s Birth

Life is full of moments shaping our paths, but few remain in the heart forever like the arrival of a new family member. January 10, 2009, was not just any day. It was the day my niece, Maria Eduarda, was born, an event transforming my life forever, which I remember with a mixture of joy, gratitude, and emotion. Undoubtedly, that day became my favorite, marking the beginning of my unique and wonderful experience of becoming an aunt.

That day began with indescribable anxiety. We waited restlessly for news of her arrival. I remember the tension, the nerves, as well as the joy that filled us. When we finally received confirmation of her birth, a feeling of relief and happiness filled my heart. It was impossible to hold back my tears. Little “Duda” had arrived healthy, strong, chubby, and very pink, and with her birth, a new chapter in our lives began.

I have had the privilege of watching her grow. From an early age, she was different; she lit the place wherever she was. Maria

Eduarda is an introverted child, a fact that does not limit her intelligence; on the contrary, it enhances it. She prefers observing rather than speaking and listening rather than interrupting. This personality makes her a thoughtful human being, capable of analyzing situations calmly and sensitively. Although she may seem reserved at first glance, those who truly know her agree that she has a huge heart full of love and tenderness.

She has great intelligence and responsibility. She has always demonstrated a remarkable ability to learn and memorize. Her capacity to understand complex subjects and her logical reasoning are admirable. Moreover, her intelligence is not limited to academics. She also possesses great emotional intelligence, reflected in her empathy and the way she interacts with others, even though she is quiet.

She is an incredible listener who understands people thanks to her special talent for transmitting calmness and affection. She dislikes procrastination and completes her duties timely. Additionally, she helps with household chores. She is exceptionally reliable.

Likewise, Maria Eduarda has found ways to express her inner world through her passions. Japanese manga and anime readings have become one of her greatest interests, helping her develop values such as friendship, courage, and self-improvement. Her love for cats reveals her tender and protective side as well. These independent yet affectionate animals seem to reflect Duda's personality in many ways.

When I look back on January 10, 2009, I realize that we are not just celebrating the birth of a baby girl, but also the beginning of a relationship that has taught me to see life differently. Maria Eduarda is not only my niece, but she is also a constant source of love and learning. That is why that day will forever remain my favorite, the day the world brightened with the arrival of someone so special.

Madelin Sanchez is a Cuban national who graduated in physical culture and sports. She is in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 to pursue a career that will allow her to thrive in the U.S.

My Favorite Day

From the time I wake up until the time I go to bed, my favorite day is made up of a routine that makes me feel balanced, productive, and happy. I get up very early, at 5:00 a.m. I like to start my day at the gym before most people wake up. Working out first thing in the morning gives me energy, clears my mind, and makes me feel good about the rest of the day. After I work out, I take a relaxing shower and eat a good breakfast that helps me get ready to focus.

When I get home, I spend a few hours studying and finishing my homework. I get a lot done during these hours because it's quiet in the morning. I usually take a break to eat lunch and rest around noon, between 12:00 p.m. and 2:00 p.m. In the afternoon, I sometimes take a short nap to get my energy back before I study and read some more.

I like to go for a walk with my wife later in the day. These walks are important to me because they give us a chance to talk, relax, and spend time together after a long day of work. I like going to Hollywood Beach the best when we walk. We usually walk along the beach for one or two hours, enjoying the fresh air, the sound of the waves, and the calm view. It helps me relax and be thankful for the little things in life.

We eat dinner around 8:00 p.m. and then like to watch a show together. This is our time to relax and get ready for bed. Finally, I go to bed at 10:00 p.m. feeling calm, happy, and thankful for a day that was well-planned and had a lot of meaning. This is my favorite day because I get to work out, learn, spend time with my wife, and rest.

Luis Sotolongo is an ESOL 5 student of Juan Ernesto at Miami Dade College. He arrived from Cuba four years ago and feels grateful for the opportunity and support to continue learning and improve himself every day. He currently works as a realtor in the Broward and Miami-Dade area and is proud of the path he is building through education, hard work, and dedication.

Original Poetry

Moving Beyond Limits

In a single breath, a day,
a restlessness fills the soul.
What lies beyond my limits?
What will I find
beyond the security of monotony?
What possibilities exist
in the clarity
that surfaces when the illusions
of the ego are disrupted?

By taking the risk,
changing geography,
deeply rooted fears,
once unshakeable structures,
are broken.
Torment is released.

As one moves forward,
other realities are revealed.
Despite the voices of others
who speak from their limits;
despite the jitters of new experiences,
or some courage-sapping form of impostor syndrome
that steal certainty away.

There exists
courageous action,
successful rebellion;
an audacity in proving
what's possible
in a foreign place,
among unfamiliar people,
with unknown scents, colors, flavors.

With time,
Strangeness mutates.
The 'other' melts away.

A new identity is born;
I have grown.
And I remain.

To move is not to flee.
To move is not to remain silent.
To move is not to hide.
To move is not to forget.
To move is not to abandon.

To move is to affirm
the right to be free,
planted in accountability.
To move is a demonstration
Of plasticity,
A banner of expansion,
To move is to overcome,
to win the battle of misunderstanding;
To recognize that rigidity
is not progress.

Sometimes, though,
movement requires stillness;
in complete silence,
in complete waiting.

On this delicate passage
depends the magnificence
of worthwhile change.

Martha Castrillón is an adult learner and multidisciplinary artist based in Florida. Originally from Colombia, she is a music director and works across the arts, visual media, and technology. Since living in the Orlando area, she has been supported in her learning journey by her tutor, Robin Schoen at Adult Literacy League, whose guidance has been an important part of her personal and creative growth. Her work explores migration, identity, and transformation, highlighting learning as a pathway to self-expression and personal evolution.

Lost

I AM Lost

I AM Lost in Time.
I am lost in the moment.
I am lost in the minute.
I am lost in the hour.
Am I really lost in Time or did I forget what Day it is?

I AM Lost in my Mind.
I am losing breath each time I breath.
I am losing the connection to my heart and lungs.
Am I really lost in my mind or did I forget what each Breath I
take beats with my Heart?

I AM Lost in Earth.
I am lost in the universe.
I am lost in the planet.
Am I really lost in Earth or did I forget I am connected to
Mother Earth?

I AM not Lost.
I am reconnecting to who I Am. I did not forget that I AM.

*Howard Crumpler is a student at Family Support Services Network
Inc. Their teacher is LaShan Crumpler.*

Eternal Shadow

I am not what you are.
I am not who I am.
I wish I were more than
Who I pretend to be.

I wish that one day I could be set free,
Like birds in the sky,
When they sing with glee.

Much like a shadow, I wear no rings.
Nobody owns me,
Nor do I own anyone.

There are only a few things
I keep in mind.
I watch, and I learn,
As time grows near.

But now I am starting
To feel a thing called fear.

My body is slowly turning
From shadow to man,
Yet I gain nothing—
Only fear.

Alexander Demos is a residential student at Pinellas County Job Corps Center. Alex is building his future by earning a plumbing trade while preparing for a career in the military. His teacher is Ms. Holly Heintz from Lakewood Community School.

Powers that Come from Within

In the quiet hours, when doubt tries to creep,
I rise for my children, though the climb feels steep.
The world may not see the weight that I bear,
but in their small eyes, I find reason there.

Each choice feels heavy, a road never clear.
I wrestle within question, with worry, with fear.
Am I guiding them right, am I steady and strong?
Or stumbling through shadows, just trying along?

Yet their laughter reminds me, their touch pulls me near.
They whisper my courage, they silence my fear.
I may walk alone, yet I'm never alone.
Their love builds the armor, the steel in my bones.

For I am a mother, a fighter, a flame, no hardship,
no trial, can silence my name.
The powers that hold me don't come from above.
They're born from the bond, from my children love,
and so I keep pushing, I fight and stand with hope in my
heart, and strength in my hands, though the world may not
always see where I've been,

I rise every day with the powers within.

Elease Dunton is a student at Flagler Technical College. Her teacher is Mahnke.

Autumn

Autumn has come
Within me,
For me ...
And that is a good
thing.

A soft yet steadfast
wind
Let's fall,
Carry away from me
All the old leaves.

They will always be
remembered,
Carefully kept
Within my life.

They mark me...
A past,
Whether gentle or
painful,
Now making room
For a Spring
Of long, new shoots,
And the beginning of
Happiness.

Maria Marchesoni is from Brazil and finds that writing is a way for her to better understand life. She attends Mrs. Naomi Chase's ESOL classes at Jacksonville Public Library. Her focus is on improving her English language skills.

Daughter of the Tropics

My favorite day lives
in my eyes, dark and glowing
Like a warm, tropical night holding light
the way the ocean holds the sun
It speaks before my lips,
soft, confident, quietly inviting

My lips taste of heat,
sweetness curved with secrets
touched by the day like fruit that is ripe under the sun
they don't rush
they finger, promise, know how to be felt

And my skin...golden, warm, alive
Every inch remembers the breeze
Every glow tells me this is my moment
It's my favorite day when all of me
shines like the tropics made me.

Marnelle Tessa Morency is a student at Lakewood Community School. Her teacher is Ivette Waller.

The Light I Became

I walked through lands both rough and wide,
through forests, deserts, roads untried.
Each step a trial, each mile a fight,
a journey through both fear and night.

I crossed the earth with trembling feet,
carrying hope with each step I'd meet.
A heart once broken, love turned away,
and silence spoke what words couldn't say.

The journey was long, the nights unsure,
each hardship alone I had to endure.
With only my dog, my loyal friend,
we faced a world that demanded we defend.

In foreign streets, I learned to stand,
to start again with empty hands.
Through wax and fire, I built my peace,
my candle's glow, my soul's release.

From ashes rose the strength I own,
a quiet power I've always known.
And when I thought my light was small,
love found me — seeing it all.

He stayed through storms, through quiet tears,
through birthdays, nights, and endless years.
He saw not pain, but what could be —
the woman healed, the flame in me.

I live where freedom calls my name,
yet freedom still feels far, the same.
But faith walks with me every day,
and God still lights my hardest way.

For even when the world feels cold,
my heart burns bright — pure and bold.
The road was rough, but now I see:
I am the light I came to be.

Daniela Russ was born in Cuba, where she learned early on the value of resilience, discipline, and the desire to build a better future. In 2022, she immigrated to the United States in search of stability, opportunities, and a path that would allow her to grow both personally and professionally.

The Last Time We Saw Each Other

I realized that I didn't have a favorite place; I had a favorite person who turned every moment into something special and perfect, as if it were a fairy tale.

He could stop time, bring things to life or death, even create a flaw in case perfection frightened me.

The last time we saw each other, we made promises and vows that flew away like birds on the wire vanishing like hope in a

shipwreck.

The last time we saw each other, your voice was like the singing of angels, who were intoning a sweet and gentle melody, enchanting everyone who heard you.

The last time we saw each other, I told you that your face and smile looked like a universe surrounded by galaxies and stars, you smelled so good that even the flowers wanted your perfume, it was living art.

The last time we saw each other, it was raining as if someone had been begging for it. I looked into your eyes which were like the sea, poor is the one who looks into them and doesn't know how to swim, drowning forever in a paradise. Perhaps that's what a believer was talking about.

Since the last time, everything has lost its meaning, like a wild animal in a cage or a genius without ideas but even in my dreams I see your face.

Kehysber Tortoza is a student at Learn to Read of St. Johns County under instructor Emily Renstrom.

Mock Funeral

We sometimes say, "You only live once."

That's not true.

You live every day and only die once.

Your beautiful soul, so resilient and unique, refusing to lose.

Knowing you got your own little family to get back home too.

You're so beautiful in and out.

Even in your ups and downs

Watching your beautiful soul grow from an innocent baby to a toddler counting her fingers and toes.

Developing into a teen

Always a curious girl you see.

Loving outside nature, enjoying what's been given to us by our creator.

Growing into an adult having had a Babygirl at fifteen of your own.

Time goes by, things happen so fast, making decisions not

knowing when it'll be your last.

Now a mom of five beautiful children.

After having gone through what you've been through; so, head strong and driven.

Living life with no fear.

When making a mistake, you turned to Yah-Weh in prayer.

Not knowing this would be about you one day. This is reality, no lies or deception.

In life there are lessons and blessings,

You've always seen the light in things.

Even when it is heartbreaking.

Keeping yourself guarded from wearing your heart on your sleeve.

The devil is keen on using what makes you weak.

All the death and disease attacking your family.

So devastating

You've covered the pain, guilt, and grief with temporary relief.

Still unpleased

Addictions have no discrimination.

Numbing the ability to feel truly human.

So strong, so bright, and so full of life.

So much to offer despite your trials and tribulations.

Your family knows your good heart and its intentions, even in release and active addiction.

Always having hit the ground running

Brave and never stop learning, standing up for what you love.

Taking on weight not just your own.

Keeping your distance as a way to keep your family protected.

All the forgiveness and mercy in your heart

Accepting forgiveness was a healthy start.

You're a powerful woman all around.

Just worries us when not knowing if you're safe and sound.

Knowing the devil is quick to tie knots in shoes.

Ready to change into ones that better suit you.

Taking a path leading you astray, thought you'd come back.

But didn't end that way.

Death of a soul, not strong on her own

With God was able to be set free from the hurt lurking inside of thee.

Reborn again as a miraculous being.

That being is me.

Spirit living a physical experience.

Blessed by this death that brought me back to life.
I deserve what's naturally mine.
That's my sobriety.
I am somebody.
Addiction didn't take what isn't given.

In a moment of a decision.
With a heart, mind, body and soul.
Surrendering. I am now free to be whole.

Sarah Watkins is a student at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida. Her teacher is Kimberly Gaskins.

What the American Dream Means to Me

My American Dream

The American Dream holds deep meaning for me because it represents hope, possibility, and a chance to start over. For me, coming to the United States was not simply about relocating to a new country, but about pursuing a life that offers opportunity, dignity, and freedom. The American Dream symbolizes the belief that through hard work and determination, a person can fulfill their goals to build a better future. This idea gave me motivation and purpose as I navigated the challenges of adapting to a new society.

Personally, the American Dream is an opportunity that is unavailable in my home country. I come from places where economic hardship, political instability, or limited access to education restrict personal growth. In contrast, the American Dream promises the chance to succeed based on effort rather than background. Although success is not guaranteed, the belief that upward mobility is possible encouraged me to work tirelessly, pursue education, and take risks in order to improve my life.

The American Dream also carries meaning because it helped me make sense of the sacrifices I endure. Leaving behind family, familiar traditions, and a native language is emotionally difficult. I often faced discrimination, financial struggles, and feelings of isolation as I adjusted to a new culture. The dream of homeownership, career success, or financial stability makes these sacrifices feel worthwhile. It provides a vision of a better future that gives strength during moments of hardship and uncertainty.

For people like me, the American Dream is closely tied to freedom and safety. Some leave their countries to escape violence, persecution, or lack of basic rights. However, in the United States the dream represents freedom of speech, religion, and self-expression. It also means the possibility of living without constant fear. For immigrants like me, the American Dream is not only about wealth or status but about being able to live with dignity, security, and hope.

Finally, the American Dream often extends beyond the indi-

vidual immigrant to future generations. Many of us who came here may never fully achieve our personal goals, but we work hard to ensure our children have better opportunities. Education, stability, and personal growth have become central family values. In this way, the American Dream gave me a sense of purpose and belief in a brighter future, making it a powerful and meaningful ideal in my life.

Dora Acosta is self-employed and has studied at Miami Dade College for approximately one year. Likewise, she got her public notary license. She is an ESOL 5 student in Professor Carmen Whu's class.

Threads of a Dream: Reflections on the American Dream

Sometimes dreams do not start where we are but in the places where we learn to imagine. When I came to this country, I realized that the American Dream is not something you are simply given. You have to work hard and be patient. Every step I take, every sacrifice, and every small success is like a thread that weaves my own dream. For me, the American Dream is not only about having money or possessions; it is the opportunity to build a better future while staying true to who I am and remembering where I come from. It is about learning from mistakes, facing fears, and never forgetting the people and experiences that shaped me.

One of the most important aspects of the American Dream for me is the opportunity to start over. Coming here meant facing many challenges: not fully understanding the language, learning new rules, and missing everything I left behind. I felt nervous and sometimes lonely, but these moments helped me grow and taught me resilience. I remember my first days at school, when every word in English felt like a mountain too high to climb. Slowly, I learned that even small efforts matter. Reading books, asking questions, and practicing English every day brought me closer to my goals. I realized that the real value of the American Dream is not only achieving success but also learning to persevere, to keep trying, and to believe in myself even when circumstances are difficult.

Likewise, I cherish the freedom to create my own path. In

Cuba, many dreams seemed limited by circumstances beyond my control. Here, I discovered that I could create my own opportunities. Hard work does not always yield immediate results, but it opens doors and demonstrates that effort is worthwhile. For example, every project and homework assignment at school reminds me that accomplishments require patience, focus, and confidence in my abilities. Being able to choose what I want to study, which goals to pursue, and how to improve myself is a privilege. This freedom of choice represents, for me, the essence of the American Dream, a chance to grow into the person I aspire to become.

The American Dream is not something achieved in a single day. It is built through effort, hope, and dedication over time. Every experience I have here shapes my dream and teaches lessons I could not learn elsewhere. I have learned that it is not only about visible success but also about the strength, resilience, and determination we develop when facing challenges. For me, the American Dream means continuing to grow, remaining connected to my roots, and embracing every opportunity that comes my way. With each step, I keep weaving the threads of a dream that is still forming—a dream that inspires me to keep moving forward, to keep believing in myself, and to keep imagining a brighter future.

Karla Alfaro is an enthusiastic English student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. She is in Professor Carmen Whu's ESOL 5 class.

I Understand Now

I moved to the United States in August 2023. From my experience in the U.S. for 2 years and a few months, I saw this country giving people plenty of opportunities to become whatever they wanted. The most critical component is education. If you want to live the American Dream, you need to be smart, educate yourself, manage your money, and invest your money.

When I was living in my country, I always heard some people say that time is money or money talks. I did not understand what that exactly meant, but living here now in the States, I understand; if you lost your time, you lost money.

Every step I take—whether it is studying, practicing English, or meeting new people—brings me closer to achieving my own version of the American Dream. I am committed to making the most of my time and opportunities, knowing that with effort and persistence, I can shape my life in ways I once only imagined.

This is the reason if you want to live the American Dream you need to be very smart.

Jean Keyzer Beralus was born in Haiti and is attending the ESOL Intermediate class with Ms. F. Johnson at Atlantic Technical College, Ashe Campus. He is working to improve his English skills to get a certification in the field of construction, especially in plumbing.

The American Dream: A Journey of Hope and Opportunities

Honestly, I am still discovering what the American Dream means to me. I am doing so cautiously and methodically, ensuring that everything unfolds as I have planned. My journey toward this dream began in Cuba, where life is often complicated and filled with challenges. Growing up, there was always a lack of everything. The unreliable electricity meant that food would spoil, and household appliances often broke down, disrupting daily life. These struggles became a part of my reality and shaped my perception of what I wanted for the future.

Additionally, infrastructure in Cuba is poorly maintained. Most streets are riddled with potholes, making driving a difficult and risky endeavor. Car breakdowns have become a common inconvenience, and paying for repairs is a painful and often unavoidable expense. Despite these hardships, not everything in Cuba is bleak. There are moments of joy and simplicity, such as walking through the streets and seeing people out and about, unlike here. I cherished the time spent with friends, sitting in the park, talking about soccer, school, and laughing together. These moments are the things I miss the most.

When I boarded the plane to come here, I felt a deep sense of loss. It hurt me to know that I would be far from the park where I played soccer every day, away from playing PlayStation with my friends, and most painfully, away from my family, the

most important people in my life. Leaving everything behind and starting anew was a difficult decision, driven not by my own choice but by the political situation in my country and the lack of resources to live a normal life. It was a painful reality that I had to accept in order to pursue a better future.

Since arriving in the United States, my goals have remained clear: to finish my studies and secure an excellent job. Achieving these goals is not just for my own success but for the people who have always supported me. When I finally become an American citizen, one of my greatest desires is to bring my family here to live with me. For me, that would be the fulfillment of a dream, the best thing I could do with the opportunities this country offers.

Likewise, the US has already helped me fulfill another childhood dream: to see my idol, Lionel Messi, play live, which I never thought would happen, and it stands as a symbol of the possibilities here.

As I continue to navigate life in this new country, I think the best way to describe the future I envision is to approach it as a task to be completed step by step, much like authoring an essay or completing homework. Just as I am building my life here, I will take each challenge as it comes, knowing that with patience, determination, and hard work, my dreams can become a reality.

Carlos Blanco is a young man working hard to achieve his goals. He is an ESOL 5 student at Miami Dade College, Kendall. His instructor is Professor Carmen Whu.

Chance, Effort, Responsibility

Many people have heard about the American Dream, but they do not always understand what it truly means. For me, the American Dream is not about having a perfect house or an easy life. It is about being seen and having a chance. It means waking up every day knowing that my effort matters and that my past does not decide my future. My accent, my history, and my journey do not stop me from becoming who I want to be.

The American Dream is about hard work. It is learning while

working, making mistakes, and trying again without feeling ashamed. It is not about being perfect but about having freedom, the freedom to speak, to learn, to grow, and to hope for something better. I carry my culture, my faith, and my past with me, and I bring them into my new life with pride. I hope that what I build today can help others in the future.

For me, the American Dream also means responsibility. It means helping others, giving back, and opening doors for those still waiting for their chance. The American Dream is not about achieving everything at once but about becoming better little by little. If I can dream, work hard, and believe in myself, the American Dream is alive in me.

Stivenson Compere attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Dreams Come True

For me, the American Dream is not about having material wealth or living a life of luxury. It is about growth, creativity, opportunity, and the joy of seeing the people I love reach their potential. When I think of the American Dream, I think of my family, our accomplishments, and the future we continue to build together.

I love art, painting, and drawing. I come from a family of artists and creators. My husband and I own a graphic design and visual branding business where we help individuals and companies develop their identity in the digital world. Art is not only our profession; it is our language. It is how we express ideas, emotions, and stories. It has allowed us to work with people from diverse cultures and backgrounds and to bring beauty, clarity, and confidence to their projects. Building a business based on creativity has been one of our greatest achievements.

My children are also a big part of what the American Dream means to me. My two older children have already completed their university studies and are ready to begin their journeys to contribute to society as new professionals in meaningful ways. Watching them walk across the stage at their graduations was one of the happiest moments of my life, because it represented

not only their hard work but also our shared values: dedication, perseverance, and love for learning.

I also have a younger child who is creative, observant, and full of imagination. Every day he reminds me that the future is full of possibilities. His creativity inspires mine, and together we continue to grow as a family that values knowledge, art, and innovation.

The American Dream, to me, is not a final destination. It is a journey of continuous improvement. It is waking up every day with purpose. It is believing that personal progress is always possible, no matter where you start. It is the joy of achieving goals through effort, discipline, and passion. It is also the ability to dream bigger, even after reaching milestones.

Today, my dream continues as I work to improve my English. I want to expand our business further, connect with more people, and continue inspiring my children through example. The American Dream means having the opportunity to create the life you imagine—step by step, day by day, with heart and determination.

Dora Flores is from Venezuela and moved to Miami in 2018. She is attending classes with Professor Carmen Whu at MDC-Kendall to improve her English so that she can successfully continue growing personally and professionally in the United States.

I Will Accomplish This Dream.

I came to the United States of America when I was 6 months old for a better life. When I was born, I wound up getting uncontrollable fevers well above 100.3 and had to be rushed to the hospital. They placed me in a tub filled with ice. Eventually, the fevers subsided, and I was sent home. These fevers affected me intellectually, which caused me to become a slow learner, and I struggled in school. However, I continue to persevere in my education.

As I got older, I was noted for having difficulty reading, writing, and understanding even the most basic things. These difficulties prompted my mother to let me know that she was told to have an abortion when she was five months pregnant with

me. Eventually, she decided not to or waited until it was too late. However, telling a young girl this information created a lot of emotional distress. Yet God had a plan for my life, even though it was not evident at the time.

My early school years were tough all the way through high school, and life at home was not easy. My mother suffered from depression and self-esteem issues, and her life spiraled downhill. While she was in a depressive funk, I was creating my own mess in my high school years. I got pregnant at fifteen. Then, I had an abortion because I was too young to have a baby. Then, I got pregnant again a few months later, and I had this one. A few months later, I got pregnant with my second child, and by the time I was twenty, I had three children. In my young adulthood, I dedicated my life to raising my children and navigating an abusive marriage.

So, I put my education on the back burner. After multiple traumatic events, I got a divorce. I remarried soon after. Eventually, I went back to school and got my GED. I then continued on to Saint Peter's University. I pushed through and graduated with a bachelor's in business administration, and now I am looking forward to taking my LSAT in May. I am entering the next part of my life with God's help and some perseverance. I will accomplish this dream of mine of earning a law degree.

Betsy Freese has a degree in business administration from the University of Saint Peter's. She loves to workout and to read Tom Clancy. She has three wonderful adult kids and eight grandkids. She studies at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida with teacher Lisa Montgomery.

American Dream

My American Dream can be anything on these topics. For example, "Turning Point in My Life" is the day I finally moved out and started raising my daughter on my own with no help. At times, I thought that I wasn't going to make it. I thought that I was not a good father. Until the day my sister started helping me—then everything changed, and I mean everything. I got married to a wonderful woman who loves me and my child as if it were her own.

Now let me tell you about my “Favorite Day.” This is every day I get to wake up and see another day. There are a lot of people in this world that are not blessed to have that as a favorite day. I thank God for blessing me and those that are fortunate to have a day that the Lord has woken them up for. My favorite place is the zoo, because I love seeing different animals. My favorite animal is the lion. The way they hunt, the way they stick together as a family, they are truly the kings of the jungle.

Anthony Hill is the father of a beautiful 4-year-old. He studies at Literacy Alliance of Northeast Florida with teacher Jason Micheal.

My American Dream

My name is Sunny. I am from Taiwan. I know Taiwan is a small country, and most people don't know where it is. But I am proud of being both Taiwanese and of having American citizenship, too. When I was a little girl, I saw some foreigners in Taiwan, in movies, on TV, and in magazines. It made me wonder about what's different between people from different countries. Do we share the same ideas? Do we think alike? I love to connect with different people, and I really want to know and understand people who are different from me. When I was young, I asked myself what I would say if, one day, I had a chance to come to America and meet different people. When I visited New York City, I was shocked to find so many different cultures and races. It was so interesting and surprising, and I liked it very much. I'm no longer surprised by different cultures because I have seen so many. Now, people in Florida look very normal and friendly to me.

What is the American dream for me? The American dream means being able to understand people and cultures that are not my own, being more tolerant and kinder, and personally seeing my own mind and heart in this melting pot of the world. I have learned to have more respect and love for everyone who is different from me. I think differences are important, and I believe that we do not have to be the same way to love each other.

Sunny Huang is from Taiwan and has lived in Jacksonville, Florida, for 3 years. She was a ballet dancer in Taiwan but is retired now and lives with her husband. She has been learning English online for 2

years at the Jacksonville Public Library and has learned a lot from her teachers and the many students from different countries and cultures. She enjoys learning English very much and hopes to continue learning English in Jacksonville.

A Place Where Dreams Come True

My name is Bejanite Joseph, and I was born in Haiti, a country rich in history, resilience, and culture. Despite its beauty, life in Haiti is not without its challenges. When I was growing up, I often heard about a place where dreams come true, a land of opportunity where hard work and determination could transform lives. That place was America.

When I first arrived in the United States, I faced my share of struggles, for example, the language barrier. I went to school at Village Readers, and my life has changed. But the American dream is not a gift; it is something you earn. I have worked long hours, sometimes juggling two or more jobs to provide for my family. I have also experienced kindness and encouragement from strangers who believed in me. This dream requires perseverance and sacrifice.

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

Hope and Possibility

To me, the American Dream means opportunity, freedom, and hope. It is the idea that no matter where someone comes from, they can build a better life if they work hard and never give up. Coming from another country, I have seen how hard life can be when people lack safety, education, or basic resources. I have seen families struggle every day, and children lose chances because of things they cannot control. That is why the American Dream is very important to me.

The American Dream is not only about money or things. For me, it is about living with respect and having the freedom to choose my future. It means going to school, learning new skills, and growing as a person. I want to have a career I am proud of,

help and support my family, and own a home one day. These goals give me motivation and remind me to work hard and stay focused.

I know that achieving the American Dream is not easy. Moving to a new country, learning a new language, and balancing school and work can be hard. Sometimes I feel tired or unsure, but every challenge teaches me patience, strength, and courage. Every step I take, especially learning English and studying, brings me closer to my goals.

The American Dream also teaches me to think about others, not just myself. Success is more meaningful when I can help my family and my community. I want my story to show that even with a hard past, it is possible to build a better future. For me, the American Dream is not only a dream - it is the life I am working to create every day with hope, courage, and faith in myself.

Roodley Marc attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

My American Dream

My name is Ana Karina, and this is my personal story about coming to the United States. When I first arrived in this country, I felt scared, confused, and excited. Everything was different—the language, the people, the food, the places. I did not have family here, and sometimes I felt very alone. But deep inside, I knew I had to be strong because I came for my children. I came to give them a better life and better opportunities. That idea gave me courage when days felt too hard.

For me, one of the most beautiful things in this country is freedom of expression. In the United States, people can speak freely and share their ideas. This freedom gave me confidence to grow, to learn, and to believe that my dreams were possible.

I have two children who are my heart. My daughter was born in the Dominican Republic, and my son was born in the United States. My son's story is very special to me. He was born premature, very tiny, and very weak. I remember seeing him in the

hospital with many machines around him. The doctors told me it was going to be very difficult for him to survive. Hearing those words broke me completely. I cried so much, but I never lost my faith. Every day I prayed and hoped for a miracle.

And the miracle came. Today, my son is ten years old. He is healthy, happy, and full of energy. He is a big boy who likes to laugh, play, and dream. When I look at him, I feel grateful for every moment. His life is a reminder that even when things seem impossible, God and life can surprise us in beautiful ways. He is my little hero and an example of strength.

My daughter, Kennsy, eighteen, is also a big blessing. She did amazing in school. She always studied hard, respected others, and helped me at home. Now she is in college studying nursing. She also works part-time. Seeing her in college makes my heart feel full. I am very proud of her because she is building a future with love, discipline, and hope. She wants to help people and make a difference, and I know she will.

Living in the United States has not been easy, but it has been worth it. This country opened doors for us. It gave my children opportunities to grow and become strong, independent people. Sometimes I think about everything we lived through, and I feel proud of myself too. I worked hard, I stayed strong, and I never gave up.

My dream now is simple: to continue giving my children love, support, and guidance. I believe that with effort, patience, and faith, anything is possible in this country. The American dream is not only about success—it is about hope, family, and the courage to start again.

Ana Karina Mejia is an ESOL student at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus. Her teacher is Perez Lapeira Caridad.

What the American Dream Means to Me

The American dream means, to me, a reality to live and appreciate.

In America, laws were created to offer, give, and guarantee all

the people's rights and liberty will be respected by authorities.

Rights and liberty are the ultimate goals that people of a country desire and need to live happily, with the certainty that their family will be living safely and happily with justice, knowing that their rights and freedom will be respected by the authorities and all the country's people.

This environment gives the people the precious treasure of living with liberty and the possibility of thinking about growing up, improving themselves, being productive, and being worthy in society.

The supreme law is the Constitution, and with federal laws and state laws, it has the great mission of protecting the rights and liberty of the people.

Unfortunately, you cannot live in this situation in all countries. In those countries, authorities commit abuse and do not respect the laws, creating a world of unsafety and the absence of the opportunity to be happy.

This is a sad and unhappy situation.

But something amazing happens when you have the opportunity and blessing of living in America. The whole situation is totally different. In America, you and your family are protected by the Constitution and all the laws of the country.

In America, you don't suffer from the sad situation of other countries. Authorities and most of all the people respect the laws. It's a land of freedom and rights.

In federal offices, local offices, schools, stores, banks, and on the streets—wherever you go—the laws are respected and followed by the people. It's a rule of life to respect the law.

This situation gives you and your family the security and opportunity to live happily, improve themselves, have a job, study, and live, thinking about not dreaming but living and creating a reality of wealth.

America was the place where I first heard the expression

“This person is a hard worker.”

Nobody impedes this goal, and even less so the authorities. It all depends on you and your desire to change a dream into reality.

Live the American Dream and make it a reality. Work hard and apply all your capacity to realize this American challenge. No excuses. Failure is not an option. The Constitution and all the country's laws give you the opportunity to do that in a world of freedom. I believe in this wonderful country and give my gratitude and thanks for living in America's reality.

America is not a dream. It's a reality that invites us to realize our dreams and goals.

Felipe Presbitero Araiza has a bachelor's, master's, and Ph.D. from the National Autonomous University of Mexico. In Mexico he was a bank and stockbroker lawyer from 1971 to 2017, eventually serving as a director and vice president. He is a member of the PhD Association in Mexico. Felipe is a proud English student of Miss Barbara Huddleston at Adult Literacy League.

My Journey to America

My name is Olga. I was born in Moscow, the capital city of Russia. I traveled a lot in my country. I visited the north, east, south, and west areas of Russia. I lived in Europe, but I always wanted to see America. I read a lot and saw movies about America. It was always my dream to go to America.

One day, I received an invitation from a friend to visit America. I was so very happy to hear that. I bought a ticket to go to America. In eight hours, my plane landed at Kennedy International Airport in New York. For a few days I lived in a hotel in Manhattan. I wanted to see all of the interesting places, like the Statue of Liberty and several museums, and I took bus trips around New York.

After a few days I went to Florida to a friend's house. My friends showed me a lot of nice places. I had a good time, and I met many American people. I felt everything was very interest-

ing, and I was very excited about all of my experiences. I was bothered by the fact that I couldn't speak or understand English. I stayed with my friends for six months, and then I had to return to Russia.

After several years I went back to America. I studied English for many years because it is never enough. I decided to stay in this country. I moved to Florida. I have lived in Florida now for many years. I love America. I am a happy person, and I am back at school because I want to learn more English. My dream came true, and now America is my second homeland.

God Bless America!

Olga Radczenko is from Russia and now studying English at Clearview Adult Education Center: Largo Library site. Her teacher is Mildred Pioli.

What the American Dream Means to Me

To me, the American Dream means having a real opportunity to build a better future through my own effort. It is the idea that my background does not limit my potential and that, with hard work and determination, I can create the life I want.

The American Dream represents hope and opportunity. It means having access to education, jobs, and the freedom to choose my own path. Even when challenges appear, the belief that effort can lead to progress motivates me to keep pushing forward and improving myself every day.

For me, the American Dream is also about stability and independence. It means being able to support myself, help my family, and live with dignity. It is not about becoming rich but about having security, peace of mind, and pride in what I achieve.

In the end, the American Dream is personal. It inspires me to work hard, stay focused on my goals, and believe that success is possible. It reminds me that no matter where I start, I can move forward and build a future I am proud of.

Omar Reyes is a student at Miami Dade College, Hialeah Campus, ESOL-5. His teacher is Ernesto Juan.

My Own Experience Living the American Dream

When I came here, I realized that it was only the first step toward achieving my dreams. I left my country with hope, but the language quickly became one of my biggest obstacles.

At first, English felt like a barrier that trapped my thoughts and stopped me from speaking with strangers. However, this improved once I started working. Work pushed me to communicate, and slowly I broke down that wall. My shyness began to disappear, and I started to feel more confident.

Sometimes we cry because of the warmth of our families and friends, something we cannot forget. When we are far from them, the pain becomes weaker, but it never disappears completely. Whenever we feel sad or disappointed, our thoughts return to them. We cannot share our happiness or our struggles with them as easily as before. This kind of sadness is difficult to forget, and it often makes us feel stuck. These emotional challenges are part of the new world we face as immigrants. These negative feelings can become common, and having these thoughts affects us more than we realize. I often wondered what I was doing here. I feared everything and even questioned if I should go back home.

Now, everything is improving little by little. After overcoming the language barrier, many other things became easier. I met good and kind people who supported me and treated me with respect. Living here has also given me the chance to have new experiences. For example, when I got my first job, I was extremely nervous, and I felt like I did nothing right on the first day. Nevertheless, I had many positive experiences afterward. Visiting the college for the first time was amazing. Life is not simple, but this hope—the hope for a better future—is something all immigrants share. We long for our families, for the smiles of our parents during Christmas, and for the feeling of belonging.

The hardest part for me, and for many immigrants, is still the longing for our families. Even so, we must stay strong and look for support. We must fight for our future, make mistakes, and stand up again. In conclusion, if you do not try, you will never know what you are capable of. Achieving your goals depends mostly on yourself. You only need patience, effort, and courage

to overcome your obstacles and become the person you want to be.

Amanda Rodriguez Miranda, a student from Cardenas, Cuba, is enrolled in the Adult ESOL Program at Miami Dade College's Kendall Campus. Her teachers are Carmen Whu and Robert K. Kelso.

The Life I Have Always Dreamed Of

The American Dream is one of the most powerful ideas in the United States; it's about hope, freedom, and the belief that anything is possible if you work hard and never give up. Also, it's the idea that no matter where you come from or what challenges yourself, you can build a better life for yourself and your family. However, I don't just think about success or money; I think about opportunity, equality, and the chance to live a meaningful life.

At first, I thought that the American Dream only meant becoming rich, owning a good house, or having a perfect job. But now I start to realize that the American Dream is different for anyone. For others it is about getting a good education, supporting their family, or simply living freely without fear. For me it is about getting my own business, speaking fluent English, and understanding what this country is: the land of freedom and prosperity.

Besides, the American Dream also means helping others achieve their dreams. It's not just about personal success; it's about lifting others up along the way. True success comes when we use our opportunity to make a difference in someone else's life. Whether that means volunteering, mentoring, or simply being kind, each of us has the power to make our dream more real for others.

In the end, the American Dream isn't a perfect story or a guaranteed outcome. It's a belief, a promise that if you work hard, stay determined, and never lose hope, you can create your own version of happiness and success. For me the American Dream means believing in possibility, no matter the obstacles, and never stopping until I have built the life I have always dreamed of.

Eliecer Tejada Gonzalez is a student with Miami Dade College. His teacher is Perez Lapeira.

What the American Dream Means to Me

The American Dream, to me, isn't about a white picket fence or material wealth. It's a feeling, an undercurrent of hope that runs through every aspiration. It's the belief that no matter where you start, you have the freedom to build something meaningful.

It's the ability to start over, to reinvent yourself, to pursue passions that ignite your soul. It's the constant possibility of betterment, not just in a financial sense, but also in personal growth and fulfillment. This country, despite its challenges, offers a unique promise: the chance to shape your own destiny.

The American Dream is not a destination but a journey fueled by optimism. It's about embracing the challenges, learning from failures, and never losing sight of the possibilities that lie ahead. It's the freedom to live authentically, to express your individuality, and to contribute your unique talents to the tapestry of this nation.

For me, it means waking up each day with a sense of purpose, knowing that I have the opportunity to make a difference, to create something lasting, and to live a life that reflects my values. It's a dream that is constantly evolving, shaped by my experiences and aspirations, a dream that I am proud to be a part of.

Aaron Thompson, Jr., is an ESOL student at Family Support Services Network, Inc. His teacher is LaShan Crumpler.

The American Dream

The American Dream means opportunity, freedom, and a better life. Many people come to the United States to work hard and create a future for their families. For immigrants like me, the American Dream is hope.

When I moved to the United States, I wanted more oppor-

tunities. I wanted a stable job, safety, and a chance to grow. In this country, if you work hard, you can improve your life. That is something very important to me.

Life here is not always easy. Learning English, adapting to a new culture, and working long hours can be difficult. However, these challenges make me stronger and more determined to succeed.

Today, my goals are clear. I want to save money, invest for my future, and buy my own house. I want to build a better life for my family. Every day I work hard to get closer to my dreams.

For me, the American Dream is real. It is not only about money but also about opportunity, growth, and hope. If you never give up, you can achieve your dreams in America.

Mariano Tilcara is an adult ESOL student of Palm Beach Central CHS ACE in Palm Beach County. His teacher is Miss Pamela Jo Wilson.

What the American Dream Means to Me

The American Dream for me is hope. I lived in a place where opportunities were very limited. Even if you work hard, it does not always give you a better life. This can make a person feel confused and not sure about the future.

In America I see opportunity for something better. The American Dream is about opportunity and freedom. People can study, work, and choose what they want to do with their lives. It is not easy, but it is possible.

The American Dream is not about money; it is about having a chance, being free, and having a better future. This is why the American Dream is very important to me.

Yenny Trujillo is a student at Miami Dade College. Their teacher is Luis San Pedrio.

Original Fiction

Time and Space Machine

Have you ever thought about where you'd go if you had a time and space machine? Who would you meet? Would you try to change something in the past or the future?

For me, I'd keep traveling back in time to witness the big moments in history. I'd want to see a world without the tech we have today, where even small, simple, or melancholic things, like a soldier writing a letter, unsure if it would ever reach its destination, matter so much. I'd want to watch the great wonders of the world being built or spend time again with loved ones who are no longer here.

But after experiencing all that, you start asking yourself some tough questions:

Could you come back to the present knowing you just relived beautiful moments with people who aren't around anymore? It would be amazing, no doubt. But at the same time, you'd be reliving memories you already know the ending to, so you'd need to be strong enough to feel it all over again.

Would you change something that might affect the future? Honestly, as a Cuban, I think I'd sink the Granma yacht without thinking twice.

Still, I think the real point of traveling to the past wouldn't be to change history. It would be to understand how we got to today and to relive the moments in life that really mattered and shaped who we are.

Israel Berta is a student at Miami Dade College ESOL. Their teacher is Miguel Balerdi.

Sand-babies

Early in the mornings, I am up to see the sunrise over the ocean. I walk on the beach alone; this is my favorite pastime by

far. It's my thinking space.

I often take a chair along with a book, just in case I'll want to stop for a while. Sometimes I have my phone to take pictures if the sky is clear. Other people are out walking too, some with their dogs. I just sit in my chair and wait for the sun to peep out over the horizon. What a beautiful, peaceful sight.

I usually don't have time to go to the beach in the late afternoons, but one day I had time and felt like walking. It was a nice day. There were children and adults playing in the water and making sand structures.

While at the beach, I saw a group of teens making some interesting sand creatures. They resembled people. I must say they did a good job.

When I returned the next morning, these people, these sand creatures, looked the same. They were about the size of two-year-olds, but they seemed to have moved further away from the ocean, or maybe it was just low tide. I thought they looked so cute.

After my walk, I tried my hand at making one of these small people-looking things. The sand just seemed to come together. I didn't believe I could make one. It looked a little funny. My small person seemed to be smiling. I'm not sure that's what I was trying for.

I skipped a beach day; other engagements needed my attention. I returned a day later. My little person was standing with the other two people-looking things, not where I built it. Did it move? This time I made another person, and I marked where I built it. When I came back to the beach the next day, it had moved. Maybe someone was moving them.

Other beachgoers became interested in making these people-like things too. More were being made.

One nice hot summer day, the people and creatures started walking. What a sight! I couldn't believe my eyes! All the people-looking things were walking together down the beach. I named them right away. I called them "Sand-babies."

These Sand-babies are vulnerable. They dissolve in water easily, and they fall apart if you touch them. Beachgoers keep making more Sand-babies. They are pretty special and cute.

On July 15th it rained all day. The Sand-babies all melted back to just sand. When I return to the beach, I'll make more Sand-babies.

Mary Floyd is a student at Learn to Read of St. Johns County. Her teacher is Barbara Horton.

The Search

When Rachel was 33, one night before falling asleep, a strange but precise sentence appeared in her mind: “Your dad is not your dad. You have another father.” Surprisingly, it didn’t feel random. Somehow, she knew it was true.

Days later, her mother almost unintentionally confirmed the secret she had hidden for decades. Through hesitant, confused answers, Monica confessed that 35 years earlier she had met a man named Ross Geller and had a brief love affair with him. That relationship had resulted in the birth of a baby girl—Rachel.

Through tears and nerves, Monica admitted she couldn’t remember the details of that short story. From that moment, Rachel felt an urgent need to know who she really was and where she came from. What was her true story?

At first, all she had was her father’s name. She spent months searching online, writing to strangers with that name, asking if they knew him or had any connection to his story. Nothing worked. Exhausted, she paused.

Still, she kept gathering fragments her mother could remember. One detail stood out: one of her uncles had married a Korean woman. One day, she typed that uncle’s name into a search engine. The first result was a young man with Korean features. His name was Joey. Something about his photos felt familiar.

She wrote:

“Hi, my name is Rachel. You probably don’t know me. I re-

cently found out my biological father's name is Ross Geller, and I'm trying to find him. Do you know anyone by that name?"

The reply came quickly: "Yes, I know exactly who you are. You are Ross Geller's daughter." Reading that, Rachel froze. She had grown up with a different story in her head, raised by a man who gave her everything he could, yet she had always felt different—haunted by the quiet sense that something essential was missing between them.

Joey asked for her number and called.

"I'm your cousin," he said.

She had done it—she had found her father's family. But the relief didn't last. Her father had passed away years earlier, though Joey avoided giving details. As Rachel listened, trying to absorb everything he told her, she also tried to piece together her family tree and the life her father had lived without her.

Little by little, she began to find members of her newly discovered family, each one adding fragments to her family story. With great calm, Rachel started calling each of them. At times, the conversations felt like interviews; at others, her voice would break, and sometimes she would laugh at what she heard. And while listening to the last of her cousins, speaking to her from the other side of the continent, she finally understood that this search was not about Ross Geller. This search was about going inward. Sometimes, the deepest pains and the most uncomfortable conversations are the ones that transform and set us free.

Laura Salas is an ESOL student at Daytona State College. She is working to improve her English skills while building her interior design business JANGKOR. Laura was born in Colombia and now lives in Florida.

Why Voting Is Important to Me?

To Vote or Not to Vote

When I lived in Haiti, I realized I had never voted to choose a leader for my country or any group I was part of. But I saw that the people making the decisions were always thinking about what was good for their own small group. For example, Haiti has had many hard times because we let other countries and a few people decide who would lead us.

Because of this, the decisions that are made are not always good for everyone. Power and money go to just a few leaders and to other countries that tell us what to do.

From my experiences in other countries, such as Brazil and the USA, I have come to understand that citizens must participate in deciding who will lead them as a people and that this participation occurs through voting. That is why voting is important to me, and I decided to vote and encourage everyone to do the same.

Now that I have voted, will my vote be counted honestly? Currently, we are in a disaster with our voting results. There is news about the mishandling of the vote count and voter fraud. I am shocked.

Dupuyson Bien Aime attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Make Your Voice Heard

Voting is important to me because it gives me a voice. It allows me to take part in decisions that affect my life and my community. When I vote, I feel included and respected as a citizen.

Through voting, I can express my hopes for better governance, stronger institutions, and greater opportunities for the Haitian people. Many Haitians have struggled and sacrificed to achieve democracy, and voting honors their efforts. Even when the process is difficult, participating reminds me that change begins

when citizens take responsibility. For me, voting is a way to stand up for Haiti's future and make my voice count.

In Haiti, many people do not have the opportunity to vote freely. Political instability and violence often prevent citizens from choosing their leaders. Witnessing this reality helped me understand how powerful and valuable the right to vote truly is.

The absence of fair and stable elections in Haiti has contributed to ongoing challenges. Without regular and transparent voting, leaders are not always held accountable to the people. This has resulted in poor governance, economic hardship, and limited access to basic services, including healthcare, education, and public safety. Although many Haitians desire change, their voices remain restricted without free elections. Seeing these struggles has strengthened my belief in the importance of voting.

Voting allows me to support leaders and ideas that reflect my values, including fairness, education, and opportunity. It gives me a peaceful, meaningful way to express my opinions and hope for change.

Another reason voting matters to me is that many people around the world, including Haitians, continue to fight for this right. Voting should never be taken for granted. When I vote, I think of those who cannot and of those who risk their lives demanding fair elections. Their courage gives my vote deeper meaning. To me, voting is not only a right but also a responsibility and a commitment to helping create a better future.

Michelson Dor attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Need a Reality Check

To me, voting is very important for every country. Voting is a basic right for citizens, as written in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In most countries, adult citizens can vote in elections. Voting is part of a healthy society and helps people have a voice in their country, community, or workplace.

Voting is essential because it allows people to make posi-

tive changes. We can support leaders or laws that improve the lives of everyone. Voting also affects social issues. When people vote, they help make decisions about schools, communities, or workplaces, and everyone's opinion can be heard. Voting is the foundation of democracy because it makes leaders listen and represent the people.

Voting also affects the present and future. When we vote, we protect the quality of life for our family, friends, and children. Voting is personal and private, and it gives us the chance to think carefully and make good choices. Everyone should vote, respect the process, and participate as responsible citizens.

While all that, what good is our vote when our country is in chaos? We need to do a reality check: Leaders are not responsible; elected officials are not accountable. We, the citizens, suffer. How long will this last?

Honny Fabrine attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

The Power of Vote

Since I started middle school, I have been completely passionate about science, especially history and general knowledge. As I grow up and the more I keep learning, reading books, newspapers, and doing some research on the internet about different nations' political situations, their culture, their economic success or failure, their independence story, etc., and that is how I finally realize how important it is to vote.

Voting is so important for anyone who has access to vote. It means you are a responsible citizen of your country, and it is one of the best ways to participate in your country's progress. If you need some good change for your community, your vote matters.

Your vote counts, and if you don't vote, someone else will vote for you. At this point, your complaints will be nonsense, just because you don't take responsibility. As a citizen of a country, you must vote. When you vote, you ensure your social security, a bright future for your children, some good change for your community, and the safety of your country.

Voting is important. It is the power that you must choose what kind of government you want, who you want to represent your city, your community, and your country. Your vote is the best way to make them hear your voice and address your concerns. It is so important when you, your neighbors, and friends go to vote together, because the more votes you have, the more powerful your voice becomes.

If you want your taxes to be managed well, to have good education for your children, a kind of good healthcare, and good job payments, etc., you must know how important it is for you to vote in the federal, state, or local elections. If you need to have a good government, good leaders to represent you and ensure your future, your family's future, the best way is to vote.

Jean Wesly Pepe attends the English class at Monroe County Adult Education. His teacher is Ms. Josephson.

Why Voting is Important to Me

Voting is very important to me. I come from a country where there is no democracy. In my country, people cannot vote for the president or the leaders. The government decides everything, and people have no say. Coming from a country like Cuba makes me understand the importance of voting.

In my country there are no elections. There is only one party and everyone thinks the same. If you think different, you could get in trouble. People are scared to talk or say what they feel. Because of that, people feel like they are invisible. If people cannot vote, they feel like they are not important.

Having come to a democratic country, I see voting as an opportunity. Voting is an opportunity for people to say what they feel. It is a way for people to say what they think. Even though people may feel like only one vote is not important, many people voting is important. Voting gives power to the people, not the government.

Voting is also a responsibility. People back in my country cannot vote, and they may never be able to vote. Voting gives me a sense of freedom. I vote for freedom, rights, and respect. I vote

because I know what it feels like to be without the right to vote.

In conclusion, voting is very important. Coming from a country where there is no democracy teaches me a lot about voting. Voting is more than just a paper or a day. Voting is your voice, your choice, your freedom.

Thalia Vera Torres is a student at Miami Dade College. Her teacher is Luis San Pedro.

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